

Localization of Feminism

19-20 DECEMBER 2020



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Introduction

The Localization of Feminism Conference that Havle Association organized on 19-20 December 2020 took place online due to the imperatives of the time. In the time when the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced or globalized our anxieties, we, as hundreds of women, got together through our phones and computers without ever getting tired. Right before the longest night, with such darkness fallen on our hearts, we were brightened up to see that even this much physical distance could accommodate such closeness. We were together with more than 300 women during those two days. Despite the distances between us, we experienced to the fullest the feeling that 'we can move the mountains if we stand together', which is the best part of the feminist get-togethers.

What has brought us together was a question we frequently asked ourselves and each other: How do we, the women who are alive, living in a certain place, and dealing an array of problems each day, relate to feminism(s)? The lives and burdens of every one of us are different. Some of us take care of children, some take care of elderly, and some only take care of ourselves. The burdens of some stem from marriage, some

from being single. Some of us are overwhelmed working outside home, some not being able to work. Some of us are discriminated because of their mother-tongue, some of their faith, migration, sexual orientation or skin color. There are some who experience discrimination because they are devout, and also some experiencing the same because they are not. There are some of us struggling with poverty as many as some who do not. To sum up, our problems are really diverse. However, in any case we search for the commonality lying beneath our problems. While doing that, we take inspiration from the analyses, findings and creative solutions that women all over the world have put forward. Consequently, whether we call ourselves feminists or not, we relate to feminism in one way or another.

That is precisely why we aimed to look at how we include feminism in our lives, how we converse and fight with it. With these in mind, we chose the theme of localization. For us, locality is not limited to villages, neighborhoods and not even to a homeland. What is local to us is sometimes a street, a country, sometimes inside a home and even our bodies. All these spaces are surrounded by laws, moral codes, norms, rules, rights and

wrongs. What battles we, as women, give amidst all these? What do we negotiate and with whom, and how do we define our boundaries? How do we relate to other women in the meantime? What are the criteria that shape all these? Let's say our identities, attire, age, our status within the family, our citizenship status, our fertility...

We searched for the answers to these questions in the Localization of Feminism Conference with our lecturers and listeners from all over Turkey and far corners of the world. We talked about the story of feminism in Turkey, the possibility and productivity of Islamic feminism, what kind of work we do with feminism within the family, our experiences of giving birth and not giving birth, the extra challenges introduced with migration and the our struggles for protecting our living spaces. We weaved our struggles together by stretching out thin threads from Nigeria to Malaysia, from Yırca to Diyarbakır, from Berlin to Istanbul.

We knew one thing very well while doing this: We are the lucky ones. We are the survivors while hundreds of women are killed by men in different places of the world every day, we are the ones who are still standing in spite of all we

experienced until now, the ones who are not behind bars, the ones who find the strength in each other to resist against the ones threatening our bodies, labor and future. Every speech, every comment, every applause in the conference was a salute to the ones who cannot be next to us, so are the articles in this booklet.

With the hope that you remember the women who make us who we are,

Hilal Alkan, Feyza Akınerdem, Fatma Betül Demir, Burcu Kalpaklıođlu

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Sare Öztürk

Localization
Is the Way
Towards Islamic
Feminism

-amina wadud

“There are many factors of localization, race and ethnicity, religion, language, class, gender identity and the like.”

amina wadud

Havle: Localization is the way towards Islamic Feminism Muslim women speak. While Muslim women have spoken through out the entire history of Islam, today their voices have consolidated into a critical mass. A critical mass insures that this momentum will not be cut out or turned around. Thus there is a momentum for change in gender dynamics EVERYWHERE there are Muslims.

When I say everywhere, I mean this as one of the factors of localization. There are many factors of localization, race and ethnicity, religion, language, class, gender identity and the like. Each of these localities are further dynamic and complex in their intersection, thereby indicating a large number of variants. Thus, when I speak about the critical mass, I mean across these variants localizations.

Despite this critical mass, Muslim women do not speak in one voice. In this presentation, I will track the epistemology and ideology of the diversity of voices as the localization that helped towards the construction of Islamic feminism. Islamic feminism is the newest iteration of a 200 year global movement of women in modernity. How do we understand Islamic feminism as feminist and How do we understand equally Islamic feminism as Islamic? I plan to answer that through 25 years of my own scholarship and activism—even before I was able to identify as feminist myself.

“In 1995, 17,000 delegates and 30,000 activists from across the globe, streamed to Beijing to attend the fourth World Women’s Conference. This was one of the largest meetings to promote women’s rights ever held.” I joined this conference as one of the representatives of an NGO called Sisters in Islam. I was one of the largest number of Muslim women ever

Feminizmin Yerelleşmesi

to participate at this international level. As a consequence of so many Muslim women being present, we decided to make our own break out group to determine how best to move forward as a collective and to communicate to the international organizing bodies like the UN. Instead, the attempt at nightly meetings turned into a shouting match.

Those in attendance could not find a way to move through specific localization to determine what a collective would look like for future collaboration and strategy building. The organization I attended with Sisters in Islam, is a Malaysian faith based human rights organization. SISI is now more than 30 years strong, having started by a mere 8 women when I moved to that country to begin teaching at the International Islamic University. Since we attended Beijing to “represent” our constituency of Muslim women in the SEAsian localization, here are a few key factors of that localization. Most Muslim women in Southeast Asia identify strongly with their faith. There are fewer who identify as some post-Muslims unlike in the numbers you find from the MENA region, from Asia, from South Asia and from other parts of the world with Muslim populations, including from Turkey. Muslim women in SEAsia have greater peace with their identity as Muslims and at the same time have serious concerns about or object to patriarchal and hegemonic assertions made in the name of Islam. In other words, groups like Sisters

in Islam assert their choice of Islam and their rejection of patriarchy.

I use the theme of this conference on localization to discuss the diversity of Muslim women at Beijing because at that time we were hopelessly divided along two major ideological differences.

These differences would become critical to all discussions about the historical development of Islamic feminism. At the time of the Beijing conference and for at least a decade following it, into the new millennium, very few people used the term Islamic Feminism. I refer to two major foremothers and feminist giants Dr.s Margot Badran, a Muslim and Middle Eastern women and Ziba MirHosseini a legal anthropologist both who began to use the term in the late 1990's. It was not a household word and it is still misunderstood. However it is the way towards the future.

At this Beijing meeting in 1995 a distinction was made between two major perspectives on Islam and gender. These two not only dominated the meeting but also set the agenda for Muslim women's activism into the next millennium. Reconciling the ideological differences between these two prepared the ground for the creation Islamic feminism as the newest feminist discourse, analysis, spirituality and activism.

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When I say, Islamic feminism was not even a phrase used until late 1990, I do not ignore those Muslims who identified as feminists. So let me unpack these terms, their relationship to each other and their localization across the discourse, activism, knowledge production and spirituality. Most importantly, why were Muslim women so hopelessly divided at those nightly meetings in Beijing; and how did we move forward?

Before I proceed with this, let me localize myself. Every speaker speaks from a locality. Identifying my locality helps identify why I engage in this discussion in the way that I am engaged. I was born in a believing family. My father was a Methodist Minister. I grew up with the God of Love al-Wadud, as represented by my father. I was a seeker. By my sophomore year in University I began practicing Buddhism and lived in a mediation house near campus. One year later I became interested in Islam and started my own study.

On Thanksgiving day nearly 50 years ago 1972, I entered a small mosque in the capital city of the United States of America and walked out of it having made my shahadah. I could thus declare myself to be Muslim. Within 6 months of that date, my life course was set in motion. I fell in love with the Qur'an from only English translation and turned the rest of my life up to the present moment in deep study and reflection with the Qur'an as both sacred

text and as spiritual guidance for social justice, equality and human dignity. I have not wavered from this dedication in almost 50 years.

I am a Black woman who was raised in the context of US white supremacy. I have never forgotten the lessons learned in the struggle for human dignity and the struggle still goes on today, in the most recent movement: Black Lives Matter. As a woman, I have never experienced the idea that I am less than someone else on the basis of my gender. I have encountered as much sexism and patriarchy as I have racism, but against the subtiles of sexism cause me greater plus and as such I have given greater attention in my scholarship activism and spirituality.

As one of 8 founding members of Sisters in Islam around 1989, I brought my scholarship in line with activism to advocate for women's equality in Islam as a fundamental right ordained by Allah. Arriving in Beijing I was surprised to witness the great divide. The two strongest voices who were fighting in Beijing, did not speak for me nor did they speak for Sisters in Islam.

One voice, which is best identified as secular Muslim feminism, followed a model of feminism that was dominant in western liberal discourses about women's rights. Despite many good and necessary features of this expression of feminism, its localization was unexamined. Still it laid claim to being universal. Actually,

like all feminism, it centered those most able to participate in its construct and promotion: namely, white, middle and upper class, educated women from the global north.

So, for instance when my foremother Sojourner Truth asked, "Ain't I a woman"? She had to ask this question because those who claimed to be speaking on behalf of all WOMEN, were still participating in racist institutions that had enslaved the likes of Sojourner herself. Even after the legal emancipation of slaves in the US these same women continued to exploit, ignore, oppress and repress Black women.

Amongst Sojourner's descendent over several generations, is a woman named Kimberlé Crenshaw who coined the phrase "intersectionality" as "basically a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What is often missing, is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.." Crenshaw offered this statement 30 years ago. Still you must note, even she does not mention religion. This is a major factor needed to understand Islamic feminism.

As a Black woman and a Muslim I felt no calling to feminism in the way it was promoted during

the Beijing conference. I am born in an identity that had been excluded in the particular localization of mainstream western feminism. I was then and am now strongly identified with my Islam. I did not then and do not now allow the localization of others to side line my identity, no matter how dominant tropes.

So in Beijing, 1995, I and Sisters in Islam Malaysia, did not comply with the dominant articulation of Muslim women's well being that used the word feminism. This is because their concluding statement indicate their position that you must remove religion from the discussion of women's rights. In fact, they said, you cannot have both Islam and human rights. Those who identified as feminist expressed a need to remove all religion from discourse over women's equality and justice. All of the Muslim women who aligned themselves with this perspective of Feminism as mainly generated in the liberal west; may or may not have identified as anti-religious, but they claimed universal human rights in opposition to Islam. Thus, I called this location Muslim secular feminism.

This location of feminism by the way led the cross national debates over gender equality for the next decade. Anyone who advocated to include Islam was considered to belong to the other dominant voice of Muslim women's agency at Beijing: the Islamist perspective.

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The other perspective that dominated Muslim women attending the Beijing conference is a voice promoted in alignment with the rising tide of Political Islam or Islamism. So I call this second voice the Islamist perspective. This perspective laid claim to being THE voice of Islam. In fact in this perspective patriarchy is taken as sacred, or Divine. However, Islam, from this perspective did not interrogate its neo-conservatism and patriarchy. It gave men, men's ways of knowing and men's ways of Being preference as if this presence was commanded by Allah and established by the Prophet, upon him be peace.

The architects of Political Islam and the women at Beijing who advocated as Islamists are adamant that Islam was preferred over all other systems of thought and practice. In particular, Islam was conceived to be diametrically opposed to any agenda set by the west or by international bodies like the UN and CEDAW (the convention for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women). Such treaties and international bodies were taken only to be an intentional opposition to the truth of Islam, which is superior to them. As such they should be rejected and shunned. At the least this Islamist perspective also advocated the idea: that you cannot have both Islam and human rights.

Three things stand out from this dichotomy. One, neither of these two voices spoke for

Sisters in Islam. And while they would not listen to the location promoted by SIS at this meetings and beyond, this location would prove very strategic for future progress on Islam and women's equality. Two: while these two voices were in clear opposition to each other, they agreed that you cannot have both Islam and Feminism, or Islam and Human Rights. Three, the best kept secret that would prove the undoing of their dominance, rested on this second thing.

For while both defined feminism only as secular and even antireligion, both defined Islam only in a patriarchal and hegemonic way. The construction of Islamic feminism confirmed the need to have agency over the definition of terms in a dynamic, intersectional way. Islamic feminism promotes a definition of Islam that first and foremost embraces the lived realities and localization of Muslim women, in all their complicated, contradictory and messy ways. After claiming this agency, we assume authority in our own definitions of both Islam and feminism.

Feminism means women are full human beings. All humans are equal. Women do not need the permission of men to be equal. We were granted our full dignity and equality by Allah at the time of our creation. The purpose of human creation is to be khalifah: a moral agent of Allah in Allah's creation, the earth. There is a consensus that Islam is just. In

Classical times, justice was understood in the context of equitable distribution across gross inequitable differences. Today, however, justice must include equality. Equality is not sameness; it is honor and dignity within our distinct localizations, our lived realities and our differences. After five decades loving and studying the Qur'an, I have come to these fundamental ideas about the essence of what it means to be human from Islamic primary sources.

Islam is a process by which human beings (female, male and nonbinary) turn toward the highest spiritual ideal or ultimate Reality (called Allah) in engaged surrender. Engaged surrender is felt in the heart as a matter of faith, understood in the mind as a matter of consciousness, and put into action with the whole body. Actions are the most important dimension of Islam and yet can only be judged ultimately by Allah. Islam is built upon a foundational monotheistic principle called Tawhid. The Tawhidic paradigm demonstrates that faith in One God/Allah requires equality and dignity between all humanity on a horizontal line of reciprocity. The Tawhidic paradigm is foundational to social justice from an Islamic perspective. It is also the cornerstone to Islamic Feminism.

Thus Islam as a way of life requires full humanity for women, or feminism. Using and critically analyzing Islamic sources to

dismantle gender hegemony is essential to Islamic feminism as a methodology. From an Islamic feminist perspective, we use a critical lens to examine the context of Muslim women's real lives. This lived reality comes the Principle rubric for understanding texts. It puts context over texts. For example it does no good for scholars to refer to justice in Islamic textual sources and yet in application Muslim women are not experiencing that justice. The only ones to confirm whether justice has been met, ARE Muslim women themselves.

Today, Muslim women have reached a critical mass. We are unwilling to relinquish the definitions of either Islam or feminism only to those who exclude us on our own terms, based on our own localizations and incorporating our lived realities. We do this to help create new policies within our individual nation states and at the international level.

20 years after co-founding Sisters in Islam, a global movement for reform in Muslim personal status laws was launched named Musawah. This was 2009. Musawah offered a dynamic and gender inclusive definition of Islam that radically integrated core Islamic values as a part of feminism in order to construct the arena of Islamic feminism. It not only confirms that women are equal before Allah but also constructs new knowledge in order to create an active spiritually ripe reality of Islam that helps dismantle all inequalities in gender

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relations. Thus Islamic feminism is the most dynamic way to perceive and experience Islam. It is open to all people of conscience, female, male and non-binary, and permits all Muslims to live within their dignity as Muslims.

I am an Islamic Feminist. It has not always been so. In order for me to arrive at this place in my journey I had to overcome the opposition set in motion at Beijing conference, where feminism and human rights had to be secular and Islam had to be patriarchal.

At the launching of Muslim in February, 2009, I arrived to my own articulation of feminism. A feminism that embraces my faith location and my social justice location equally. The Musawah global movement celebrates gender inclusive scholarship and social justice activism in faith trajectory. A cursory look over the website features the activity of what started with 250 women and men from 50 countries in Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and Muslim minority contexts in Europe, North America and Australia and has moved on to embrace both the necessity of regional and national even sub-national localization under the banner of Islam's tawhidic thrust towards a unified humanity before a Single Divine Reality, Allah.

Our struggles were confirmed by the launching and subsequent decade long work of Musawah. Namely: Islam belongs to us. We take Islam on

our own terms. We fulfill the Musawah mandate to make changes in policy, culture, law, art and spirituality within the context of our own realities as Muslim women and citizens of the modern nation state. The Musawah launch was the place where I came out as an Islamic feminist because I could enter the global discourses fully in all my localizations at an intersection. I advocate for the same for others.

So in conclusion let me provide more coherently the answer to my question. How is Islamic feminism feminist and how is it Islamic? Feminism is the radical idea that women are (full) human beings. In Islamic sources, a human being is created BY Allah to be khalifah on the earth. A khalifah serves Allah through their bodies on this earth. NO duty is restricted to one on the basis of gender (except for the two privileges that belong only to women IF THEY choose: namely, child bearing and nursing from their own bodies.) Every other duty can be performed by any gender provided they do the performance as part of their service to Allah. All humans are equal to all other humans because ONLY Allah is Akbar, above. Thus according to tawhid all humans are on a line of horizontal and reciprocal equality with each other. Thus it is through Islam that we claim the fulfillment of our humanity and that is what makes an Islamic feminist.

1st
SESSION

FEMINISM
IN TURKEY

Being a
Feminist in
the 2000s

–Feryal Saygılıgil

“We can say that dynamics of breaking up and rallying among Turkey feminism were encountered at the same time.”

FERYAL SAYGILIGİL

2000s has been a period in which the studies on women’s history is plenteous. The books titled *Kadınsız İnkılap* (Womanless Revolution) (2003) and *Bir Adalet Feryadı; Osmanlı’dan Türkiye’ye Beş Ermeni Feminist Yazar 1862-1933 (A Cry for Justice: Five Armenian Feminist Writers from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic (1862-1933))* (2006) are undoubtedly the most striking among these studies.

We can say that dynamics of breaking up and rallying among Turkey feminism were encountered at the same time. While there had been break ups on the basis of ideological and political differences, feminist women who advocated similar political views rally and get organized within certain structures. Women who rallied with the call of *Amargi Magazine* in 2006 were to adopt policy on a more common ground with the establishments of the *Sosyalist Feminist Kolektif* (Socialist Feminist

Collective) in 2008 and *Barış İçin Kadın Girişimi* (Women Initiative for Peace) in 2009. One of the tools that made the feminist movement rally with the trade union movement had been the *Petrol-İş Women’s Magazine* which had been published every two months by the *Petrol-İş Union* starting from the January of 2003. *Kadın Emeği ve İstihdamı Girişimi* [Women’s Labor and Employment Initiative] founded in 2006 had dealt with the way women participate in employment. In 2010, *Göçmen Dayanışma Ağı* (Immigrant Solidarity Network) had been established.

2000s has been a period of legal acquisitions. Transformations within the Civil Code and the Turkish Penal Code made as the result of women’s struggle has made the concept of “lobbying” become the focus of political discussions among the feminists as well as project feminism. For this period, a women’s movement was on stake where feminists and non-feminist groups rallied together.

Organizations such as platforms and coalitions may also be counted as those movements. Paving the way for women's solidarity through women's labor had especially become prominent with the impact of "Novamed Strike" since 2007. A women's solidarity campaign that sets a good example of union-feminist movement collaboration during the strike held in Novamed which was a women's-dominated workplace in Antalya Free Zone was established through *Petrol-İş Women's Magazine* in 2006. At Novamed, solidarity between an independent women's movement and women union members was in question. This solidarity was led by these feminists. The Novamed experience has made women studies gain ground within the union as well as paving the way for the feminist movement to recover.

2000s are a period where the most severe losses were caused due to male violence. In this context, it is necessary to mention about the "We are in revolt against femicide" campaign of İstanbul Feminist Kolektif (İstanbul Feminist Collective) in 2010 and the campaigns on making "unjust provocation" namely maleness reduction visible. Again in the second half of the 2000s, the diffusion of the principle of "women's statement" was one of the most important achievements of feminists, while another of these achievements had been the Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence Against Women. However, in this period,

government's attempts to abolish this law with the familism policies commenced and the Ministry of Women was transformed into the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Abortion prohibition was added to agenda, divorce was made inconvenient, limitations on alimonies came into question, care labor and discussions about impositions on maternity gained more importance. The Presidency of Religious Affairs was transformed into a tool for social policies, and an ideological struggle was caused to be initiated by circulating the concept of gender justice instead of gender equality. While mentioning the activities of the feminist movement in these years, it is necessary to refer to various campaigns conducted by several different groups. In this regard, the campaigns initiated by *Cinayetlere Karşı Acil Eylem Grubu (Emergency Action Group Against Murders)* in 2014 aiming to draw attention to the increase in femicide and to the insufficiency of preventive policies are important. During this period, the Socialist Feminist Collective had launched the campaigns "We Want Our Due Back From Men" and "There Is Life Outside The Family". In 2015, the "Women Claim Their Lives" campaign became prominent. Its aim was making "killing in order not to die", "killing against systematic violence" and the ways of struggle of women such as Nevin Yıldırım, Yasemin Çakal and Çilem visible.

While Turkey feminist movement has continued to institutionalize and begun to take

active roles on legal regulations on women with the 2000s, its borders has begun expanding by different identity struggles gaining strength and confrontations on different platforms and efforts on creating common grounds increase. This period continues to be a period in which hierarchical differences in society such as ethnic identity, sexual identity, sexual orientation, class, religion are the subject of feminism, a period where solidarity gains ground and feminism diversifies, and where the discussions on who the subject of feminism continue.

With LGBTI + movement gaining strength in the second half of the 2000s, and with the rise of queer formations within the feminist groups, created a transformation in feminist politics, including the discussions on heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia, which were further questioned within. In terms of relations with the Kurdish women's movement, the 2000s were a period where Kurdish women became autonomous within the movement and where their mass empowerment, their determination on transforming the ideological structure of the Kurdish movement and their insistence on rallying with women on common platforms strengthened their ties with the feminist movement. Their efforts to understand each other and making politics together lead them to establish new and closer relationships.

Muslim women, on the other hand, had held monthly meetings during 2007-2008 via the e-mail group titled "We Protect Each Other" and had started to discuss where feminists and Muslim women can establish partnerships. The formations that emerged within this wing are Kadına Şiddete Karşı Müslümanlar İnisiyatifi (Muslims Against Violence Against Women Initiative) (KŞKMİ) which was established in 2013, Reçel Blog which started broadcasting in 2014, and Havle Association which was established in 2018.

In addition, they are important in terms of discussing the importance of being a feminist at universities, considering that the cases of sexual harassment and assault have been publicized, and that there have been cases of harassment and violence that include "respected" male university teachers.

Briefly, when we consider the publications aspect, it is seen that the number of translated and royalty books on feminism had been increased in the 2010s, and that two feminist publishing houses were established: Ayizi Kitap (2010) and Güldünya Publishing House (2014). In addition, websites and blogs that reflect different feminisms or feminist agendas such as *5Harfliler*, *Reçel Blog*, *Çatlak Zemin*, *Erktolia*, *Yalnız Yürümeyeceksin (You Won't Walk Alone)*, *Dijital Topuklar* as well as *Kültür ve Siyasette Feminist Yaklaşımlar (Feminist Approaches in Culture and Politics)* and magazines in

the field of academic and online feminist publishing such as *fe* magazine, which is the international journal of Ankara Üniversitesi Kadın Sorunları Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi (Ankara University Women's Issues Research and Application Center), online archive sites such as the website established by *Kadın Kültür ve İletişim Vakfı (Women's Culture and Communication Foundation)* in order for people to access the past issues of *Pazartesi, Feminist and Kaktüs* magazines, Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi (*Women's Works Library*) website and *Amargi Magazine and Feminist Politika (Feminist Policy)* magazine websites can be listed as various examples that make up the feminist blogosphere in question.

In the 2000s, while women's labor, violence against women and history has been continued to be studied from a feminist perspective in universities, areas such as ethnicity, identity, body, masculinity, media, militarism and nationalism have also begun to be studied intensively. Queer studies continue at full speed as a new discipline. The "March 8 Feminist Night Walk" which has been held since 2003, became widespread after Gezi and makes us gain more strength.

Localization of Feminism

**Agendas,
Organizational
Types and Political
Strategies in
Turkey Feminism:
Rethinking the
'Outer-System'**

-Selin Çağatay

When you look at a master's thesis written in the field of women's studies, you may come across a women's movement where women are categorized as 'Kemalist women', 'Islamist women', 'Kurdish women', or 'feminists'.

SELİN ÇAĞATAY

There are certain local and transnational dynamics that have transformed Turkey feminism over the past decade. Some of the reflections of these dynamics can be listed as follows: (a.) Skeptical approach to the state and institutions and moving away from the logic of civil society, (b.) Organizing and campaigning through social media, (c.) Infiltrating other male-dominated social movements, and (d.) forming coalitions among women's groups that both resist to loss of rights and oppose to interference with lifestyles. Similar reflections can be traced among feminisms in the other parts of the world and in current transnational campaigns such as #MeToo, Ni Una Menos, Las Tesis, and the International Women's Strike.

In this article, I would like to discuss the effects of the process I've mentioned above in terms

of "outer-system feminism". I would argue that "outer-system" that was widely used in the feminism debates in Turkey in the past and that characterized the period of the late 1980s and early 1990s but lost its appeal over time, is a useful concept for determining and interpreting the agendas, organizational types and political strategies adopted by the feminist movement and keeps it up-to-date.¹

The issue of categorizing feminisms

Let me start with the question: "Where did the idea of reviving outer-system feminism come from?" I am interested in questions like "What is feminism, how is it defined, how is its agenda determined, who is its subject, who is called a feminist and who is not, how are feminists organized?". For a while, I have specifically addressed myself to the

¹ The background of this article is originated from the participatory action research I had conducted within the scope of the project Areas of Resistance between 2018-2020 and the face-to-face interviews I carried out with women in various feminist and women's organizations in Adana, Ankara, Antakya, Amed, Bodrum, Istanbul and Mersin within the scope of this research.

categorizations of feminisms. This came from some of the dominant trends I've determined within my work on the feminist movement and on the women's movement in Turkey. One of these trends is the categorizations of the women's movements based on prominent political affiliations across the country. For example, when you look at a master's thesis written in the field of women's studies, you may come across a women's movement where women are categorized as "Kemalist women," "Islamist women," "Kurdish women," or "feminists." We do not encounter any women's movement categorized as "vegan," "queer," or "anarchist," because they are not categories at the national level, but at best they are the subject of individual studies.

We see a similar classification practice in the periodization of the feminist movement such as in the use of the metaphor "waves": the Late Ottoman and Early Republic era as the First Wave, the Second Wave by the 1980s, and nowadays we are discussing the third and fourth waves. The intersections, overlaps, and intertwining between these waves are hardly prominent in academic studies. Let's also admit that socialist women and organized women's labor movements are not considered as part of these waves.

The second dominant trend is that the studies in the field of women and gender being generally focused on formal organizations, NGOs,

platforms created by NGOs and the campaigns they run, that is, they mainly focus on the formations that address the state. However, when we say feminist movement - although we do not deny the importance of NGOs- there are also informal, small-scale, unprofessional, non-institutionalized organizations that are more spontaneous and that act on the basis of the subject. For example, I am talking about the organizations that are derived from the meetings organized on the occasion of the 8th of March or the 25th of November or through a series of debates that we organize as feminists, where the only concern is not the state, or AKP, or legal rights, debates where a total social transformation is discussed and that raise demands from the bottom up. These formations gain little ground for themselves within the literature, even if we know about them or discuss them amongst ourselves.

In my studies, I have adopted a method with two steps to balance these two dominant trends. In the first step, I approach feminism from a transnational perspective. We can define this perspective as designing the research in a multi-scale way and conducting the analysis in this way in order to comprehend the trends, connections and identities taking place at the local, national, regional and global levels at the same time. From this perspective, we can identify that different women's groups in Turkey that have experienced different waves at different times, depending on the place

they occupy in the map of historical and global inequalities. For example, Gezi was a turning point for the entire feminist movement, wasn't it? Not actually! Not for the Kurdish women's movement, for example. For them, the summer of 2015 was rather the turning point of the war that erupted between the 7th of June and November 1 elections. Or, when the achievements of the women's movement are mentioned, only legal changes that have concerned "all women" have been listed. While talking about the achievements of the 2000s, for example, the abolition of the headscarf bans is not included in the changes in the new Civil Code, or in the changes in the Turkish Penal Code or the Constitution because this was a regulation that only concerned a group of women.

The second step of the method I've adopted is to distinguish between dominant feminisms and feminisms in the opposite public spheres, in a way that again coincides with the transnational perspective, instead of focusing on NGOs and formal processes. Opposite public spaces is a concept developed by feminists as Nancy Fraser and Rita Felski in the USA in the late 80s. For example, Fraser defined opposing public spaces as "areas of struggle in which people who belong to oppressed social groups produce and circulate opposing discourses about their identities, interests and needs"².

In other words, we are talking about an area of struggle that operates in the triangle of state, civil society and global governance, that does not oppress existing inequalities and that tries to transform them by addressing them, in other words, approaching the issue of women's oppression from a more intersectional point of view, unlike those who belong to the dominant social groups. It is this definition of public spaces of the counterpart that made me rethink the concept of outer-system feminism.

Outer-system feminism

Outer-system feminism which emerged around the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s, discussed both the woman being oppressed as a gender and the exploitation of women within capitalism, and emphasized the continuity between the private and the public spheres, and a conceptualization that was developed by women organized among the groups around the magazines such as *Feminist*, *Kaktüs* and *Pazartesi*. Outer-system feminism also coincides with the distinction between dominant and opposing public sphere feminisms I've mentioned above to the extent where it separates itself from egalitarian feminism or state feminism, which it considers as within-the-system. However, the concept of outer-system feminism was not widely used in Turkey, in other words it did not "become

² Fraser, Nancy. 1990. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25/26: 56-80. Also see Rita Felski. 1989. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

popular”. Gülnur Savran explained the reason for this in 2011, in the Amargi Feminism Discussions as;

Previously we used the definition “outer-system feminism” and this was not adopted by multiple feminists. I think those who react to the concept of “outer-system feminism” were right in one part, because the system that is commonly referred to was capitalism. Yet what we, as feminists, should mean when we say outer-system in the means of women’s liberation must be patriarchal capitalism or... capitalist patriarchy. Therefore, we need to consider the mutual dynamics of all these two systems, both capitalism and patriarchy.³

In 2008, the Socialist Feminist Collective [SFC] was established with a similar analysis of patriarchal capitalism. The call made to feminists at the establishment said:

Feminism is a revolt against the common oppression of all women, despite all divisions based on class, nation, race, religious beliefs and gender identity. There are requirements to fight gender-based discrimination and oppression on a common ground with all women, and we always stand side by side in this. However, we think that the priority of

socialist feminists today should be a political orientation that takes women’s labor to the axis by establishing a link between capitalism / neoliberalism and patriarchy, but immediately creates itself in the struggle against all oppression women have been experiencing. ... We believe that independent feminist policies should be independent from men, capital and the state, as to put it in general terms.⁴

The publication of Social Feminist Collective, Feminist Politics, started out in 2009 as a magazine that discussed the agenda and the needs of outer-system feminist politics. In my opinion, the concept of outer-system was developed in two directions within the discussions in this magazine. The first corresponds to what we now call Social Reproduction Feminism, what we then called the “paid-unpaid labor clamp.” In other words, it corresponds to the agenda of politicizing the social positions of household and care work and their consequences for women, including emotional labor. Second, outer-system feminism now distinguishes itself not only from egalitarian feminism and state feminism, but also from project feminism. It should also be noted at this point that the issue of project feminism is not limited to the debate outside the system, and that the dependence

3 Savran, Gülnur. 2011. “Socialist Feminizm.” Amargi Istanbul Feminism Discussions 2011, page 220. İstanbul: Amargi Yayınevi (https://tr.boell.org/sites/default/files/amargi_feminizm_tartismalari_2011.pdf).

4 Socialist Feminist Collective. 2008. “Call To Socialist Feminists.” SFK Archive Web Site (<http://www.sosyalistfeministkolektif.org/biz-kimiz/sosyalist-feministlere-cagiri/>).

on institutions, funds and short-term, unsustainable, result-oriented initiatives are the common concerns of feminisms that have grown in opposite public spheres since the 2000s.

Current agendas, organizational types, political strategies of contemporary feminism

As I mentioned at the beginning, it is possible to talk about some developments in the 2010s that led to the need to update the conceptualization of outer-system feminism. We can observe the skepticism towards the state and institutions and digression from the logic of project/NGO fetishism as a growing trend throughout the world and in Turkey. With the rise of right-wing, conservative and authoritarian governments in recent years, especially young women are keeping aloof from making politics in institutions and institutions are already closing their doors to them. Thus, more and more women are organizing informally. The number of people and groups spreading from metropolises to provinces and from urban centers to neighborhoods who call themselves feminists or not, but who are ultimately fighting against male domination is rapidly increasing. Practices of organizing and running campaigns through social media reinforce this process. Thanks to social media, it is possible for women who do not have the opportunity, to reach out to a wider audience and to learn from each other's experiences. In this way,

it becomes easier to deal with the issue of women's oppression in a more systemic way, to map patriarchal capitalism in a sense and to see its relation to racism, environmental crisis, and the binary gender regime.

On the other hand, the infiltration of feminism into other social movements affects the agendas and political strategies adopted by feminisms. As feminism infiltrates left-socialist movements, anti-racist movements, environmental movements, anti-militarist movements and - rarely - conservative movements, it turns into a more popular, mass social movement. At the same time, the practice of forming coalitions among different women's groups that both resist loss of rights and that oppose interference with lifestyles is gaining momentum. In these coalitions, the emphasis on coexistence with differences, in line with the massification process become prominent instead of the strategy of achieving legal gains by pushing differences that emerge by being a woman aside - because this strategy doesn't work anymore. We can say that the formation of Women Strong Together is one of the current examples of this strategy.

Rethinking the "outer-system"

I think the developments I mentioned above have enabled us to develop the concept of outer-system feminism in three directions. I can summarize the first as going beyond the

continuity between the private and public spheres, revealing the private within the public sphere and continuing to emphasize the role of the public in the private. Interventions such as the #MeToo movement in general, and #SpeakUpToEnd, #StopYourSleep movements in particular show that women are determined not to back down in the areas of sexual harassment, rape, stalking and mobbing. This raises the need for a detailed discussion of the relationship between public and private spheres over the interventions for women's physical and mental integrity as well as for their labor.

My second suggestion is about addressing the differences between women. "Outer-system" sees inequalities among women that are based on differences such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity as different manifestations of patriarchal capitalism. In this sense, it stands at a slightly higher level of abstraction. However, in recent years, we see that transnational campaigns such as the International Women's Strike and Ni Una Menos, which have risen in the opposite public spheres, are beginning to displace the duality between class politics and identity politics. Similarly, in Turkey, it is possible to talk about the existence of a quest to include identity politics without pushing the analysis of capitalist patriarchy aside and to establish the collective political subject of feminism without exhausting the differences among

women. This, in my opinion, points to the need to strengthening the "outer-system" by establishing a dialectical relationship between different levels of abstraction. For example, instead of seeing the Flormar resistance solely as the solidarity of feminists with working women, it is possible to consider it as a channel where the secular-religious duality has been overcome. Although we divide the politics of class and identity analytically, we must admit that they are almost always intertwined in our everyday practices of solidarity.

My third suggestion is not considering the dominant and outer-system feminisms as fronts set against each other. Based on the character of feminism being a movement in conflict within itself and keeps its actuality this way, it is possible for us to see the "dominant (within system)" and "outer-system" as tendencies that correspond to the two main veins of the feminist movement, often contrary to each other but sometimes complementing each other. The complicated relationship between dominant and outer-system feminisms has multiple manifestations in Turkey today. For example, while criticizing NGO/project feminism, with the increasing pressure on NGOs in recent years, we've started to look after them. Perhaps, with the influence of neoliberalism, we've resorted to becoming NGOs ourselves in to meet our financial needs. In a situation where all feminists are coded as enemies, traitors, terrorists, it is unrealistic

to see NGOs as the strongholds of dominant feminism. Moreover, many NGOs are now starting out with highly opposing and with outer system agendas and with militants.

Let's address another example as the feminist women who are active in left-socialist organizations but who also established their own self-organizations. Looking at this feminist group whose numbers have increased especially after Gezi, I observe that the perspective of "organization independent from the state, capital and men" is no longer the defining feature of outer-system feminism.

Finally, let me end the article by stating that the boundaries of "outer-system" are not stable, and that these boundaries are narrowed and expanded instantly according to the position of feminist subjects in politics. For example, when the government tries to restrict the right to abortion, many women of different involvements fill the opposite public spheres, however, when it comes to peace, we are not able to see a similar crowd. This requires us to consider the inner and outer systems in a multiple way, in other words, in the light of the positioning of feminisms within multiple systems.

**Feminism(s):
A Study On the
Perceptions
of University
Students**

-Duygu Öztürk

“One of the interesting things was that people who chose to use the title ‘Ms.’ when talking about women, never said “Ms.” when it came to feminists.”

DUYGU ÖZTÜRK

First of all,¹ I would like to begin with the originating point of this study. The perceptions of feminism in people’s minds have been preoccupying me for a while. Even in the academia, and I am talking about the field of social sciences, I’ve noticed that even academics whom we expect to have at least a certain level of theoretical knowledge about feminism by profession, have very different and unrelated thoughts on this subject and that they are quite confused. In various interviews I had with faculty members working in the fields of Political Science and International Relations, I’ve picked away at the situation a little bit. The questions I was curious about were what kind of perception and attitude they’ve developed towards feminism, on what basis they think that way, why and how they distinguish between the sense of equity and feminism. Almost all

the people I spoke with had advocated equality between men and women in terms of social, political and economic rights, but when it came to feminism, they used sentences that started with ‘but’s. Also, they did not hesitate to claim that I was not a feminist, although I always said otherwise. While some asserted that they could sense who is a feminist or not by looking at them, they as well claimed that feminists were women who produce an ‘anti-male’ discourse, who often develop such an attitude as they do not have good relationships or as they are not admired by men and that they are aggressive and usually short-haired, overweight single women who do not quite fit into the beauty standards of the society. One of the interesting things was that people who chose to use the title ‘Ms.’ when talking about women, never said “Ms.” when it came to feminists.

¹ Dr. Faculty Member, Istanbul Medipol University, Department of Political Science and International Relations.

These opinions of the mostly male professors working in the field of social sciences have impelled me to conduct a research on the perception on feminism. In this context, I decided to study what university students think about feminism. What does the concept of gender equality mean to university students, how do they define the concept of feminism, do they define themselves as feminists and why, basically were the questions I was seeking answer for. In this context, face-to-face interviews were held between April-May 2019 with 86 university students living in Istanbul out of which 58 were female and 28 were male.² 11 open-ended questions were asked to participants between the ages 18 and 26. In addition to the questions mentioned above, the concept of Muslim feminism was among the questions in the research.

One of the main findings that arose in this study was the students being quite confused about equality of women and men, gender equality and especially about feminism. Almost all of the students participated in the survey think that there is equality between men and women in terms of rights. With this in mind, many of them highlighted the physiological differences between men and women and stated that men and women are not 'equal' in this regard. In other words, while the participants stated that they believe in equality between men and women on a rights basis, they mentioned the

physiological differences when asked about the concept of gender and explained 'not being the same' as 'not being equal'. In this respect, it is seen that the concept of gender equality is perceived as an approach expressing sameness rather than equality by many participants. For this reason, while the participants defended the existence of equal rights between men and women, they would remain distant from the concept of gender equality due to their notion of not being the same.

Like gender equality, the participants are also distant to the concept of feminism. When asked what they comprehend from the concept of feminism, a notable part of the participants emphasized equality between men and women. However, among the few participants, there are those who considered feminism as advocating female supremacy. In this context, a 21-year-old male participant (Political Science and International Relations student) criticized feminism as "hammering female supremacy into our heads". A 19-year-old male participant (Political Science and International Relations student) defined feminism as a notion that supposedly defends equality but whose main goal is to maintain the superiority of women.

Participants' confusion about feminism became apparent in their responses to the question "Do you identify yourself as a feminist?". The attitude of "I advocate gender

² I would like to thank Özge Elif Yel, Merve Tezcan and Sevdnur Karakaş, students of the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Istanbul Medipol University, who contributed to the preparation of the interview questions and the realization of the interviews.

equality but I am not a feminist” is seen among most of the participants. While they advocate for gender equality, they think that feminism is something beyond that. Therefore, although the majority of the participants have a positive attitude towards feminism in general, they take a distant attitude towards feminism when it comes to identifying themselves as feminists or not. Even if they advocate equality between men and women, they are afraid to call themselves as feminists. On the one hand, they comment on who can be called as feminists, on the other hand they say that they do not have enough knowledge to call themselves feminists. For example, a 22-year-old male participant (Political Science and International Relations student) defined a feminist as a believer in the equality of men and women and although she stated that she thought that women should have equal rights with men, she did not define herself as a feminist. The 23-year-old female participant (Child Development student) also stated that although she was in favor of gender equality, she was not a feminist. The 21-year-old female participant (Psychological and Counseling student) also stated that anyone who defends the equality of men and women can be a feminist, but when it comes to defining herself, she did not define herself as a feminist because she did not know about feminism much. Another participant (20-year-old male Psychology student) stated that although he inclined toward feminism, he did not classify himself in this category in terms of the culture

he was raised in. A reading can also be made to this participant’s answer as follows: While he does not have a personally negative attitude towards feminism, the participant prefers to remain distant from feminism with the idea that there is a negative attitude towards feminism in his culture. A 20-year-old female participant (Pharmacy student) stated that feminism is good and necessary for society as long as it is interpreted correctly. If we do a reverse reading of the participant’s view, it can be concluded that feminism can also be misinterpreted and this situation harms the society. However, since the participant did not clarify the issue of correct and incorrect interpretation, it is not possible to understand what kind of feminism definition she has made. Similarly, a 22-year-old male participant (Medical student) also stated that people who misrepresent feminism were more self-assertive. It can also be thought that there is a false perception of feminism in the society. The same participant said that he did not have enough knowledge to define himself as a feminist. Male participants interviewed within the scope of the study define themselves less as feminists than female participants. Even if they did not make this definition, a significant number of participants also argued that there is an equality between men and women. In this respect, the statements of the 25-year-old male participant (Political Science and International Relations student) are notable. Although the participant did not define himself

as a feminist, he stated that he approved of this movement, as well as supporting and respecting it.

Among the participants there are also those who do not call themselves as a feminist, partly because they advocate their own-defined feminism. For example, a 22-year-old female participant (Food Engineering student) stated that she was in favor of defending women's rights "to a certain extent", although she did not clearly define herself as a feminist because she did not advocate every view or every act of feminists. Similarly, the 21-year-old female participant (Turcology student) stated that she did not want to be among feminists because she thought that feminists were too harsh. It is not possible to understand what they consider negative about feminism and feminists since both participants did not clarify what they had meant.

In addition to those who are positive but distant about feminism, there are also those who are clearly negative, though few in number. It is seen that the reason why these participants have a negative attitude towards feminism is either their perception of feminism or their negative opinion about gender equality. For example, a 19-year-old male participant (Psychology student) defines feminism as advocating female supremacy and therefore disagrees with feminism. Similarly, the 24-year-old male participant (Mechanical Engineering student)

commentated on feminism as women thinking themselves superior to men and stated that he did not approve of what was done on March 8. He had not had an explanation for what was not pleasant. Another male participant (a 21-year-old Computer Engineering student) made a judgment as to how women and men can have the same rights when they are not even biologically equal.

There are also a small number of participants who define themselves clearly as feminists. The 23-year-old female participant (Psychology student), who defines herself as a feminist, contributed to the discussion of sameness-equality and women's masculine characteristics while explaining a topic she felt uncomfortable with. The participant stated that women do not have to be painless and strong during the periods of menstruation, that they can be delicate, and do not have to be like a man, as shown in the commercials. Although another participant has developed a higher awareness of feminism than most of the other participants, she is reluctant to define herself as a feminist. The 20-year-old female participant (Turkish Language and Literature student) defined feminism as a concept created against the patriarchal social order and said that she supported gender equality. The same participant stated that the concept of equality is misunderstood in the society, that women are afraid of being strong individuals, and that she considers everyone who regards men and

women equal as feminists. Despite all these views, she said that she did not see herself as a feminist, and even if she liked the idea, she could not live that way. It would not be wrong to say that this participant also has a negative but unspecified perception towards feminism despite all her positive attitude.

The concept of 'Muslim feminist', which is quite new for many people in Turkey is also a new concept for almost all of the university students participating in the research. Few participants have heard of the term Muslim feminist. Only a few of those who have heard about the term identify themselves as a Muslim feminist. It was observed that the participants who developed a positive attitude towards feminism had a more positive attitude towards the concept of Muslim feminism than others. Participants who developed a negative attitude towards feminism, on the other hand, were uncomfortable with the concept. They did not see it possible for being Muslim that they had attributed a positive meaning and feminism which they had attributed a negative meaning to coalesce. The 21-year-old male participant (Political Science and International Relations student) stated that Islam protects women's rights, but feminism is against many ideas of Islam. Similarly, the 19-year-old male participant (Political Science and International Relations student) also said that feminism has various opinions against Islam, that therefore the two concepts cannot coalesce. In

addition to this view, some of the participants did not find the concept of Muslim feminist meaningful because the essence of Islam is already respectful to women's rights. Among the participants there are also those who attribute a positive meaning to feminism and a negative meaning to Islam and those think that the two cannot coalesce for this reason. They opposed the Muslim feminist concept with the argument that there is no gender equality in religion. For example, a 22-year-old female participant (a student of Political Science and International Relations), who describes herself as a feminist, does not consider the concept of Muslim feminist possible because of the emphasis on male domination in religion. There are also participants who have not heard of the concept of Muslim feminism before, but have an opinion on what could it be and they have a positive attitude about it. For example, a 22-year-old male participant (Political Science and International Relations student) thought that Muslim feminism could be the liberation movement of women in countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Sudan, while another male participant from the same department has a positive attitude towards the concept of Muslim feminist because feminism is not a separate religion.

Instead of conclusion...

This study which was conducted with university students and of which the first analysis were

shared, shows that young people are quite confused about the concepts of feminism and gender equality. A significant part of the participants stated that they advocate equality in terms of rights between men and women, but they do not mean the sameness of men and women. The fact that they especially expressed this when explaining their opinions on the concept of gender equality suggests that there is a perception of sameness within their opinions on gender equality. In addition, it was observed that they had developed a negative attitude towards feminism that they could not clearly explain and therefore they remained quite distant to defining themselves as feminists, even though they advocate equality between men and women. The concept of Muslim feminist on the other hand is a new concept for most participants, except for a few students.

This research has drawn a picture of the perceptions and attitudes of university students for those who work on feminism and gender equality. It is thought that it will have an important place among the literature with similar studies on this subject.

Localization of Feminism

2nd
SESSION

MUSLIM
WOMEN
WHO MADE
ROOM FOR
THEMSELVES

On the Merits
and Limits
of Islamic
Feminism(s)

-Merve Kütük-Kuriş

“Islamic feminism can be defined as the effort of Muslim women to resist patriarchal domination and seek equality within Islam through interpretation, fiqh and hadith studies.”

MERVE KÜTÜK-KURİŞ

In this discussion, I will talk about the literature on Islamic feminism(s) that has gained momentum among academia and social movements since the 1990s. Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Azizah Al-Hibri, Riffat Hassan, Hidayet Tuksal and Ziba Mir-Hosseini, whom we call the founding names, as well as the new generation Kecia Ali, Ay Chaudhry, Ayshapetenullah and Muslim male academics Abou El-Fadl and Mohsen I will try to summarize Kadivar’s contributions to the field of Islamic feminism (s). I will try to summarize the contributions of the new generation Kecia Ali, Ayesha Chaudhry, Ayshapetenullah and Muslim male academicians Khaled Abou El-Fadl and Mohsen Kadivar to the field of Islamic feminism(s) in addition to Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Azizah Al-Hibri, Riffat Hassan, Hidayet Tuksal and Ziba Mir-Hosseini whom we call the founding

names. I will mention the main arguments, the conceptual framework, methodological tools and theological dilemmas faced by Islamic feminism(s). Finally, I will conclude my discussion by addressing the possibilities that Islamic feminism(s) offer to the daily life of Muslim women.

Before I begin, I think it would be useful to briefly dwell on the delayed introduction of the conceptualization of Islamic feminism into academic literature. As Amina Wadud mentioned in the opening speech of the symposium, Islamic feminism has long been considered as an oxymoron conceptualization, and for this reason, Islamic circles have taken a distant approach to this concept. It is possible to find the reasons for this distant stance that I will refer to in my speech today for each theologian, especially for the founding names,

in their individual life stories and multiple identities. For example, we can say that Asma Barlas made use of feminism(s), especially third world feminism, as an analytical tool, but showed resistance to being called as an “Islamic feminist”. So Barlas, while criticizing the dominant and privileged role of male power in establishing Islamic normativity, makes use of feminist methodology as a strategic tool. However, Barlas, an American of Pakistani origin, grew up with colonial memory, and after the 9th of September, she is an academician who experienced how USA had legitimized the invasions under the name of “fight against terrorism” and more importantly how some feminist organizations became part of this political project with the discourse of “liberating Muslim women”. For this reason, Asma Barlas defines being considered a feminist as “symbolic violence” and underlines that she stepped into this field of research not because she was a feminist, but a believing woman.

Amina Wadud, on the other hand, has been criticized for many years as an African-American Muslim for appealing to a “Western” ideology like feminism, for “not absorbing authentic Islam.” Wadud, however, has already kept her distance from the field of feminism, which she finds white, elitist and secular in her experience of her multiple and intersectional identity. For this reason, we can say that Wadud avoided the conceptualization

of Islamic feminism in her early periods in order not to be perceived as a Western feminist and therefore anti-Islamic. We can see that she used feminism as a convenient methodological tool rather than focusing on feminism.

So how do we define Islamic feminism(s)? Islamic feminism can be defined as the effort of Muslim women to resist patriarchal domination and seek equality within Islam through interpretation, fiqh and hadith studies. Let us underline that we are talking about a social movement as well as an academic and theological movement. However, today I will focus on the knowledge creation of Muslim women in the fields of interpretation, fiqh and hadith rather than activism. In short, Islamic feminism is a literature developed against the argument that Islam is inherently a patriarchal religion. It defends that Islam is a religion based on justice and equality by focusing on the category of gender. It aims to undermine the structure of the Islamic tradition, which is integrated with patriarchy, especially in the field of family law, and therefore the monopoly of the male elite in understanding and interpreting Quran and hadith literature.

The three main arguments of Islamic feminism can be listed as follows: (a) the ontological equality of men and women, (b) the necessity of a new jurisprudence in regulating the relations between men and women due to the dynamic nature of Islamic law, (c) destroying the

male-centrism as power centers that produce knowledge, and Muslim women gaining equal access and interpretation to Islamic resources. As the first argument suggests, Islamic feminists emphasize that men and women are ontologically equal. Here we see that they refer to a series of verses that we can categorize as “verses of equality.” For example, Amina Wadud (1999) claims that the notion of the verse in 3:30 refers to a state of moral agency assigned to every man and woman, regardless of gender. Again, referring to the verse 4: 1, Wadud (1999) and Barlas (2011) underline that men and women are created from a single soul and that superiority is related not to gender but to being pious. In other words, they state that each individual’s right to self-realization is a right bestowed by Allah and which cannot be withdrawn by any other authority.

Referring to one of the Muslim male reformists, Mohsen Kadivar, an Iranian Shiite mollah who has been living in exile in the USA for a long time due to regime pressure, may be explanatory when talking about the ontological equality of men and women. Kadivar (2013) explains the women not being treated equal with the dominant influence of Aristotle’s ontology in pre-modern Muslim male ulama, despite the verses on equality. Aristotle’s emphasis on the hierarchical division of slaves, males and females grounds on the biological differences between the sexes as ontological inequalities. Therefore, according to Kadivar, the

traditionalist ulama does not define woman as a rational and competent equal individual due to her “nature”. Based on Aristotle’s proportional justice principle, instead of fundamental equality, ulama stipulate that women should be treated as “deserved” rather than equal. According to Kadivar, the strong belief in the principle of relative justice underlies within the interpretation of Quranic concepts such as men being the protector of the family and wilaya in the favor of men and considering women’s demands for equality as an anti-Sharia movement as well as criticising them. At this point, we can say that Islamic feminists act on the principle that God would not persecute. For Islamic feminists, the very state of one person (woman in this example) being the object of another one (a man) is the persecution itself. If we interpret this situation within the framework of Wadud’s (1999) “paradigm of monotheism”, considering men superior to women actually conflicts with the unity of God. Azizah Al-Hibri (1997), who bravely takes this point of view one step further, argues that the only entity that opposes the authority of God is the devil, therefore the expectation of obedience to the man is a devilish claim for a woman who aims to transcend his authority.

It is therefore an essential step for Islamic feminists to weaken the male ulama’s central authority in law-making. That is exactly why Amina Wadud (2006) conceptualized women’s efforts on producing knowledge within Islam

and demanding equal power as gender jihad. Here, it should be noted that Khaled Abou El-Fadl (2001) went back to the 10th century and underlined the fact that the positions of women who had given fatwas and who had been part of the knowledge production at that time were erased from people's minds in the modern period. Islamic feminists emphasize that verses that are not related to worshipping and that regulate interpersonal relationships (such as marriage, divorce, inheritance) should be re-evaluated and reformed in the light of socio-economic and political developments. For Islamic feminists who remind that Islamic jurisprudence is a state of constant action, family law that denies the changing role of women in social life should be the main focus.

So what are the conceptual and methodological tools that Islamic feminists use to justify their claim to equality? The first of the conceptual mainstays of Islamic feminism stems from them separating shariah and fiqh clearly. While the shariah refers to the revelation that is believed to come from God, that is the sacred, they underline that fiqh, which is the field of Islamic law is completely human-made. In other words, fiqh is a law, a legal construct that people make with reference to Quran and sunnah derived from people's efforts to understand revelation. As Abou El-Fadl (2001) has accentuated in his book *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, the most fundamental problem for Muslim

women is law-making Islamic scholars and traditionalists in particular rejecting all kinds of bills for reformation by claiming "That is what God says in Qur'an.". However, thanks to the conceptual distinction between shariah and fiqh, Islamic feminists show that the voice that claims "That is what God says in Qur'an." is not shariah but man-made fiqh literature. In other words, Islamic feminists emphasize that "God does not say that" and what has canonized Islamic literature is actually a poem of male interpretations. Amina Wadud claims that people's efforts to understand revelation cannot be understood independently of both their personal identity and the social structure and time they were born into, and states that the texts of fiqh reflect the perspective of the interpreter as well as trying to show the text's purpose. Based on this claim, the reason for the patriarchal interpretations on issues concerning women and the family is the male elite's point of view that has occupied the monopoly of interpretation for centuries.

Islamic feminists take advantage of three interrelated methodological tools in order to develop an egalitarian perspective: (a) evaluating the text in its historical context, (b) evaluating Qur'an and hadiths from a holistic perspective, (c) including women's daily life experiences to their effort to understand Qur'an and hadiths. Islamic feminists claim that the verses cannot be evaluated independently of the circumstances of the period in which

they were revealed and for what reason they were transcribed. According to them, Qur'an and hadiths should be read considering their historical and socio-cultural contexts. In order not to ignore the claim of the universality of Qur'an, Islamic feminists attach importance to a holistic perspective and claim that the basic values of Qur'an such as equality, justice and fairness should be taken as basis when interpreting the verses in order to understand it. Moreover, the verses should not be interpreted individually, but in terms of their context and their relation to other verses on the same theme. If there is a contradiction with the basic values of Qur'an in the provisions concerning women and family, they should be reevaluated. The most basic criterion here is to center the "paradigm of monotheism", which is based on the knowledge that Allah will not persecute. In other words, what should be emphasized are none other living thing to be compared with the superiority and uniqueness of God and establishing a horizontal relation between man and woman. Finally, Islamic feminists emphasize the importance of taking not only the sacred texts into account, but also the daily life experiences of women and how laws affect these experiences thus creating Islamic jurisprudence in this direction. In this regard, it is important to include international texts on human and women's rights in the interpretation process.

However, young generation Muslim women theologians such as Kecia Ali (2006), Ayscha

Chaudhry (2015) and Aisha Yadavullah (2014) have developed new approaches that are distant to this conceptual framework built on "verses of equality". The most basic arguments are in the words of Hidayatullah (2014) that feminist methodology was insufficient to construe the "hierarchy verses", which are difficult to interpret. We can give the verse 4:34 on men being the protector of the family, that we frequently came across in the question and answer part of the conference today as example to hierarchy verses. In this verse, we encounter concepts such as violence against women and women's disobedience that we would have difficulty interpreting in their own contexts. For the young generation of Islamic feminists, there are verses in search for equality that are futile to eliminate with contextual explanations. So the question is: How do we make peace with these "difficult verses" that point to male domination? The young generation of theologians state that these verses cause great dilemmas for believing women, and that women can become even hesitant within their worlds of belief. As a result of their own struggles with these difficulties, Chaudhry and Hidayatullah made studies focusing on these verses. For example, Chaudhry (2015) stated that his monograph, in which he only examined the verse 4:34, begins with the driving force of the inquiries he had experienced. Chaudhry examines how the male ulama has interpreted this verse in the same way beginning from the 19th century

until today and narrates how the male ulama has been mythicized. Chaudhry's claim against traditional canonized literature where the discussion had been on not the violence itself, but on the extent of violence and this claim require making a new reading that implies to a major disengagement from today's male ulama, and that therefore does not refer to tradition. He argues that opposing violence is not un-Islamic to the extent that this separation takes place on an ethical plane. Kecia Ali (2006), on the other hand, states that it is a problematic method to search for equality in the text of the Quran from today's framework as if it has been a fact that has always existed throughout history.

Many verses can be read in their own context, or there may be verses that do not allow this, so accepting them as they are and avoiding anachronism can be a way out for the believing woman. Wadud, on the subject of difficult verses, follows the conceptualizations of "fate-based objection" or "conscientious pause" borrowed from Abou El-Fadl (2001). Abou El-Fadl states that it is difficult to understand the verses with today's perception of equality within these conceptualizations. If a person is in a crisis of belief in those predicament moments, they should listen to the voice of their own conscience and be able to say "no" to the text, albeit difficult. According to Abou El-Fadl, faith-based rejection is a conscientious and individual attitude that does not detract

from one's belief. In other words, Abou El-Fadl does not refer to an academic evaluation in which verses are completely rejected by the theological method, but a personal attitude that people take against their own conscience in the world of faith.

Before bringing to an end, let's briefly talk about what opportunities the Islamic feminism(s) literature offers us. First, we can mention the importance of the field of Islamic feminism(s) as it provides an alternative reading to traditional and unequal interpretations in family law reforms. Secondly, this literature is important as it shows us that the reforms are political, but not Islamic. It can be seen that different practices are made on the same issue in many Muslim majority countries where family law is based on shariah. For example, taking a traditional approach to the Moroccan example where the age of marriage is 18, Malaysia sets the age limit as 15. It is worth noting here that the age limit was reformed in Morocco and in other Maghreb cases, but a similar reform did not occur in Malaysia despite the lobbying activities of the world's first Islamic feminist organization, Sisters in Islam. Perhaps the most effective example of the fact that reforming family law being a political issue is the custody reform in Iran. Many mothers who lost their husbands in the Iran-Iraq War lost custody of their children due to the shariah laws that gave custody rights to the father and his family. The regime which has lost its popularity due to the

devastating effects of the war, goes to reform only for women who had lost their husbands in the war. While the custody remained with the father and family, mothers only obtained the rights to care for their children. However, a petition realized by women's social mobility in 2006 that asked a similar demand to be extended among all women resulted in the marginalization of activists by the regime forces. From this point of view, it would not be wrong to claim that the field of Islamic law and the law-making process were determined by the political context rather than the text of the Qur'an. Thirdly, it can be said that Islamic feminism(s) functions as a pressure group for countries that have put annotation on international human and women's rights texts. Chaudhry notes that many Muslim-majority countries have reserved the articles of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW] that were related to combating violence against women. Many countries such as Iran, Pakistan, and Malaysia put forward the argument that the implementation of the agreement would be in conflict with Islam and would break family unity. This situation leaves us alone with the problem of relativism and in a dilemma with reference to the principle of religious values and respecting differences among international platforms. At this point, it is of vital importance for women's rights as Muslim women are expressing through feminist readings that the annotations put forward by Islamic countries

are not Islamic, and Muslim women being accepted as new interlocutors for platforms such as CEDAW thanks to the alternative readings they offer. Chaudhry underlines that international structures such as the United Nations also need a religious education and formation, and at this point, Islamic feminism literature will function as a bridge.

Finally, let's add here that the literature of Islamic feminism(s) is an important part of the male and female awareness activity. For example, in his study conducted simultaneously in Malaysia and Canada, Chaudhry states that Muslim women do not consider violence against women Islamic. Chaudhry, who shows women verses of violence from various scriptures, states that the vast majority of Muslim women do not recognize the "verse on violence". He adds that among women who recognize it, the rate of women who claim: "Violence is incompatible with Islam." is high. This example shows that women have already put the faith-based rejection mechanism conceptualized by Abou El-Fadl into operation in their daily life practices. In fact, the difference or the gap between the discourse and practice, has formed the basis of many studies in the literature of Islamic anthropology in the last decade. Over against of the traditional readings, especially the new generation's search for alternative fatwas often becomes prominent. Studies conducted by Lara Deeb and Mona Harb (2013) on young Shii women in Beirut or by Giulia

Liberatore (2017) on young Sunni women of Somali origin in London show us that women do not follow a single ulama, that they draw individual paths by practicing upon different readings of Islam. It would be appropriate to say that Islamic feminism(s) has gained an unsettling power to displace the traditional in this new era where rapid access to alternative Islamic interpretations is facilitated by digital media as Gary Bunt had stated (2018). As a final word, the importance of Islamic feminism(s) as a discursive and operational strategy for the expansion of Muslim women's life spheres should be emphasized, especially in this period when the influence of anti-feminist social movements and religious communities have been increasing worldwide.

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Localization of Feminism

**Efforts on
Family Law
Reform
and Islamic
Feminism in
Egypt**

-Aslı Karaca

“In countries where family law is historically based on religion, we see that both feminism and Islamic feminism had great difficulty.”

ASLI KARACA

In this discussion, I will refer to the efforts of women and the family law reforms, an area where Islamic feminism actually comes to life in Egypt. In countries where family law is historically based on religion, we see that both feminism and Islamic feminism had great difficulty. Although many jurisdictions have been secularized in most Muslim-majority countries, family laws are still regulated by religious references. Therefore, it becomes very difficult to update the family laws that are protected by official religious institutions and by unofficial Islamic movements.

For Egyptian Muslims, family laws based on Islamic shariah [*el-kavanin el-ahval el-şahsiyye*] allow male polygamy and allow men to divorce women unilaterally. Along with

these, the issues of women’s right to divorce, alimony, custody and the man being the guardian of the family and the obedience of women have been discussed among Egyptian women for centuries¹. Man being the guardian of the family is generally applied as women’s inability to perform some actions without the permission of a male “guardian”². Thus, family laws refer to women’s rights in both private and public areas. While studying these laws, we can see whether women have the authority and power to produce Islamic fiqh and jurisprudence as well as discuss them, let alone produce them.

Unwritten marriage and divorce rules in Egypt were enacted in 1920 and 1929. With these laws, while the legal duty of the man was assigned as taking care of his wife and children financially,

¹ The issues which were less discussed and that were still taboo were Muslim men being allowed to marry women of another religion, while Muslim women could not, and the woman who would remarry to lose her right of custody.

² For example the woman’s not being allowed to travel, not being able to get a job, getting questioned about smuggling or prostitution if she left the airport without permission, and the need for her husband or father’s signature on her passport.

the legal duty of the woman was coded as obedience to the man. The right of the man to verbally divorce the woman unilaterally, men's right to polygamy and the right to divorce based on damage to women, which all have a place in Islamic jurisprudence, had been legalized. The notion of "damage" generally included the physical violence of the man that exceeds the limits³, the failure of the man to fulfill his financial responsibility, an incurable serious physical or mental illness, or the man going missing.

A reform that we can call as pro-women were realized in 1979 for the first time in Egypt⁴. This reform obliged men to inform his other wives when he got married to another woman. There was not such a necessity before. Secondly, a woman who got stuck in such a situation was automatically granted the right to divorce. In other words, the definition of the notion of damage was expanded. In addition, women were given the right to travel without their husbands' permission. The age of marriage was raised to 18 from 16. However, during this period where Islamic movements gained strength in Egypt, the clause "Islamic shariah principles are the

main source of the constitution." was added to the constitution by President Sadat. Based on this article, the judges redemised the new law to the Constitutional Court on the grounds that it violated shariah. Because according to them, polygamy of men, which is a religious and legal right could not be defined as damage to women.

Finally in 1985, the Constitutional Court had invalidated this law for procedural reasons. Many women protested this decision, and a new law was passed two months later. This law protected the divorce right of the woman whose husband had married another woman, but this time the woman got obliged to prove the material or moral damage she had suffered⁵. The ambiguity of the definition of damage in this law gave judges a great discretion among cases⁶. In general, the 1979 law declared void and the 1985 law in force did not limit men's polygamy, it only gave the former wife (s) a new reason for divorce. This law also regulated the man's unilateral right to divorce. While there was no requirement for men to go to court and state a reason for divorce prior to the law, the new law obliged the man to notify his former wife and register it with the registrar

3 While the courts had been trying to decide whether the beating falls within the scope of damage to the woman, they wanted to investigate whether this was a cause or not (i.e. a justification should involve advice first, then splitting beds and lastly beating). In addition, the courts' definitions of damage had varied according to the conditions of women. While "unfair" mild physical violence was considered acceptable for women in the economic lower class, it is more likely to be considered as damage for an educated upper class woman.

4 Known as "Cihan's law", this law takes its name from the wife of the President Enver Sedat of the time. We also know that prolonged women's studies had been effective in the enactment of this law.

5 The woman has to apply for divorce within one year from the date she finds out about her husband's marriage.

6 In 2003, female judges were appointed to the Constitutional Court for the first time. We've started to encounter women judges in first instance courts after 2007. In the long run, these developments can increase the perspective of women among courts.

within thirty days. The new law imposed fines and imprisonment for those who did not obey these rules, but it did not invalidate divorces that did not comply with these rules. In addition, men are still free to return to their wives within the three-month period called *iddet* (waiting period to remarry after divorce) and the divorcees are not granted the right to refuse reunification.

However, the year 2000 had been a turning point for Egyptian women. Women had obtained the unilateral right of divorce without the consent of their husbands and without giving a reason⁷. This reform which was made in the period of Hosni Mubarak, was realized with the notion of “hul” (حُلّ), that was based on Islamic jurisprudence and on an hadith⁸. However, according to the divorce conditions of “hul”, the woman had to renounce all her financial rights⁹. Women were obliged to say: “I hate living with my husband and I’m afraid of not staying within the limits of God because of this hatred.” at the hearing. However, there still had been problems in the implementation of this law. For example, the divorce cases in which the women sued for damages could take

up to 5–10 years. During this time, the women’s life would be suspended, while the men could remarry and have children.

For that matter, women had started to prefer divorcing with “hul”, which sometimes even ended in a shorter time, even if they have legitimate reasons. The conservative segment criticized this law since it had been adopted. They questioned whether the enactment of the law was democratic as well as it being Islamist or not. There had been even lawyers who claimed that women who were divorced this way violated the obedience rules because they did not get the permission of their husbands.

“Poking A Hole Through The Wall”: Islamic Feminist Studies

In this section, I will include two groups that contribute to Islamic feminism in Egypt. The first group is women who work in feminist women’s organizations, who do not define themselves in terms of Islam, but who study fiqh and produce Islamic discourses for the reform of the law. The other group is women who define themselves as Islamic feminists

7 According to the law, they did not need the judge’s approval, so the judge had no legal discretion not to divorce the woman.

8 This law was based on both the verses of Surah al-Baqarah (2: 229) and Surah An-Nisa (4: 128) and on a hadith. It refers to the incident where Sâbit b. Kays b. Şemmâs’ wife went to the Prophet and stated that she wanted to divorce from her husband and the Prophet separating them on the condition of the woman returning the financial assets she had been given during the marriage (*muhâlea*). It should be noted that there are different interpretations in this hadith about how the divorce took place or about who was divorced from whom. (See TDV Encyclopedia of Islam, article: *muhâlea*).

9 A woman who divorced with “hul” could not receive alimony or “muta” (two-year alimony right determined by the 1985 law), her bridewealth or her postponed bridewealth, if any. She had to return the bridewealth (gift) she had received earlier. However, the women who had the custody of the children could not be dispossessed from the house where she got married, until the children would be 15.

and who produce Islamic feminist knowledge by conducting religious-historical readings and who generally are academics.

The main starting point of these women can be summarized as emphasizing on the difference between fiqh and shariah. According to them: “What is unjust is not shariah but fiqh, Islamic shariah is just and holy, but fiqh is manipulated by the hand of man, that is, it is not inviolable.” After the enactment of the “hul” law in 2000, some defender of women’s rights began to use Islamic language more. One of these women was Azza Suleiman, one of Egypt’s most famous legal expert feminists and the founder of *Egyptian Women’s Legal Aid Center*. Azza Suleiman states that Islamic fiqh and international agreements are tools to pursue the case, and since 2002 she has been in dialogue with religious functionaries on family law reform¹⁰. The center had organized meetings and trainings with al-Azhar¹¹ ulama, mosque imams and local notables throughout the country – in Cairo, Alexandria and Southern Egypt – in 2008 and 2009. Suleiman argued that the family law should be unified for Egyptian Christians and Muslims. She was accused of causing interfaith conflict with her work on this.

Azza Suleiman is one of the women who dared to appear on TV on this issue. Being visible is very

important in Islamic feminism because women step into a “holy” area with these discussions. In 2011, the head of the Family Court of Appeals Abdullah al-Baga who claims, that the divorce with “hul” is invalid without the consent of the husband and Azza Suleiman came face-to-face on a television program. Suleiman was able to respond harshly to her opponent with religious references. But when we look at the second group, i.e the academician Islamic feminists, we can see them working especially before the revolution and mostly behind closed doors.

Another example from the first category is the activist, academician and poet Marwa Sharafaddin. She had gathered a study group among women’s non-governmental organizations for family law in 2006¹². These non-governmental organizations identify three main references: contemporary Egyptian realities¹³, conventions on human rights and an enlightened Islamic discourse. Sharafaddin says that these non-governmental organizations were not able to reach a consensus on what an enlightened Islamic discourse is. She states that they could not fully advocate for equating inheritance or banning polygamy altogether on issues such as women’s inheritance rights and men’s polygamy, which are clearly stated by Quranic verses. At the same time, they did

10 Personal interview with Azza Süleyman. 2014, Cairo, Egypt.

11 Al-Azhar Al-Sherif: The mosque in Cairo and the complex around it, which is the oldest religious educational institution in the Islamic world.

12 Marwa Sharafeddin, 2013. “Challenges of Islamic Feminism in Personal Status Law Reform: Women’s NGO’s in Egypt between Islamic Law and International Human Rights” In *Feminist and Islamic Perspectives: New Horizons of Knowledge and Reform*, ed by Omaima Abou Bakr. Women and Memory Forum Publications.

13 Women are the breadwinners in many families.

not want to give up the financial responsibility of the man, which emerges from the situation where the man is the protector of the family.

Among the Islamic feminists, it is necessary to take a look at the studies of the academician Omaima Abou-Bakr. Abou-Bakr, one of the founders of the Women and Memory Forum which was established in 1995, is one of the most prominent names of Islamic feminism not only in Egypt but also in the world. Abou-Bakr has begun to institutionalize her Islamic feminist work after the revolution. After the revolution that overthrew Hosni Mubarak on January 25, 2011, we can see Islamic feminism gaining both organizational and discursive strength. While Islamic feminists used to work individually and academically, after the revolution they started to sink to the public's level by different institutions. In 2012, Women and Memory Forum organized a conference on Islamic feminism under the coordination of Abou-Bakr. Representatives of Al-Azhar and the Muslim Brotherhood were also invited to the conference for building dialogue. However, the presence of one of the Al-Azhar sheiks Jamal Kutb, the former head of the fatwa committee gave the impression to the audience that al-Azhar got the final word on the subject. In addition, all participants on the panel including Abou-Bakr, are accused of not being experts in the Islamic field¹⁴.

In 2010, a platform called Noon Center founded by men and women whom we can call moderate Islamists. This institution claimed in the booklets they published that they supported feminist jurisprudence and received support from Islamic feminists like Omaima Abou-Bakr, Amani Saleh and Fatma Hafız. Abou-Bakr taught lectures on gender equality that the platform had organized for the ulama. Abou-Bakr summarizes these encounters which she described as “poking holes in the wall by their heads” as follows:

“It was very difficult to teach the ulama as an academic researcher, let's face it, we live in ivory towers. We cannot get in touch with real people because we are not activists.” She defined these lessons as an opportunity for both parties and expressed it as follows: “[Ulama] they were not satisfied with the gender equality training, but of course they were very polite. When we tell them about Nisa 34, they perceive man being the protector of the family as the leadership of men. When we say: “No, God gave it to provide opportunity to men, because you inherit more.”, they mount an argument about men's disposition. And then I would say: “Okay, you can be conservative about gender equality, but don't tell me that it's Islamic.”¹⁵.

The project coordinator of the center though, had drawn a more positive picture on these

14 Women and Memory, 2012. “Topic: Islamic Feminism and the Ulama” <http://womenandmemory.org/islamicfeminism/forums/?mingleforumaction=viewtopic&t=4>, last accessed January 28, 2021

15 Personal interview with Omaima Abou-Bakr. April 23, 2014, Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, Egypt.

trainings. He stated that the ulama got more positive about equality in post-surveys¹⁶.

Afterwards, the International Musawah Organization had empowered Islamic feminists in Egypt. The organization decided to move its secretariat to Egypt in 2012 and currently, names such as Azza Süleyman, Marwa Sharafeddin, Omaima Abou-Bakr and Mulki Al-Sharmani are working with Musawah in Egypt. Mulki Al-Sharmani describes the community in Musawah as: “Even though our beliefs and religious views are different, our goals are the same”¹⁷. In the book *Men in Charge?* published by Musawah, Abou-Bakr analyzes how the concept of men’s protectorship is interpreted differently by legal experts and glossators over time. She begins to address new generation and taboo issues in Egypt. For example, Fatma Emam and Yara Sallam brought up marital rape at the conference, which was not yet considered a crime in Egypt. They stated that this should be considered a violation of rights in terms of Islam. The reactions they received were on that they were not experts in the Islamic subject. Fatma Emam expressed her implication as follows: “Talking about Islamic fiqh is a taboo, and on top of that, it is even more difficult in Egypt if you are both young and female, civic educated and without a headscarf. He begins

to address new generation and taboo issues in Egypt. For example, Fatma Emam and Yara Sallam brought up marital rape, which is not yet considered a crime in Egypt, at the conference. They state that this should be considered a violation of rights in terms of Islam. Their reactions are that they are not experts in the Islamic subject. Fatma Emam expresses her implication as follows: “Talking about Islamic fiqh is a taboo, and on top of that, it is even more difficult in Egypt if you are both young and female, both civic-educated and without a headscarf.”¹⁸.

In summary, Islamic feminism in Egypt is having difficulties on the field. Academic studies are various, but their dissemination is difficult without state or institutional support.

Caught between the conservative Muslim Brotherhood and authoritarian military governments, Egyptian women and women’s rights associations are going through hard times. The financial assets of the dissident women’s associations, which have received funds from abroad since 2016, are frozen and their managers are under travel ban¹⁹. We see that it has become difficult for Islamic feminism to gain priority and reach the public level due to political polarization and pressure.

16 Personal interview with Noon Center coordinator. 2014. October 6, Cairo, Egypt.

17 Personal interview with Mulki Al-Sharmani. 2014. Al-Mohandeseen, Cairo, Egypt.

18 Personal interview with Fatma Emam. 2014, Heliopolis, Cairo, Egypt and Online Interview 2017.

19 Azza Suleiman is among these women.

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3rd
SESSION

IMMIGRATION:
FAMILIAR
INSTITUTIONS,
NEW
CONTEXTS

**Immigrant
Women's
Struggle for
Independent
Residency Rights
in Germany**

-Elif iğdem Artan

“Women are reluctant to submit their rightful applications due to both the language barrier and the uncertainty, and they become victims for the second time.”

ELİF ÇİĞDEM ARTAN

Germany was only able to put the Istanbul Convention which it had signed in 2011 into force at the earliest in February 2018, by making reservations on the implementation of the second and the third paragraphs of Article 59 of the convention. Article 59 under the Immigration and Asylum Section provides that victims of domestic violence whose residence status is dependent on a spouse or a partner whose residence is recognized by domestic law shall be granted a residence permit independent of the spouse in case of a breakdown of a marriage or a relationship. The first paragraph of Article 59 imposes obligations on the contracting states for granting an independent residence permit from the spouse regardless of the duration of the marriage or relationship; the second paragraph imposes obligations on the contracting states to stop the deportation procedures of the victims of violence in a way that allows them to apply for an independent

residence permit, the third paragraph imposes obligations on the contracting states to grant the victim of violence a renewable residence permit if their legal process is ongoing or if he or she is staying in a women’s shelter and the fourth and the last paragraph imposes obligations on the contracting states to restore the permits of the victim if the victim is taken to another country as a result of forced marriage and loses the right of residence.

The German government justifies its reservations on the internal law regulation of the first paragraph of Article 59 being sufficient. However, our experience in the field and the feedback of women violence victims, migrant and refugee women’s associations, social service consultants and lawyers show that the Difficult Circumstances Commission established according to the domestic legal system does not work effectively. The report issued by the commission does not have any

sanctions on the Immigration Office, and the documents requested by the commission members vary on the basis of states, cities and commissions. Women are reluctant to submit their rightful applications due to both the language barrier and the uncertainty, and they become victims for the second time. This victimization directly contradicts the principle of providing equality to everyone, regardless of language, religion, race, residence status, stated in the fourth article of the convention. In this context, this presentation illustrates the political work carried out by DaMigra (Dachverband der Migrantinnen e.V.), the umbrella organization of immigrant and refugee women's associations in Germany, to remove the reservations placed on the Istanbul Convention and the right to be granted a residence permit independent of the spouse. Within this framework, it examines how immigrant and refugee women's associations from different geographies of the world localize feminist struggle practices in Germany where their lives are centered.

DaMigra which was founded in 2014, today represents more than 70 member associations by expressing equality demands of migrant and refugee women and by conducting political work in this direction. It both empowers women for participation in social life in Germany with the grassroots work carried out for and with migrant and refugee women, and also conducts lobbying efforts to create political demands that contain permanent solutions to the current identified

problems. Struggling against racist and sexist discrimination, DaMigra insists on the demand "Let Istanbul Convention be Implemented Unconditionally" while discussing the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Germany on the axis of immigration and gender intersection.

When we look at the Istanbul Convention from the intersection of immigration and gender, we see that some articles particularly stand out. For example, Article 11, data collection and research. Migrant and refugee women are often included in short sections of research. However, within the framework of Article 11, we are talking about the need for the state to collect data directly on the needs and demands of immigrant and refugee women. Or article 19, the woman's right to information in a language she can understand. This undoubtedly includes the woman's right to testify in her first language. Article 23, shelters. Since 2015, the law on the place of residence (Wohnsitzauflage) has been in force in Germany. According to this law, refugees are registered in a certain city after their application is completed and they have to live in that city for three years. This law means restricting the freedom of movement of refugees. If they find a job in another city, they go to the immigration office and demand their residence to be changed by virtue of duty. This request can take weeks or even months to get an answer back. During this waiting period, they may miss job opportunities. Their inability to

find a job causes them to live in need of state aid by not being able to acquire their economic freedom. This law makes the situation difficult for refugee women who are victims of violence as follows: If there is no availability in a women's shelter in the city where they are registered, they cannot find an available place in another city and move there. Because they have no freedom of movement. Immigrant women who come to the country by family reunification and receive their residence through their husbands also have limited access to women's shelters. Sometimes they are rejected because they cannot receive social assistance to cover their expenses in the shelter, or sometimes because of racist prejudices with judgmental assumptions that they may bring their family members along and that it would cause trouble. Or as there is no translator in the shelter, the woman gets stuck in the language barrier. On the other hand, finding a place in women's shelters is still a problem in Germany. The condition of one family living space per 10,000 people in each region, stipulated in the explanatory report of the Istanbul Convention has not yet been met in Germany. The Ministry responsible for family, elderly, women and youth announced that it has allocated funds to establish new women's shelters or expand the capacity of existing ones under the Istanbul Convention. However, simply increasing the capacity does not protect immigrant and refugee women unless these regulations are changed or the racist behavior of the staff is punished. Immigrant and refugee

women and girls seeking help to escape violence are discriminated against because of their lack of citizenship rights. In other words, they are victimized for the second time by the German legal system.

Other articles of the Istanbul Convention that directly concern immigrant and refugee women are related to forced marriages, female genital mutilation-cutting and crimes committed in the name of so-called 'honor'. Particularly prominent in these three items is the emotional pressure exerted on women and girls, that is, the psychological violence perpetrated by the perpetrator: The 'honor of the family' in forced marriages and crimes committed in the name of so-called 'honor' and the so-called 'ladyhood' pressure in female genital mutilation-cutting are examples of these. Although psychological violence is clearly defined as a crime in Article 33 of the Istanbul Convention, it is not yet under legal investigation in Germany. In other words, nobody can file a lawsuit due to psychological violence.

The seventh part of the convention on immigration and asylum includes the articles of the Istanbul Convention on the residence rights of immigrant and refugee women: Article 61-non-refoulement, Article 60-requests for asylum based on gender and Article 59-residence permit. It is important to examine Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention within the scope of the struggle for the right of residence

independent of the spouse. The most important point of Article 59 is the reservations made by Germany in the second and third paragraphs of the article while enacting the Istanbul Convention. These reservations prevent women who are victims of domestic violence from being protected if they file a complaint. For example, preventing the deportation of a woman when applying for a residence permit independent of her spouse, as provided in Paragraph 2. Or, as stated in Paragraph 3, if the victim of violence is to be heard as a witness for the investigation, or if a woman is staying in a shelter, she cannot be deported. Germany cites the first paragraph of Article 59 which is implemented in accordance with the 31st paragraph of the foreigners law as a reason for the reservations it has made. According to this, immigrant women who come to the country by family reunification can apply for a residence permit independent of the spouse after the end of a three-year marriage period. If the woman is a victim of domestic violence, this period does not need to expire in order for her to apply for a spouse-independent residence permit. But of course, what is written in the law and what happens in the field does not coincide. For example, in order for a woman victim of violence to obtain an independent residence permit from her husband, she must first apply to the Difficult Circumstances Commission and should document the violence. According to the experiences conveyed by the immigrant women's associations, the documents requested by the commission in the

applications differ even within the same state. Most of the applications are denied. As such, women violence victims are obliged to wait for the expiry of the legal period rather than dealing with uncertainty. Knowing this, the perpetrator uses the spouse-independent right of residence as a means of violence. He threatens to divorce her and send her out of the country. Women often hesitate to complain because they are afraid of losing their children. Under these circumstances, immigrant and refugee women who are victims of domestic violence are again victimized by the German legal system for the second time.

So what does the practice in the field tell us? This is what DaMigra exactly describes in its GREVIO report. GREVIO — for those who do not know — is the expert group that controls the implementation of Istanbul Convention. GREVIO periodically sends questionnaires to countries and asks for information on states' regulations in accordance with the Istanbul Convention. Non-governmental organizations also prepare shadow reports in parallel with state reports. GREVIO evaluates all these reports together with their visits to the countries, publishes country reports and makes suggestions for the improvement of the practices. In a way, it issues the state report of the Istanbul Convention. The DaMigra-GREVIO-Shadow Report focuses on three main sections: first, migration and asylum, second, women's shelters under protection and support, and the last, investigation and

prosecution. In the report, we also examined one case in depth to illustrate structural rights violations. Aytan's case.

Aytan came to Germany by family reunification at the beginning of 2018. Shortly after, she was subjected to violence and she left home and took refuge with a family she had known from Azerbaijan. She had had a son from her first marriage, and the boy was going to a second school in Germany at that time. Thanks to her son's teacher, she found a place in the women's shelter and went to Siegen. Before her application for family reunification in Cologne was completed, her file was sent to the Immigration Office in Siegen. Meanwhile, Aytan filed a complaint on her husband. She occasionally found a job, found a house and applied for an independent residence permit. The Immigration Office rejected her family reunification application and canceled her working and residence permit, as Aytan was no longer living in Cologne with her husband in the same house. Aytan went to the Difficult Circumstances Commission but could not get a response. She appealed to the district Petition Committee. She didn't get any response from there, either. Aytan was deported in November 2019.

We see that Aytan both tried to get away from violence as well as struggling to fill the gaps among the protection mechanisms of the state. For example, Aytan could not leave home and

go directly to a shelter. She had to arrange her own escape. Since family reunification was not approved, the residence and working permit was canceled. The interesting thing here is that Aytan's application was rejected, although she both found a job and a house and showed that her life center was Germany. On the other hand, the fact that economic independence, which is the most basic point of the right to live independently from a spouse, was not provided to Aytan by not granting her a working permit. In addition, when Aytan was deported, the lawsuit filed against her husband was dropped without any investigation on the grounds that there were no witnesses. Thus, the reservations made by Germany had protected the perpetrator.

Aytan is not the only case. Aytan is not the only woman who was added to the state statistics through deportation, but not by an incident of violence she was subjected to that was reported by immigrant women's associations. We need a feminist struggle involving ALL WOMEN to protect immigrant and refugee women from the multiple discrimination they face in terms of class and gender.

**Being an
Immigrant
Woman Within
the Local
Movement**

-Sultan Betül Kaya

“Since the 1980s, thanks to feminist researchers, the number of migration studies that include a gender perspective has started to increase.”

SULTAN BETÜL KAYA

The fact of migration, which has existed for centuries, affects the economic, political and social dynamics of countries, and the selfness, identities, perceptions and the attitudes of individuals. When the migration literature is examined, it is seen that the fact of migration is mostly read through economic, social-political and historical contexts and not analyzed in detail over individual and social norms. Factors affecting individuals' decision-making to migrate, social norms and migrant relations have begun to be included in migration researches after the 1970s, albeit in a limited way.

However, it is seen that these studies are conducted with a gender blind perspective and the specific experiences of immigrant women are ignored in the studies. Since the 1980s, thanks to feminist researchers, the number of migration studies that include a gender perspective has started to increase. Among

these studies, Mirjana Morokvasic's article "Birds of Passage are Also Women" published in 1984 has been accepted as a pioneering study in migration and gender literature. Migration studies conducted with a gender perspective have shown that women prefer migration not only for economic reasons, but also to escape the pressure of social norms and to establish a life in line with their own dispositions. With the feminization of migration, the facts that women take an active role in the migration process and that they are one of the main actors of migration have been reflected in migration studies.

In this study, the self and gender perceptions of 21 immigrant women who migrated to Turkey from various countries and worked in XX sectors were examined. Participants were selected using the snowball method. Except for Participant-19 who migrated from Greece to Turkey, Participant-7 who migrated from Afghanistan, the 14 of the participants are

from the former Soviet Union and 5 from the Middle East countries. Since “being an immigrant woman” is prioritized in the study, not the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, but the nature of the migration period and working conditions are taken into account. Therefore, living and working in Turkey for at least one year was sought as a prerequisite in the selection of participants. The data obtained from the field study were analyzed with feminist method and interpretive phenomenological approach based on migration and selfness literature. The study aims to investigate whether the self and gender perceptions of immigrant women are affected after they migrated to Turkey, and if so, how they have been affected. In order to reach the answers to the six basic questions of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with immigrant women and the transmissions of migrant women were analyzed within the framework of migration theories, gender perspective and self-literature.

Interviews had begun by asking migrant women questions about why they migrated, what difficulties they faced while migrating, and how they coped with these difficulties. All the participants stated that they had felt the uneasiness of living as a foreign woman in a new country before taking the decision to migrate. However, in addition to this uneasiness and fear, the hope of a new life opportunity, an increase in the level of economic and social welfare has urged them to make the decision

to migrate. Participants stated that primarily economic factors and secondly, the uneasy and insecure environment in their country has played an important role in making the decision to migrate. It has been observed that all participants from the former Soviet Union, Middle East countries, Greece and Afghanistan used their social capitals in Turkey before and after the migration decision. At the same time, participants from the Middle East, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan stated that they felt drawn to Turkish culture. When these two situations are read in the framework of the network of relations and migration systems theory, it shows us again how important the individual and social factors that cause the acceleration and feminization of migration are for immigrant women. The fact that immigrant women both establish new social networks and use their old social networks is based on their desire to create a safer migration process for them.

According to the findings obtained from the other questions, what has been difficult most for the immigrant women is to learn the Turkish language when they first came to Turkey. However, it was observed that they had more difficulties in establishing a reliable and continuous work life and a social environment. Migrant women have benefited from TV shows and social networks in the language learning process. Finding a reliable job and environment took more time than learning a language. Immigrant women who are perceived as low-

cost, unreliable and flexible labor force in Turkey, face the risk of being dismissed at any time and not being remunerated. It has been observed that participants from the former Soviet Union work in retail and home care services through their own networks, while participants from Middle Eastern countries work in relatively more qualified jobs. The reason for this is that all participants from Middle Eastern countries are university graduates, that they know a second foreign language, and are relatively young and qualified individuals. Even though the participants work in different fields, they are affected by gender inequality. The common inequalities they face are being paid less than immigrant men in their workplace, being perceived as unreliable and not being promoted. Even though they struggle with these inequalities through the networks they have established, this struggle is not able to transform into a collective action and remains at an individual level. Despite everything, the fact that immigrant women create new alternatives for themselves and support each other has revealed that they show an individual resistance to the systemic inequality they experience.

The fact that migration is a process that has individual and psychological reflections as well as social ones, has been repeated and underlined frequently throughout the thesis. Regardless of whether the migration is voluntary, compulsory, temporary or permanent, every immigrant has moved away from the society

and culture in which they are used to, and felt psychologically alone, alienated and rootless for a long time in the country they migrated to. Some social networks established before migration by the participants in the study did not provide psychological comfort when they first came to Turkey. Participants stated that being separated from their country and their families caused them to feel loneliness and inexhaustible longing. However, the participants stated that they got used to Turkey over time and felt less lonely, less alienated, less longing and rootless as they made friends, but they stated that these feelings will never run out. It was observed that the participants felt relatively safer between the time they first came to Turkey and now, as they achieved their goals of finding a job, earning money, and sending money to their families, and none of the participants thought of returning to their home country in the short run. This situation has caused them to feel psychologically better and to increase the opportunity to invest more in themselves.

How the gender-perceptions and self-perceptions of the participants were affected during the migration process was also analyzed in the study. Participants are under the influence of a social and individual mobility and their perceptions on gender and self are consciously or unconsciously shaped by their subjective experiences, because participants are not independent of the society and culture in which they were born, raised and currently

live in. When the participants were asked about who they were and how they defined themselves, it was seen that nine of the participants answered these questions based on their identities and professions, and twelve answered these questions based on personal characteristics such as diligence, determination and cheerfulness. Participants stated that they are more determined and hard-working than in the past in order to adapt to Turkey and that they had learned the language, found a job and met new people. They explained the reason for this change by emphasizing that existing in the migrated country required acquiring new skills. Participants' creating a new life in Turkey stands out as an important step in their individualization. The fact that the participants do not want to go back to their countries despite the economic and social difficulties in Turkey and tried to cope with the difficulties they had faced shows that they had the opportunity to shape their own lives. Participants' ability to understand themselves and their needs, and taking the path of identifying their own realities are seen as the most important steps in self-realization. Participants who came to Turkey by taking many risks such as sexual harassment, assault or fraud, stated that they believed that they could overcome many difficulties with the skills they gained during the migration process. Thus, the participants started to realize their potential. Especially going out in the public sphere, earning money and showing personal development have been observed to play an important role in the

developments of the self-perceptions of the participants.

In order to understand how the gender perceptions of the participants were affected during the migration process, questions were asked about the gender norms in their own societies and the effect of this situation on the migration decision and working conditions. Participants felt anxious about being a foreign woman in a foreign country during the decision-making process. They explained the reason for this anxiety as sexual harassment or fear of being sexually assaulted. Participants stated that they use their own social capital and employment agencies to reduce this fear and anxiety and to work in a relatively safe work environment. Participants from the former Soviet Union stated that gender norms in their own countries had been more flexible than Turkey, while participants from Middle Eastern countries and Afghanistan stated that gender norms in their own countries had been stricter. However, it was observed that all participants were affected by the patriarchal order.

According to the statements of the participants, it is seen that the concepts of maleness and patriarchy have similar meanings in a Socialist or Islamist community. Participants play the role of "citizen" in the public sphere and "mother, wife" roles in the private sphere. The words of Participant-1: "If you do not work in the Soviets, you are a parasite." and the words of Participant-7: "One has to get married, and

should have kids, because she is a woman.” summarizes the whole situation. Each of the participants who went through the migration process stated that their gender perception had become more egalitarian and that they felt stronger as a female immigrant.

It was observed in the study that gender norms are at the forefront in determining the working conditions of immigrant women in Turkey. Most participants' jobs in areas such as retail and domestic care are examples of gendered division of labor. Participants stated that thanks to the gendered division of labor, they get jobs easier than male immigrants, and that women are more preferred than men in sales and domestic and elderly care. However, gendered division of labor causes the participants to be confined to a certain work area and being exposed to precarious, flexible and low-cost jobs. It has been revealed that the participants who are confined to a certain work area due to gendered division of labor are not able to show their skills and education. In addition, it was observed that the participants were more affected by risk factors such as dismissal, getting less salary, not being promoted and being subjected to discrimination, when compared to male immigrants.

The family hierarchies of the participants vary. While the family hierarchy of some participants involves mothers, fathers and children, it is observed that other participants' family hierarchies consist of grandparents, mothers,

children and siblings. For the participants from the former Soviet Union countries, working in Turkey did not directly affect the family hierarchy, but the increase in their incomes had affected the family order. It was revealed that the participants who had increased their income got a say in the family and they were included in the decision-making mechanism. Providing financial aid to their families, helping their siblings migrate, having their children go to school, and increasing their own earnings accelerated the process of getting independent and self-liberation.

As a conclusion, migration is an important factor in changing both individual and social dynamics. The fact that movement of migration enables countries to produce policies, develop their economies and production and the globalization, acceleration and feminization of the migration movement for individuals are indicators that migration is a dynamic phenomenon. Within the framework of the findings obtained in the study, it was concluded that women are active individuals in the migration process, and they have become decision makers in their own lives, with migration being a strengthening factor. Living and working in a new country, adapting to a different culture and environment has increased participants' self-confidence and self-belief. The question of immigrant woman: “Can I?” has turned into the opinion: “I can now.”

Opinions of
Turkish Immigrant
Women Residing
In the USA on
Gender Constructs

-Z. Selen Artan

“ . It is possible to see that the gender definitions of immigrants who draw a thick line between femininity and masculinity are based on some essentialist arguments. ”

Z. SELEN ARTAN

In this article, I will discuss the opinions of immigrant women living in America on gender construct and gender equality, whom I interviewed during my doctoral research. It would not be wrong to argue that the interviewees' views on gender, who are predominantly first-generation immigrants, were formed in Turkey, where they went through socialization processes before the migration movement. It is possible to see that the gender definitions of immigrants who draw a thick line between femininity and masculinity are based on some essentialist arguments. While the interviewees equate femininity with passivity, sensuality, compassion and softness, masculinity is built with the definitions of being calm, tough and sensible outside the home but careless and superficial at home. Moreover, the content of these constructs does not differ significantly when variables such as women's education

level, socio-economic status and their levels of religious belief are taken into account.

At the beginning of the interviews, the majority of the interviewees answered a quick “No” to the question: “Do you think men and women are equal?” For example, Buse, a pious young mother who does not work outside the home, drew attention to the difference between men and women in her answers. She argued that men would not be interested in decorating a new house due to their nature. Buse said that hanging the curtains does not mean anything other than protecting the house from the outsider eyes for men and she claimed that women will attach importance to the color or the pattern of the curtain as well as its possible harmony with the furniture in the house. Buse continued as follows: “Man looks at things in a superficial way. Therefore, I think men and women are not equal. Man settles for what

he sees, but the woman thinks of everything. “Other participants also emphasized that men and women cannot be equal due to their natures, by referring to the essentialist arguments I have just mentioned. I saw that these clear and confident statements began to crack when women started talking about their daily practices and life experiences. Even if they didn’t say it openly, immigrant women were voicing demands for equality around three different themes related to home and public sphere.

The first theme I came across with was the women’s demand for equal voice with their husbands upon the decisions taken inside the house. Cahide, who is married with two children and has never worked outside the home, tried to explain her situation with the religious references she gave. “For example, our Prophet says that he would like to worship, he gets permission from his wife, our mother Ayşe.” Based on this example, she explained that they make all the decisions at home as a family, and that not only her husband gets a say around the house. She ended her words by saying: “There is no male or female. They’re equal.”

The second theme was the demand for equality in housework which is mainly expressed directly by women working outside the home, but also mentioned by some interviewees who do not work outside the home. This request was often expressed in the word “assistance”.

Pelin, who works both outside the home and is an active woman with the organizations she organized for women in the mosque, stated that she wanted her husband to help her because she was working. She did not even limit this to her own spouse and stated that all fathers should be responsible for caring for their children. While expressing this request, she often broke her sentences short, paused, and continued after a short silence. After emphasizing that women do not have physical strength like men, so they cannot be equal with them, Pelin stated that she thinks that women and men can share the responsibility when it comes to housework and childcare.

The last theme I encountered was the demand for equality in terms of abilities. Asya was one of the interviewees who claimed that women can do everything men do. Growing up in a conservative environment in a small settlement in Turkey, a university graduate but always working in low-income jobs in the US, Asya was working in a supermarket when I spoke to her. She stated that women are responsible for matters such as motherhood and keeping the house in order. She, on the other hand, was against labeling jobs as ones that men and women could do. “I can do whatever men around me do.” said Asya who claimed that while men have an advantage in terms of physical strength, there is no difference between men and women when it comes to abilities and skills.

In addition to their demands for equality, the biggest impact of immigration to the US on gender construct appeared before me in the fear of the interviewees not being able to control their children's sexuality. The immigrant women I interviewed thought that premarital sex was not considered as "out of the norm" in American society. They were more concerned about the possibility that the pudicity regime, which we can consider as a set of rules that control and regulate women's sexuality, will lose its authority in the USA and thus the sexuality of girls cannot be controlled. It was a great risk for immigrant women that these rules related to pudicity, which their children would learn through similar social processes, would lose their power in American society if they lived in Turkey. This risk meant transferring the pudicity regime to the younger generation and reinforcing the border drawn between gender constructs.

Ayfer, whom I met at the mosque one summer evening, who is a married woman with one kid drew attention to this issue. We were in the living room of her mother-in-law Umay's house for the meeting. There were Umay and his close friend Mesude, Mesude's nephew who went to high school and Ayfer's daughter who went to high school as well. One thing lead to another and the situations where the relationships between men and women in the USA set a "bad" example were brought up. After a while, Ayfer, who were answering my

questions, started speaking not to me but to the young girls, both of whom grew up in the USA. Ayfer, who works in a bridal shop serving American customers, said that the brides who came to the shop lived in the same house with the grooms for years. Ayfer was trying to argue that premarital sexual intercourse should not be before marriage but she could not put it openly, so she followed an alternative route and said that women who live in the same house without a marriage bond with their boyfriends will hardly marry because men then would have no reason to get married.

If I have to summarize the arguments that I have tried to explain briefly here, it is not possible to say that the gender constructs of the first generation women have changed by moving to USA and this shows up as a result of their socialization processes in Turkey. On the other hand, we observe that even though they oppose gender equality on a discursive level, they demand equality through daily experiences. However, when it comes to the control of sexuality in American society, it is possible to say that it is mostly handled as an "issue of femininity" and a border is drawn again between the genders.

4th
SESSION

FERTILITY:
TECHNOLOGY,
CONTROL
AND DECISION

The
Transformation
of the Fatwas
on Abortion
and the Power
of the Life

–Burcu Kalpaklıođlu

“The views on abortion in classical fiqh interpretations vary from sect to sect. But they have one thing in common, which is that the soul incarnating in the body is a milestone.”

BURCU KALPAKLIOĞLU

In this discussion, I will analyze the historical transformation of fatwas given on this geography on abortion and refer to the advice of female preachers who answer religious questions on the Alo Fatwa Line affiliated to Istanbul Provincial Office of Mufti. First of all, I would like to express that I will not say anything normative about abortion, that I am not a theologian, that I don't agree or disagree with the fatwas given, nor do I worry about saying whether I find them justified. I just want to take a look at the reasoning behind the fatwas given in the past and given today, and explain how religious interpretations which can be generally considered as “that's how religion works” could transform along with political changes and technological developments throughout history, and state that the decisions that are generally thought to be static and to be closed to change are actually interpretations made within the context of time.

Let me start here: The views on abortion in classical fiqh interpretations vary from sect to sect. But they have one thing in common, which is that the soul incarnating in the body is a milestone. This milestone is regarded as a stage where abortion would not be possible from then on. For example, according to Hanafis and Zaydis, the soul incarnates on the 120th day, so abortion is allowed before that day. According to the belief of the Hanbalis, the soul incarnates on the 40th day, according to many Malikis, it incarnates when the sperm and egg combine. After the incarnation, it is thought that the fetus is a human being, and that before it incarnates it had the vitality similar to plants or animals, so abortion is possible during this period (Musallam, 1983). Until the 19th century, abortion was neither legally prohibited nor a fatwa that prohibited abortion existed on this geography. However, with the advent of biopolitics in the 19th century, “life” becomes an issue of the ruling

power, population politics emerge, birth and death rates become an issue and medical science becomes institutionalized, and then abortion becomes an object of the ruling power. And when abortion was first banned in the Ottoman Empire in 1838, shaykh al-Islam was asked to issue a fatwa stating that abortion was a sin (Demirci and Somel: 2008). We can say that the fact that the discourses of the state power and religious authorities on abortion being so intertwined is a phenomenon which has been going on since then, as in many other issues.

Parallel to the fact that life is a political object, ultrasound technology has also seriously affected religious and non-religious interpretations about abortion. Now that the fetus can be seen with ultrasound, the soul's incarnation into the body no longer indicates a transformation. The visibility of the fetus then began to have an authority and a new consciousness started to emerge about the fetus that then had inviolableness as well as rights. This fetus had become an icon of life, representing life. So what ultrasound did was not really just represent the fetus, but reconstructing the fetus as a physical, social entity that demanded an ethical response from us (Haraway 1997). And today, the inviolability of the fetus's right to life is emphasized in the abortion fatwa of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, and it is stated that nobody, including the mother and father can interfere with this right to life from the moment the sperm and the egg unite, as long as the mother's health is in danger.

The Supreme Council For Religious Affairs (DİYK) gave its first fatwa on abortion in 1956. An important exception to abortion that was not strictly permissible was the DİYK's council decision in 1994 stating that women who had been raped during the Bosnian War could have abortions. According to the decision of the council, this situation should be considered in terms of the greatness and dignity of Islam and the continuation or disappearance of the Islamic community in this region. Therefore, the abortion of Bosnian women was allowed, and even a gynecologist was sent from Turkey to Bosnia. What was expressed in this statement as an excuse was not the mental health of rape victim women and the difficulties they would go through the rest of their lives, but the greatness of Islam and the presence of the Islamic society in the region, and I think that there existed the body policy of Islam again. If we consider the Islamic society and ummah as a body, it is possible to say that what was expressed here can be counted as a type of biopolitics. Like the fatwas themselves, their exceptions can vary in different political contexts and can be shaped by the knowledge of different authorities.

In one of the statements made by the former President of Religious Affairs Mehmet Görmez, at a time when abortion discussions were intense, I think it was very interesting that his only references to abortion being scientists and science technology while stating that abortion . was illicit. When I looked at the fatwas given in Alo Fatwa line, I saw that a strange love-

hate relationship was established with modern medicine. While some fatwas, as in abortion, were completely based on medical discourse and fully embraced abortion, in others it could be seen that they clearly contradicted medical discourses. Likewise, it is also possible to say that such a tense relationship was established with the science of psychology. If I go back to Mehmet Görmez's fatwa statement, he later stated the following: "Instead of stating general provisions on issues such as protecting the mother's life, eliminating the consequences of sexual assaults such as rape, and serious illnesses emerging in the fetus in mother's womb, a specific judgment may be required for each specific situation." I remember being quite surprised when I read these. Because, although more difficult and complex questions were directed to the Supreme Council for Religious Affairs and answered by the experts there, what I observed in my field research on Alo Fatwa line was that abortion was strictly illicit. In my interviews with female preachers, I was never mentioned of exceptions, except that the mother's health was at risk.

At this point let me move on to the research I just mentioned. In 2015, I conducted a field research for my master's thesis on the Alo Fatwa line of Istanbul Provincial Office of Mufti, in a room where female preachers answered questions asked by phone. During my visits to the room called the "Miss Fatwa Room" for five months, I'd listened to preachers' responses to fatwa questions and conducted in-depth interviews with ten preachers and religious services

experts. What I observed in the field research and what I've tried to explain throughout my thesis was that what happened there had been a form of governance, that is, with Alo Fetva, the state was going through people's homes, families, and the deepest details of their daily lives and managed the problems with its own discourse.

But on the other hand, I saw that it was not right to discuss the female preachers' fatwas only in terms of governance and power, that there was left an area that had been open to the preachers' interpretations between the fatwas of the Presidency of Religious Affairs and the stories that the preachers listen to, and that the female preachers who were as well women familiar with women's experiences in this field were trying to understand the women ask questions, to protect their rights, and gave personalized advice. In particular, preachers made specific comments on matters such as imam marriage, polygamy and religious divorce by trying to find solutions by protecting the upmost benefits of women as well as all parties in the stories that had been told to them. Based on what I encountered when I was working in the field, I can clearly say that abortion was the least flexible issue among the area of interpretation I've mentioned. Throughout my field research, I was intrigued by the facts that preachers' fatwas about abortion had been very clear, and that they had given answers that regarded abortion as murder unless the mother's life was in danger. Let me give an example of an advice given by

a female preacher for better understanding. In one of the interviews, a woman called who had an abortion appointment with the doctor for the next day but who felt really guilty. When the preacher asked her why she wanted to have an abortion, she said she had an eleven-month-old baby, that her husband was very irresponsible and she was depressed. “If you’re depressed and your husband is irresponsible, why don’t you kill your eleven-month-old baby?” the preacher asked. And the woman gave up having an abortion. I do not discuss the veracity or the falsity of the fatwa given by the preacher here, but the point I want to emphasize is the strictness of the fatwa and the fact that abortion was put on par with murder. The fatwas on this subject are so clear that even the next-day pill is not allowed, because the possibility of the sperm and the egg being combined at the time the pill is taken is taken into account. It is very difficult to draw a time limit according to the preachers, and there is no difference between intervening in the fetus the next day and intervening after 3 months, or killing it at the age of eleven months. When I asked the preachers about the reasoning behind the fatwa, they told me that the soul incarnated in the body on the 120th day, so then the fetus was thought to be alive, but now with the ultrasound technology modern medicine could let us hear the heartbeat of the fetus and let us see its movement, and that therefore the fetus was a living and potential human being.

As you know, fiqh is a human-made discourse that is open to transformation and which is shaped according to the needs of people as well as being fluid and flexible. That ambiguity and flexibility that underlies Islamic interpretations becoming vague especially in the last century that we face when we look at history, is actually not something that has happened solely in the context of abortion. The codification of fiqh, especially in Muslim countries where family law is based on shariah, and thus where the emergence of strict laws that are based on gender hierarchy and that make women victimized are also a part of this. We also see this codification in legal interpretations on daily life problems, although not in a legal context. As for Alo Fatwa, the fact that one of the most visible issues of this codification being abortion is not independent from the emergence of biopolitics or the anti-abortion controversies in the Turkish politics in particular or de facto abortion bans. And it is no coincidence that the discourses of the religious authorities who openly oppose abortion concerning the fetus’ right to life as well as the anti-abortion discourses around the world for example in the USA are similar. They all point to the inviolability of life and the vitality of the fetus. What I want to say here is this: While the arguments against abortion are based from religious point, that point is actually not just religion. In fact, religion, which leads our daily life in particular, is never merely religion, that is, it is never independent of traditions, power relations and social dynamics.

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5th
SESSION

LOCAL
WOMEN'S
STRUGGLES

**From Environmental
Resistance to the
Space of Hope: The
Struggle of Women
From Yırca¹ Stones,
Stumblings and Not
Giving Up**

-Sare Öztürk

“We don’t know what is going to happen, or how, or when, and that very uncertainty is the space of hope.”

Rebecca Solnit (2018:22)

SARE ÖZTÜRK

There are two stories of struggle in Yırca Village. The first is the struggle involved in the environmental resistance against the coal-fired power plant, and the second is the peasant women’s struggle for existence. I will tell about the stones that women tripped over along the way, about their stumblings and about how they kept going without giving up. I will touch on the space of hope in women’s lives, which was created within a hopeful journey and is tried to be kept alive.

Affiliated to Manisa Soma, Yırca Village, was brought to agenda in 2014 with 6600 olive trees being cut down to build a coal-fired thermal power plant. The villagers who did not want the plant, resisted for fifty days by calling on “Don’t Touch My Olive”, however they could not prevent the cutting of the olive trees, although they managed to stop the construction of the thermal power plant.

During the resistance, women centered the struggle, with their presence as well as their forms of disobedience. Their earning their keep with agriculture, women’s labor, the feminization of agriculture and the emotional bond established with olives were reflected to their practices of resistance and to their words.

“We are not allowed to step in our own land.”

“What do you cook, how can you cut the trees?”

“How will you eat this olive?”

“We have nothing but heirloom, what are we supposed to do without soil?”

Women of Yırca tried to protect their lives by resisting the thermal power plant. Due to the existing thermal power plant, diseases such as COPD, asthma and cancer had increased in the village. Women had defended life, as building another plant meant death for them. A woman

¹ This article was created by using my master’s thesis with the title of “Being a Woman in Yırca and Labour Of Peasant Woman: Soap Maker Women As The Experience Of Empowerment” at Istanbul Arel University in 2019.

from Yırca who also suffers from asthma describes the situation in the village with the following words:

Look around, everyone has asthma, COPD. I have it too. Is there anyone who hasn't! Those who come here tell us: "You shouldn't stay here, you will get cancer, leave this place." Where shall we go, do we have anywhere to go? Yet, why would we? This place is our home, our land belongs here!

Women who did not leave their villages planted new olive trees instead of the ones that had been cut down. It will take time for them to grow, of course. While the seedlings of hope were growing, the women created a space of their own in the village as well as a workshop called Handmade and Homemade Yırca Hanımeli. They started to produce olive oil soaps.

The Soap House As The Space Of Hope

34 women came together and turned an old stone house in the village into a workshop and founded the soap house. The main features of this place are; it being founded by the labour of women, being based on solidarity and adopting collective production as a principle. The women who produced and sold soaps built the soap house with the income they had earned. For this reason, we can say that it was founded by women's labour. We can as well say that women did not individually make financial gains out

of soap production until the establishment process was completed. The fact that women did not receive any financial support from their husbands or their household heads is also an important factor. This causes the men in the village remain aloof from the place. Therefore, men cannot take the credit for women's labour or their earnings and they cannot dispossess labour.

The foundation process of the soap house had been spreaded over time due to various reasons, especially to financial problems. The soap house was built over two years because of transportation problems, the inability to cover the workshop conversion costs due to the low income from the soap sales, and some of the men in the village trying to discourage women. During this time, the soap house took on a new significance for women. Because women took care of all the works, from mortaring to partial demolition work, from whitewashing to cleaning, regardless of the work being heavy or easy. This endeavor had changed the meaning of the soap house for women from being only a job. In addition to all this workload, women also had to deal with the men in the village throughout the process. They try to dissuade women by using expressions such as "You are not capable, you will not succeed, you are wasting your time. Just leave it. This old house is impossible to rectify. This place is too messy to be in." Despite the villager men's efforts on dissuading the women, they kept on going with

the solidarity between them, without giving up. They stood against the manipulations of men with their solidarity and took the path less chosen by saying: “Whatever we will do, we will solve this.” In this sense, the soap house had turned into a space of hope that women struggled for. For them, the soap house had been the place where they “get away from the house and their troubles, come together and laugh a lot”. The workshop meant more than just a workplace. Even if there would be no production, they would only go there to see each other. Therefore, the space had an aspect that heals women.

With the soap house, women became more visible both in and outside the village. They collectively took place in the public sphere. They got involved in the problems of the village and produced solutions. The soap house still continues to work in the village, and a women’s coffee house was established in order to meet women who do not work in the soap house. In addition to all these, today the board of the village association consists of soap maker women.

Two Struggles: Anger and Joy

What has been tried to be explained briefly are... The long and grueling journey of the women of Yirca. Their practices of struggle coming together with the labour of women labor since 2014. We can separate the experiences of the

women of Yirca into two practices of struggle. The first is the environmental resistance that protected the olive trees against the thermal power plant, and the second is the long-term struggle against patriarchy for the establishment and continuation of the soap house. In both struggles, women tried to protect their labour and tried to exist. The first struggle created the ground for the second. For this reason, we can say that the two struggles are practices that reach out to each other. On the other hand, it is seen that these two struggles that bring women side by side have two different feelings. The unifying emotion in environmental resistance was anger, while that of the soap house process was joy. Women’s solidarity has formed the basis of opposition and coping in both emotions. Sevgi Soysal (2016: 160) says the following about emotions: “Ugliness is to narrow down an emotion. Yet an emotion is beautiful as it spreads. Good things don’t fit in tight spaces. Like people’s happiness. More you multiply its essence, the better it would get.”

Local women’s groups are dynamic practices that touch, heal and transform experiences. Quoting Rebecca Solnit, these practices are just like Hope in the Dark. This is not such a frivolous hope. It is a hope that believes in the transformative power of women’s solidarity. It is a hope that continues to have an effect, that grows, expands and opens up space. Just like what we feel when we think of the crowd at the

Solidarity Against Beating March organized by feminists in Yoğurtçu Park in 1987 and then look at the crowd on the 8th of March that throngs the squares today. A spark of hope shining in the dark with few people yesterday can evolve into a great movement today over time. When you think about it, we have multiplied our essence by many. We believe in the hope in the dark, which I mentioned at the beginning, which is the space of uncertainty. And we know that for the women of Yırca, who are a part of the hope in the dark, and for the entire women's movement, "For perfection reached after struggle and strife (Solnit, 2018: 20)."

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