

**THE POLITICS OF GENDER AND THE MAKING OF  
KEMALIST FEMINIST ACTIVISM IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY  
(1946–2011)**

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## Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between women's activism and the politics of gender by investigating Kemalist feminism in Turkey as a case study. The dissertation offers a political history of Kemalist feminism that enables an insight into the intertwined relationship between women's activism and the politics of gender. It focuses on the class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious dynamics of and their implications for Kemalist feminist politics. In so doing, it situates Kemalist feminist activism within the politics of gender in Turkey; that is, it analyzes the relationship between Kemalist feminist activism and other actors in gender politics, such as the state, transnational governance, political parties, civil society organizations, and feminist, Islamist, and Kurdish women's activisms.

The analysis of Kemalist feminist activism provided in this dissertation draws on a methodological-conceptual framework that can be summarized as follows. Activism provides the ground for women to become actors of the politics of gender. At the same time, the relations of power and systems of inequality that dominate the field of formal politics also infiltrate the field of civil society and women's activism thereof. Thus, women's activism is always-already marked by class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious struggles; these struggles thereby become the constitutive dynamics of women's gender politics. Therefore, to account for the ways in which women's activism influences, reproduces, and/or challenges the politics of gender in a specific historical context, it is necessary to analyze the strategies women employ *both* to seek women's gender interests *and* to maintain a political framework for defining these interests that is simultaneously class-based, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious.

A further objective of this dissertation is to explore the historical transformation of Kemalist women's politics into Kemalist feminism. By bringing to light the forms of activism

adopted by Kemalist women, and the demands they raised—individually and collectively—to further women's rights in Turkey, the study suggests a rewriting of the history of women's activism with a focus on continuities, alongside ruptures, between different, namely the single-party (1923–1946), multi-party (1946–1980), and post-1980, periods.

The dissertation is based on research on the print and online material provided by Kemalist women's and feminist activism and on interviews conducted with Kemalist feminists. The print and online material includes documents, interviews, reports, leaflets, booklets, articles, journals, books, edited volumes, biographical, and autobiographical works that were written or prepared by Kemalist women including Kemalist feminists, or written or prepared by other feminists (activists and scholars, in Turkey and abroad) about Kemalist women and feminists. In addition, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 26 Kemalist feminists during 2011 in the cities of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir.

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## List of Abbreviations

ADD	Atatürkist Thought Association ( <i>Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği</i> )
AKDER	Women's Rights Organizations against Discrimination ( <i>Ayrımcılığa Karşı Kadın Hakları Derneği</i> )
AKL-TK	European Women's Lobby-Turkish Coordination ( <i>Avrupa Kadın Lobisi-Türkiye Koordinasyonu</i> )
AKP	Justice and Development Party ( <i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i> )
ANAP	Motherland Party ( <i>Anavatan Partisi</i> )
AP	Justice Party ( <i>Adalet Partisi</i> )
AUUDP	Anatolian National Awakening and Solidarity Platform ( <i>Anadolu Ulusal Uyanış ve Dayanışma Platformu</i> )
BKP	Capital City Women's Platform ( <i>Başkent Kadın Platformu</i> )
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEDAW STYK	CEDAW Civil Society Executive Committee ( <i>CEDAW Sivil Toplum Yürütme Kurulu</i> )
CHP	Republican People's Party ( <i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i> )
CHP-BYKP	Republican People's Party Platform for Science, Governance and Culture ( <i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi Bilim Yönetim ve Kültür Platformu</i> )
CHP-KK	Republican People's Party Women's Auxiliary ( <i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi Kadın Kolları</i> )
CKD	Republican Women's Association ( <i>Cumhuriyet Kadınları Derneği</i> )
ÇATOM	Multi-Purpose Community Centers ( <i>Çok Amaçlı Toplum Merkezleri</i> )
ÇEV	Modern Education Foundation ( <i>Çağdaş Eğitim Vakfı</i> )
ÇYDD	Association for the Support of Modern Life ( <i>Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği</i> )
DP	Democrat Party ( <i>Demokrat Parti</i> )
DSP	Democratic Left Party ( <i>Demokratik Sol Parti</i> )
DYP	True Path Party ( <i>Doğru Yol Partisi</i> )
EU	European Union
IAW	International Alliance of Women
IAWSEC	International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship
ICW	International Council of Women

IFUW	International Federation of University Women
IKD	Progressive Women's Association ( <i>Ilerici Kadınlar Derneği</i> )
IKKB	Istanbul Union of Women's Organizations ( <i>Istanbul Kadın Kuruluşları Birliği</i> )
IKKB	Izmir Union of Women's Organizations ( <i>Izmir Kadın Kuruluşları Birliği</i> )
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IP	Workers' Party ( <i>İşçi Partisi</i> )
ITC	Committee of Union and Progress ( <i>İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti</i> )
IWY	International Women's Year
Ka-Der	Association for the Support and Training of Women Candidates ( <i>Kadın Adayları Destekleme ve Eğitim Derneği</i> )
KAD	Women's Research Association ( <i>Kadın Araştırmaları Derneği</i> )
KAMER	Woman's Center Foundation ( <i>Kadın Merkezi Vakfı</i> )
KASAIID	Association for the Research and Investigation of Woman's Social Life ( <i>Kadının Sosyal Hayatını Araştırma ve İnceleme Derneği</i> )
KASIDE	Association of Women Politicians ( <i>Kadın Siyasetçiler Derneği</i> )
KHF	Women's People's Party ( <i>Kadınlar Halk Fırkası</i> )
KHKD	Association for the Preservation of Women's Rights ( <i>Kadın Haklarını Koruma Derneği</i> )
KIH-YÇ	Women for Women's Human Rights-New Ways ( <i>Kadının İnsan Hakları-Yeni Çözümler</i> )
KP	Women's Party ( <i>Kadın Partisi</i> )
KPG	Women's Party Initiative ( <i>Kadın Partisi Girişimi</i> )
KSGM	General Directorate on the Status of Women ( <i>Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü</i> )
KSSGM	General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women ( <i>Kadının Statüsü ve Sorunları Genel Merkezi</i> )
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party ( <i>Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê</i> )
RP	Welfare Party ( <i>Refah Partisi</i> )
SHÇEK	Social Service and Child Protection Agency ( <i>Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu</i> )
SHP	Social Democratic Populist Party ( <i>Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti</i> )
TAD	Turkish Mothers' Association ( <i>Türk Anneler Derneği</i> )
THKD	Turkish Jurist Women's Association ( <i>Türk Hukukçu Kadınlar Derneği</i> )

TKB	Turkish Women's Association ( <i>Türk Kadınlar Birliđi</i> )
TKDF	Federation of Turkish Women's Associations ( <i>Türkiye Kadın Dernekleri Federasyonu</i> )
TKKD	Association of Turkish Women's Council ( <i>Türk Kadınlar Konseyi Derneđi</i> )
TSK	Turkish Armed Forces ( <i>Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri</i> )
TÜBAKKOM	Turkish Bars Women's Commissions Network ( <i>Türkiye Barolar Birliđi Kadın Hukuku Komisyonu</i> )
TÜKD	Association of Turkish University Women ( <i>Türk Üniversiteli Kadınlar Derneđi</i> )
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WIDF	Women's International Democratic Federation
WB	World Bank
YÖK	Higher Education Council ( <i>Yüksek Öğrenim Kurumu</i> )

## 1. Introduction

This dissertation is an attempt to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between women's activism and the politics of gender by investigating Kemalist feminism as a case study. It analyzes the making and development of Kemalist feminist activism from a politico-historical perspective. It focuses on the class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious dynamics of and their implications for Kemalist feminist politics. In so doing, it situates Kemalist feminism within the framework of gender politics in Turkey.

It has been common for nationalist modernization projects to evolve alongside emerging women's activism that are supportive of those projects. Kemalism, the founding ideology of the Turkish Republic named after Mustafa Kemal, shares this common characteristic with other nationalist and/or secular modernization movements of the early-twentieth century. In the years following the foundation of the Republic in 1923, an increasing number of women who supported the new regime organized in the field of activism and participated in Kemalist nation-building thereof. Kemalist women's activism, since the early 1930s, remained an important force in Turkey's gender politics while Kemalist women modified their agendas and adopted new strategies and forms of activism according to the socio-political conjunctures in which they were embedded. In the post-1980 period, the political developments in general, such as globalization, Europeanization, and the salience of political mobilization based on religious and ethnic belongings; and the developments in gender politics in particular, such as the rise of feminist activism in Turkey and the adoption of the UN-led global gender equality agenda by the Turkish state, created a context in which some, mostly younger generation Kemalist women, identified simultaneously as feminists. In the last three decades, these women built Kemalist feminism through various forms of activism ranging from local to global scales and from informal to institutional structures

(Working definitions of Kemalism, Kemalist women's activism, and Kemalist feminism are provided in Section 1.2).

For many Kemalist feminists, although they each have different syntheses of Kemalism and feminism, Kemalism (or at least its very principles of laicism,<sup>1</sup> nationalism, and modernism/westernism) is the condition of possibility for furthering women's rights in Turkey. In this regard, Kemalist feminism is *both* an effort to improve the social, political and economic conditions of women in Turkey *and* a struggle to maintain Kemalism as a reference point in defining women's interests. With this aim, since the late-1980s, Kemalist feminists developed a political perspective in which they defined women's interests in feminist as well as laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist terms. Through their presence in the academia, they supported a Kemalist framing of women's rights by producing knowledge on women's problems from a modernist and developmentalist paradigm. In their activism, Kemalist feminists raised funds to support girls' education, provided courses on literacy, health, and income-generating skills for women, and aimed to enable the inclusion of lower-class, covered, and Kurdish women in a Kemalist public sphere. They organized public demonstrations and signed petitions against the rise of political Islam with the headscarf as its symbol, and supported the Turkish state in its assimilationist policies towards the Kurdish population. At the same time, they adopted the global gender equality regime in their agenda and, allying with egalitarian feminists, campaigned and lobbied for furthering gender equality in Turkey. They pursued a Kemalist feminist gender politics not only in Kemalist women's organizations but also in egalitarian feminist organizations and in Kemalist mixed-sex organizations, primarily in the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP).

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<sup>1</sup> In English language literature on Turkey, "secularism" is used as the equivalent of the Turkish word *laiklik*, which was adapted from the French word *laïcisme*. In this dissertation I use laicism instead of secularism because, as Davison (2003) argues, unlike secularism, laicism does not entail a non-religious state but a separation of religious and state affairs. Thus, laicism is more suitable to understand the Turkish case because religion was not removed from, but rather interpreted, overseen, and administered by the Turkish state (Ibid.,338).

The 2000s brought new conditions for Kemalist feminist activism thanks to the dual developments of Europeanization (the process of European Union accession) and the consecutive rules of Islamist Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) governments from 2002 onwards. In this period, Kemalist feminists relied more on the mechanisms of transnational governance against AKP's non-collaborative attitude towards Kemalist (and other secular) women's organizations; participated, together with feminist, Islamist, and Kurdish women's organizations, in issue-based platforms in order to influence the EU-related gender reforms; professionalized their grassroots activism through involving in the process of NGOization, and mobilized the Kemalist civil society in defense of a laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist definition of women's interests. Up until today, Kemalist women's activism has comprised a big and important part of women's activism and Kemalist feminists, as leaders of Kemalist women's activism, have been influential actors in Turkey's gender politics. Thus, it is crucial to understand Kemalist feminism in order to grasp the relationship between women's activism and the politics of gender in Turkey. Yet, discussions on Kemalist women's activism in general and Kemalist feminism in particular have been largely absent in gender and feminist scholarship on Turkey.

The objective of this dissertation is to offer a political history of Kemalist feminism that enables an insight into the intertwined relationship between women's activism and the politics of gender. This endeavor is possible only by situating Kemalist feminist activism within the greater politics of gender in Turkey, that is, by analyzing the relationship between Kemalist feminist activism and other actors in gender politics, such as the state, transnational governance, political parties, civil society organizations, and feminist, Islamist, and Kurdish women's activism. To analyze this relationship, I draw on, and outline in detail in the next chapter, a methodological-conceptual framework that can be summarized as follows. Activism provides the ground for women to become actors of gender politics. At the same

time, the relations of power and systems of inequality that dominate the field of formal politics also infiltrate the field of civil society and women's activism thereof. Thus, women's activism is always-already marked by class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious struggles; these struggles thereby become the constitutive dynamics of women's gender politics. Therefore, to account for the ways in which women's activism influences, reproduces, and/or challenges the politics of gender in a specific historical context, it is necessary to analyze the strategies women employ *both* to seek women's gender interests *and* to maintain a political framework for defining these interests that is simultaneously class-based, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious.

Seen from this perspective, a political history of Kemalist feminism not only fills a gap in women's and gender studies literature but also problematizes the dominant approach to women's activism in feminist and gender scholarship in Turkey which does not account for Kemalist women's and Kemalist feminist activism as constitutive parts of the history of women's activism as a whole. Thus, a further objective of this dissertation is to explore the historical transformation of Kemalist women's politics into Kemalist feminism. By bringing to light the forms of activism Kemalist women adopted and the demands they raised—individually and collectively—to further women's rights in Turkey, I propose a rewriting of the history of women's activism with a focus on continuities, alongside ruptures, between different, namely the single-party (1923–1946), multi-party (1946–1980), and post-1980, periods.

This introductory chapter is organized in two sections. In the first section, I discuss the reasons for which Kemalist women's activism and Kemalist feminism in feminist and gender scholarship in Turkey have been neglected. I thereby point out the problematic aspects of the dominant approach in this scholarship with regards to the study of women's activism, and then suggest the ways in which the dissertation tackles these aspects. In the second section, I offer

working definitions of Kemalism, Kemalist women's activism and Kemalist feminism that I use throughout this dissertation. A research description and a chapter outline are also provided in the second section.

## **1.1. Kemalist women's activism and Kemalist feminists in feminist scholarship:**

### **Why are they absent?**

Women's and gender studies literature on women's activism since the 1990s developed so as to include not only feminist (Bora and Günal 2002; Aldıkaçtı Marshall 2009; Kardam 2005; Sancar 2011; Çaha 2013) but also Islamist (İlyasoğlu 1994; Saktanber 2002; Pusch 2000; Y. Arat 2005; Aslan-Akman 2011; Z. Yılmaz 2015), Kurdish (Çağlayan 2007; Çağlayan 2013; Çağlayan et al. 2011; Bozgan 2011), and socialist (Akal 2003; Akkaya 2011) women's activism. Kemalist women occupied surprisingly little space in this literature. In fact, feminist and gender scholars do not seem to be interested in situating Kemalist feminism in contemporary Turkey: The literature on Kemalist women's activism is predominantly generalizing, homogenizing, disregarding the differences among Kemalist women and their organizations, and overlooking the significance of their activism in terms of shaping Turkey's gender politics. Generally, Kemalist feminists are either assimilated under egalitarian feminists or not recognized as feminists at all. For Yeşim Arat, for example, the effort to participate in state processes (i.e. policy making) supporting the state to reform its gender policies is what distinguishes "an older generation of women who identified themselves as Kemalist feminists or egalitarian feminists" from a younger generation of radical, anti-statist feminists (1994, 102). In his recent work *Women and Civil society in Turkey* (2013), Ömer Çaha covers feminist, Islamist, and Kurdish women's activism in separate chapters but does not refer to Kemalist women's activism. Later in the book, he classifies feminists into liberal, radical, and socialist and implicitly includes Kemalist feminists in the "liberal" group without

even mentioning them as "Kemalist."<sup>2</sup> Erdoğan (2006), on the other hand, does not differentiate between mixed-sex Kemalist organizations with no gender perspective, and woman-only Kemalist organizations with an explicit gender agenda in terms of reproducing the "neo-Kemalist pedagogy."<sup>3</sup> Another, opposite, tendency is to treat all Kemalist women homogeneously as Kemalist feminists. Nüket Kardam, for instance, refers to all Kemalist women who take part in women's rights activism as Kemalist feminists (2005, 46). Only one recent study points that taking Kemalist feminists as a homogeneous group is problematic due to the plurality of Kemalisms and the ambiguity of the relationship between Kemalism and feminism (Mutluer 2016). This study brings about the differences among Kemalist feminists on issues such as laicism, militarism, family, and sexuality.<sup>4</sup>

A similar kind of omission of Kemalist feminist women's and gender studies scholars exists in the feminist literature on women's and gender studies scholarship in Turkey. The tendency here is to recognize the foundational status of the works by Kemalist feminists such as Abadan-Unat (1981) and Kağıtçıbaşı (1982) in the emergence and development of the scholarly field while not including later works by Kemalist feminists (e.g. N. Arat 1992; Narlı 1991; Narlı 2007; Moroğlu 1999; Moroğlu 2004) in the scholarly accounts of the history of women's and gender studies (see Y. Arat 1993; Sancar 2011; Sancar and Akşit 2011; Durudoğan et al. 2010). Meanwhile, Kemalist feminists build their own scholarship in which they focus on matters that they think are most important, such as education, paid work, legal change, and violence, and omit others, such as sexual citizenship or the Kurdish question.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Çaha argues that *Istanbul Üniversitesi Kadın Sorunları Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi* (Istanbul University Women's Research and Education Center) was founded by feminists (2013, 91), whereas the majority of the founders were Kemalist feminists. Again, one organization Çaha refers to as feminist, the TÜBAKKOM (Turkish Bars Women's Commissions Network), was first organized by Kemalist feminists (2013, 100). It is very unlikely that Çaha doesn't know these, which tempts one to think that his omission is deliberate.

<sup>3</sup> Erdoğan's argument is based on a study on Atatürkist Thought Association (*Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği*) and Association for the Support of Modern Life (*Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği*). In another article (2000) on the same topic, Erdoğan mentions that the ÇYDD was founded by a groups of mostly academic women but does not mention that almost all of them were at the same time Kemalist feminists.

<sup>4</sup> Yet, Mutluer's research does not account for the differences between Kemalist feminists but only acknowledges that Kemalist feminists' views on the issues of laicism, militarism, family, and sexuality range from "conservative" to "reformist" (Mutluer 2016).

Authors who contribute to the scholarly volumes edited by Kemalist feminists are mostly Kemalist feminist academics and activists and only occasionally non-Kemalist feminist and gender scholars and activists (see Moroğlu 2004; Çitci 1998).

In a recent volume on feminist scholarship in Turkey edited by the professor of gender and politics Serpil Sancar we find an account of the reasons for the omission of Kemalist women's activism and Kemalist feminist scholarship. In her introductory chapter to the volume, Sancar indicates that until recently the general tendency in women's studies in Turkey has been to define "women's problems" and to generate solutions to those problems from within a modernization paradigm (2011, 12). In Sancar's view, the recent critique of Turkish modernization brought about a transformation of the field of women's studies, which she articulates as follows:

We can define [this transformation] by the desertion of the "authoritarian modernist" aspect of the "Kemalist discourse of women's rights." This "authoritarian modernist" paradigm resides on [the conviction that] those women who claim to defend "women's rights" [do this] not for their own selves but, [based on the belief] that women who are oppressed are uneducated and weak women, to raise "other" women's awareness, to educate them, and to demand rights in their name in order for them to be aware of their rights. The "women's problems" approach [that draws on] on the [idea of] "saving" weak women originated in the "modernist-enlightenmentalist" understanding which grasped feminism as a partnership [*ortaklık*] between aware and unaware, in other words emancipated and yet-to-be-emancipated women. We know, from the discussions we have witnessed recently, that this understanding was criticized for how easily it could be articulated to strategies of segregation-subordination of women based on race, class, and region, such as eastern-western, urban-rural, Turkish-Kurdish, [and] rich-poor. (Ibid.)<sup>5</sup>

Sancar's reflections on the previously dominant "authoritarian modernist" paradigm in women's studies is perhaps the most accurate explanation of why Kemalist women's activism and Kemalist feminism have been out of sight of feminist and gender scholarship on women's activism. Kemalist women in their activism as well as in their academic knowledge production adhered to this paradigm; a paradigm that was unsettled by a younger generation

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Turkish to English are my own.

of self-identified feminist scholars. In the view of these feminist scholars, Kemalist women belonged to the oppressor group whose feminism—at least potentially—reproduced the already existing hierarchies between women. This view resulted in a tendency to hold Kemalist women responsible for the exclusion and marginalization of oppressed groups within the women's movement such as (but not only) Islamist and Kurdish women (see, for example, Turam 2008; Arat-Koç 2007; Çaha 2013, 114).

Another, and perhaps more significant, reason for the neglect of Kemalist women's activism and Kemalist feminism relates to the analytical perspective that feminist scholars adopted throughout the 1980s and 1990s when researching the relations of gender and the history of women's activism in Turkey. Feminist scholarship emerged in Turkish academia in the 1980s, around the same time as feminist activism did in the political field in Turkey. Unlike the earlier studies that employed the analytical category of gender within the framework of modernization and social transformation, new works in social sciences focused on women, addressed the problems they faced because they were women, and analyzed the ways in which women empowered themselves (Y. Arat 1993, 126–128). Feminist scholars, like their activist counterparts, discussed the nature and consequences of the gender reforms of the early-republican period. There were two dominant views on the Kemalist reforms. The first view held that the reforms eliminated the patriarchal system as it was defined and regulated by Islam and therefore they were not to be underestimated. Holders of the second view claimed that the Kemalist reforms did not target women's emancipation as an end in itself, they did not substantially challenge patriarchy, and they were not able to raise the status of women in a meaningful way (Tekeli 1982; 1990; Özbay 1990; Y. Arat 1994).

This second group of feminists discussed Kemalism's gender project in an extensive body of scholarship. From the 1980s onwards the official discourse on women, according to which women had received their rights from Atatürk "on a golden plate" and the Republic had

ensured the equality of women and men, was seriously challenged. Feminist historians brought to light Ottoman and early-republican feminisms and began rewriting the history of women in terms of the role they played in Ottoman-Turkish modernization (S. Çakır 2007, 62), especially in the processes of gendered nation-building. This allowed new insights into the origins of feminism in Turkey, the "woman question" of the late-Ottoman period, and the late-Ottoman and the early-republican women's activisms (Zihnioğlu 2003; S. Çakır 1994; Davaz 2014; Demirdirek 2011). Other studies problematized the "modern Turkish woman" as a socio-political construct and offered alternative, gendered readings of the Kemalist nationalist modernization project (Durakbaşa 2000; Yeğenoğlu 1998; Altınay 2004; Sancar 2012; Berktaş 2003). Women's status in Turkish society was previously scrutinized by Kemalist scholars from modernization and development perspectives. Yet, it was feminist scholars who revealed that unequal relations of power persisted systematically between women and men. They did so by focusing on a wide range of topics, including the transformation of gender relations in urban and rural areas (Sirman 1990; Kandiyoti 1987; Delaney 1991), women's labor and employment (Berik 1989; Koray 1993), gender policies of the state, and women's participation in politics (Y. Arat 1989; Tekeli 1982; Tekeli 1990).

This large body of feminist literature on Kemalist nationalism and Turkish modernization is by no means homogeneous; neither in disciplinary approach and/or methodology nor in its evaluation of how Kemalist nationalism and Turkish modernization transformed gender relations. Still, it is possible to find some aspects and repercussions of Kemalist gender reforms about whose interpretation feminist scholars seem to have reached a consensus. Accordingly, Kemalism's gender project, just like Kemalism itself, was based on three main principles: Laicism, nationalism, and modernism (or westernism, as was often used synonymously). Among these principles laicism became the backbone of the "Kemalist discourse of women's rights" (Saktanber 2003; Durakbaşa 2000). For Kemalists laicism was

what rescued women from oppression disguised as Islam—the major source of their backwardness and their confinement to the domestic sphere. A number of reforms made during 1924–1934, especially those related to education, family and attire, indeed enabled women's access to the public sphere and the improvement of their citizenship status (Y. Arat 1994). At the same time, women's public inclusion went hand in hand with the notion of "modern Turkish family" and the identification of womanhood primarily with mothering and household duties (Şerifsoy 2004; Üstel 2004). In this modern notion of family, although women's legal status within the family institution improved, traditional gender norms such as gendered division of labor or women's duty to obey and respect their husbands were maintained. In Berktaş's account, Kemalist gender reforms had replaced the religious structuring of the domestic sphere with secular moral norms, but the degree of self-sacrifice expected from women, in terms of devoting themselves to the other members of the family, did not decrease; in fact, Kemalist men differed from "traditional men" in that they expected from women a similar type of self-sacrifice and responsibility in the public sphere, too (Berktaş 2003, 108). Neither the "woman revolution" meant to give women equal political rights or involve them in state-building processes (Sancar 2012). Still, thanks to these reforms, a small but notable group of women who belonged to and/or were raised by the Kemalist elite benefited from the new regime as educated, professional women. The first generation of Kemalist woman activists were those who belonged to this group. Yet, in Zihniöğlü's words, the identity of the "new Turkish woman ... could not go beyond being a child-woman who is committed to the Kemalist ideology in an unconditional way" (2003, 23).

These early scholarly accounts of Kemalism's gender project share two common features. First, in their framework of analysis, they prioritize gender relations over relations of, say, class and ethnicity in the formation of Kemalist womanhood. Second, they particularly focus on the national/ethnic and cultural/religious dynamics of Turkish

modernization at the expense of, say, the influence of class and transnational processes.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, read against the necessity of analyzing women's activism by looking at its gender, class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious dimensions which I suggested above and conceptualize in the next chapter, these early scholarly accounts are only partially helpful in understanding the dynamics of Kemalist women's activism of the early-republican and later, multi-party and post-1980, periods. On the other hand, evaluations of Turkish modernization and national identity outside the field of women's and gender studies (Ahmad 2002; Bozdoğan and Kasaba 1997; Köker 2003; Insel 2006; Zürcher 2004; Yıldız 2007), class analyses of Kemalism (Yalman, 2002; Boratav, 2005; Keyder, 2007), Kemalist laicism (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Özyürek 2006) and works focusing on the ethno-nationalist dimension of Kemalism (Yeğen 2009; Yıldız 2007) overlook, if not deliberately ignore, the gender dimension of the Kemalist project.

Feminist scholars' evaluation of Kemalism's gender project, including their particular focus on its national/ethnic and cultural/religious aspects, resonated with the broader trend of critiquing Kemalism in the post-1980 period. Up until the mid-2000s, the Turkish army had claimed to represent the official, "correct" version of Kemalism—a laicist, nationalist, westernist bourgeois modernization project which has its roots in the Young Turk era (see the working definition below). Military interventions in Turkish politics (coups and memorandums) in 1960, 1971, 1980, 1997, and 2007 had all made explicit reference to reinstating the principles of Kemalism. The army officials who performed the *coup d'état* of 1980 and the following three-year military rule had claimed to have recast Kemalism for the survival of the Turkish state, but the result in practice was the destruction of left politics, political polarization based on national/ethnic and cultural/religious belongings, and

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<sup>6</sup> In Bilge Firat's (2002) account, feminist scholarship on gendered nationalism in Turkey suffers from methodological nationalism and methodological statism. In her examination of the scholarship on gendered nationalism, Firat argues that the nation-state is the analytical framework of these studies while both "women" and "nation" are discussed from the perspective of the state.

Kemalism's loss of legitimacy as the overarching national identity. In the aftermath of the military regime, Kemalism was discussed in Turkish academia mainly from post-Marxist and post-structuralist/deconstructivist perspectives. These perspectives focused on Kemalism more as a "discursive formation" than as a "practice." For example, according to Çelik (2006), Kemalism emerged as a "mythical space" during 1930–1945, transformed into an "imaginary" after 1945, and eventually became the "signifier of its own absence" due to its ambivalent and ambiguous position as a discourse. In the meantime, the politicization of religious (Islamist) and ethnic (Kurdish) identities drew the attention to the national/ethnic and cultural/religious aspects of the Kemalist project. Thus, Kemalism was primarily analyzed as an "official ideology" and "national identity" with laicism and Turkishness being its dominant components. The class aspect of the Kemalist project, for example, was included in the analysis only in relation to the from-aboveness (*tepeden inme*) of Turkish modernization. According to the post-structuralist/deconstructionist approaches, the rise of (religious and ethnic) identity politics in Turkey indicated the "organic crisis of Kemalism" (Erdoğan 2006) or "the crisis of Kemalist hegemony" (Keyman 1999) and the rise of Islamism and Kurdish nationalism was rooted in and immanent to Kemalism itself (Keyman 1999; Irem 1997). In more liberal accounts, the challenge posed by identity politics was formulated as "alternative modernities," based on the claim that Islamism was, drawing on the Iranian revolution, a challenge and an authentic alternative to Western modernity (Göle 1996; I. Kaya 2004; Karasipahi 2008; Yavuz 2009; Kuru 2009; Hale and Özbudun 2009).<sup>7</sup>

These scholarly accounts, while they immensely contributed to the understanding of Kemalism as a nationalist and modernist political ideology, said very little about how the everyday experiences of women and men were shaped by the Kemalist project.<sup>8</sup> They also lacked a comparative perspective on the other nationalist and/or secular modernization

<sup>7</sup> For a short review of some these books see A. Kaya (2011).

<sup>8</sup> More recent works on social history, on the other hand, show how far people's practices under Kemalism could be from what the official discourse hoped to establish. See, for example, Brockett (2011).

projects of the twentieth century, and assessed Kemalism in isolation from the greater developments in the world such as imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, or globalization. One result of such narrow analytical scope was identifying the Kemalist state's wrongdoings as the primary obstacle to Turkey's democratization and thus positioning Kemalism and democracy in opposition to each other. As Tezcan indicates, the claim that Islamism and the Kurdish question emerged as reactions to the Kemalist project, and the following desire to "get rid of Kemalism as soon as possible" became an obstacle to conceive of Kemalism in its entirety (1997, 194). Today, the assumption that the achievement of genuine democracy is conditioned by getting rid of Kemalism and criticizing Kemalism thereof became the dominant paradigm in Turkish social science (Alaranta 2014, 2). However, as Alaranta argues, this "black-and-white condemnation" of Kemalism does not account for why and how it is still supported by so many people today (Ibid., 2–3).

In the post-1980 period, parallel to the global focus on civil society as a democratic force for countering state power, the critique of Kemalism was accompanied by the scholarly discovery of "civil society." In politics and in social science the notion of civil society, perceived mainly to comprise of NGOs, gradually replaced that of the public sphere (Özbek 2004, 33). The dominant understanding of the state-civil society relations in Turkey drew on a Western liberal perspective where civil society was conceptualized as a sphere autonomous from the state. In line with it Turkish democracy was characterized by the absence of the institutional developments in the West that allowed the formation of a coherent civil society (Güngen and Erten 2005). Important examples of this perspective are Şerif Mardin's (1973) analysis of "center-periphery conflict" and Metin Heper's (1985) discussion of the "strong state tradition."<sup>9</sup> The strong state tradition, according to Kahraman, resulted in a "fundamental

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<sup>9</sup> Heper (1988), who identified Turkey as a patrimonial society that lacked the democratic institutions developing under Western feudalism, had also celebrated the 1980 military intervention and the three-year military regime that followed for bringing democracy and better state elite. Mardin's foundational text argued that the center-periphery conflict was "the most important social cleavage underlying Turkish politics" (1973, 170).

split" between the state and society in the form of centralist and elitist preferences of the state and decentralist and liberal preferences of the society and led to the prioritization of the state over society (2005, 72). From this point of view, politics and social relations were understood as a struggle between binaries such as state vs. society, center vs. periphery, or bureaucracy vs. bourgeoisie, where the former represented repression and authoritarianism and the latter, the genuinely democratic forces (Akça et al. 2014, 2). Therefore, a civil society autonomous from both the state and the economy was seen as the remedy to the political repression of the military regime (1980–1983) (Duruşan 2008). In this perspective, as Akça et al. argue, "socio-political power relations are reduced to conflicts among the elites, and the social, especially the class-based, nature of politics is largely ignored. ... and the class-based nature of the state and the political sphere is covered up to an extent that the connections between these are ignored" (Akça et al. 2014, 3).<sup>10</sup> The dominant post-1980 understanding of state-civil society relations as such have strengthened the equation of Kemalism with anti-democratic rule.

Feminist scholarship grew in a scholarly atmosphere in which the critique of Kemalism focused on discourses rather than practices and omitted its class and transnational dynamics and the main antagonism in Turkish society was identified as one between the Kemalist state and the civil society. Just as Kemalism was perceived in the post-Marxist and post-structuralist/deconstructivist approaches as the main obstacle for Turkey's democratization, feminist scholars saw the Kemalist modernization project as the primary

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Accordingly, Ottoman modernization was based on the westernization of the bureaucrats and this continued in the republican period as an opposition between the Kemalist elite at the center and local notables and peasantry in the periphery. From the start of the multi-party politics in 1946, center-right parties were supported by the notable-peasant alliance because decentralization and economic liberalism defended by the center-right was to their benefit; in the 1950s the Kemalist CHP stood for the "bureaucratic center" whereas the DP for the "democratic periphery" (Ibid.). Hanioglu (2008), however, finds the modernizers vs. reactionaries opposition fictional and misleading, and draws attention to the need for effective taxation for the strong, modernized Ottoman army behind centralization and bureaucratization efforts. He argues that the periphery, as was the case with Cairo or Baghdad, was also interested in westernization and sometimes was more modern in governance than was the center (Hanioglu 2008, 205).

<sup>10</sup> For example, Fuat Keyman, a leading liberal scholar of political science argued in 1994 that democratization required the problematization of (1.) the understanding of politics that was limited by the state and reduced to the notion of "public benefit," (2.) the active, hegemonic, and agential position of the state, and (3.) the perception of citizenship based on responsibilities towards the state (1999, 194). In this formulation, curbing down the state power seems to suffice for furthering democracy.

source of gender inequality in the republican period. The prioritization of gender relations over other relations of power in the analysis of the formation of Kemalist womanhood perpetuated this understanding. Moreover, the rise of feminist activism in the 1980s was celebrated for its potential to mitigate state power.<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, Kemalist women with a pro-state outlook in their activism could easily be considered as non-feminist and anti-democratic. The Western liberal conceptualization of civil society as autonomous from the state further inclined feminists to conclude that Kemalist women's organizations worked to reproduce the Kemalist state ideology and not to liberate women from gender-based oppression.

Şirin Tekeli was the first feminist scholar who, in her 1977 associate professorship thesis (published as a book in 1982), analyzed Kemalism's gender regime from a critical perspective. According to Tekeli, Kemalist men had adopted a version of "state feminism" with which they enacted the gender reforms of the early-republican period in a from-above manner, without the collaboration with feminist women who were already organized around demands for gender equality. Given the exclusion of feminists from decision-making processes, it was clear that the notion of women's emancipation was instrumentalized by the Kemalist regime as a means to achieve other goals rather than being an end in itself (quoted in Zihnioğlu 2003, 262–263). After the dissolution of the feminist Turkish Women's Union (*Türk Kadınlar Birliği*, TKB) in 1935, Kemalism became the only legitimate ground available for women's activism (Tekeli 1992). Tekeli's account of state feminism, while it presumably holds true for the single-party period, was uncritically reproduced by other feminist scholars in the following years (see, for example, Kılıç 1998; Oktik and Kökalan 2002; Sayan Cengiz 2010). These scholars took the tension between Kemalism and women's independent organizing in the early-republican period as an indicator of the incompatibility between

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<sup>11</sup> For an account of how feminist activism emerged out of the Turkish left and against the state, see Sirman (1989).

Kemalism and feminism in later periods. The result was an exclusive focus on two periods in feminist scholarship: The late-Ottoman and early-republican period (1908–1935), when women's political mobilization took place mainly through their involvement in nation-building processes, and the post-1980 period, when women's political mobilization for their rights was possible only thanks to the emergence of the feminist activism (see, for example, Tekeli, 1998; Sirman, 1989). Notwithstanding the boom of women's organizations in the multi-party era, feminist researchers showed little interest in this stage of women's activism. The argument for the omission of this period was that there was no significant women's movement in Turkey until the late 1970s and that the word "feminism" was long forgotten after the dissolution of the TKB in 1935. Tekeli argued that the years before 1980 were "barren years" where the elite women of the Republic remained under the delusion that gender equality had been achieved in Turkey thanks to Atatürk (1998, 337). Clearly, the reasons behind the lack of interest in women's activism during the period from the dissolution of the TKB in 1935 until the (re-)emergence of feminist activism in the 1980s was based on the initial thesis that Kemalism and feminism were antithetical to each other which, in the subsequent years, translated into a "feminism–or–nothing" approach.<sup>12</sup> It automatically followed that those women who did not claim to be feminists were considered as not interested in feminism or they were in fact anti-feminists.

In the introduction to her edited volume *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader* (1991), Şirin Tekeli argued that the price of realizing early-republican feminists' demands for gender equality was women's loyalty and devotion to the new laic state. This, in her view, held Kemalist women back from developing a feminist perspective on women's rights:

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<sup>12</sup> This approach applied to Kemalist, nationalist, Islamist, and socialist movements equally, without differentiating between different gender regimes sought by these projects. For example, Özbay argued that all male-dominant political projects were equally anti-feminist: Kemalists, just like Islamists and Marxists, did not acknowledge women's oppression across different class and educational backgrounds, and they thought of feminists as "spoiled and degenerate Western women" who were responsible for spreading the idea of hatred of men (1990, 7).

Thus our mother's generation - both because they got some important rights and were given new opportunities, and because they were forced to do so by repression - identified with Kemalism rather than feminism. In the period between the 1950s and the mid 1970s most women's associations were founded with the aim of protecting the status quo - i.e. women's acquired rights and the laic state which in their view was the only guarantee against going back to old Islamic tradition. Hence they celebrated the important days of the Republic each year, and professed their loyalty and admiration for Atatürk. Consequently the patriarchal nature of the Civil Code, which recognized the husband as head of the family, was never an issue for them, and they tended to ignore the reality of patriarchal relations affecting the daily lives of most women. According to Kemalist women, peasant women were oppressed in Turkey only because they did not have an education and were not aware of their legal rights. They had the illusion that education was key to everything, and that they were 'emancipated' and beyond patriarchal domination and control. (1991, 12)

Tekeli, in 1990, provided two reasons for the so-called gender-blindness of Kemalist women: Their class position and their relationship with the state. According to her, the bourgeoisie in Turkey had a stronger class than gender prejudice; the fact that most of the elite (i.e. Kemalist) women held university degrees, had good jobs, and were generally treated well (sic.), prevented them from realizing that they constituted a privileged group and that women were one of the most oppressed segments of society (152).<sup>13</sup> Therefore these elite women considered feminism irrelevant. Moreover, because Kemalist regime instituted the gender reforms from above and did not encourage people's participation in decision-making processes, women came to expect everything from the state and thus did not engage in activities that would lead to the improvement their condition (Ibid.).

Other feminist scholars shared Tekeli's assessment of the relationship between Kemalist women and the Turkish state. For example, according to the feminist historian Serpil Çakır, "[t]hese women felt themselves empowered by the Republican state and therefore thought it [was] unfair to criticize that early period of modernization, as do many contemporary Kemalist women today" (2007, 63). Other accounts of women's activism in the

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<sup>13</sup> Here Tekeli drew on Ayşe Öncü, who explained the high percentage of women in the fields of law and medicine as follows: "[U]nder conditions of rapid [socio-economic] expansion, the elite recruitment patterns to most-prestigious and highly remunerated professions are maintained by the admission of women from the upper reaches of the social hierarchy. Women from elite backgrounds are much more acceptable and less threatening than upwardly mobile men from humbler backgrounds who are likely to be more competitive and achievement oriented" (Öncü 1981, 189).

multi-party period (until the 1980s) are also notably partial, if not opinionated, and scholars seem to agree on the lack of women's political engagement and the absence of feminist ideas in this period. For example, Sancar, in her recent study on the reformulation of gender relations in Turkey from 1945 to 1965, indicates that until the 1980s women's organizations focused only on philanthropy and social aid, where women who had dedicated themselves to the struggle for women's rights disappeared from politics and the "woman revolution" got subsumed under the conservative ideology of "modern family" (2012, 184). Zülal Kılıç (1998), who in the 1970s had organized in the socialist Progressive Women's Association (*Ilerici Kadınlar Derneği*, IKD), suggests that it's more appropriate to refer to these organizations as "organizations for women" instead of "women's organizations" for they aimed to compensate for what women lacked through philanthropic activism instead of promoting women's rights. According to Kılıç, women in these organizations held a well-educated, upper class position and a high social status, they believed that women's needs were fulfilled in Turkey, they saw themselves emancipated, and they wanted to elevate the rest of the women to their level (Z. Kılıç 1998, 350).

These evaluations held Kemalism responsible for women's shift away from feminism and the struggle for rights<sup>14</sup> and dismissed Kemalist women's activism for not challenging women's oppression and transforming the patriarchal structures in Turkish society. Taking a closer look at Kemalist women's activism of the multi-party period, however, shows that at least some of the leading women, instead of viewing feminist ideas as irrelevant, were looking for ways to seek women's gender interests while remaining loyal to the Kemalist political framework. These women had recognized the persistence of patriarchal relations in Turkish

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<sup>14</sup> Kılıç in her 1998 article specifically refers to İffet Halim Oruz, the founder and chief editor of the journal *Kadın Gazetesi*, who said, (as quoted in Kılıç 1998), "The republican revolution has given our women their place among the womanhood of the advanced world. ... Because of this, *Kadın Gazetesi* ... [did] not feel the need to reflect on the cause of equality of women and men." Kılıç's reference to Oruz is clearly selective since we know, for example from Yaraman's research (1999), that Oruz was one of the leading proponents of women's rights, and through *Kadın Gazetesi*, she made numerous calls for political parties, particularly the CHP, to take steps to improve women's participation in society and in politics.

society and, although they did not use a Western feminist vocabulary, they were politically mobilized against gender inequality especially from late 1960s on. As foundational academic texts in the field of women's studies (Abadan-Unat 1981; Kağıtçıbaşı 1982) show, Kemalist women's organizations were highly concerned with women's status in Turkey, and they were engaged in a number of activities from organizing conferences and street demonstrations to publishing journals and documents in which they raised demands for gender equality. In fact, Kemalist women's political activism in both woman-only and mixed-sex organizations during 1950–1980 had been on the increase, reaching its peak in mid-to-late 1970s where most of the demands that were raised converged with those raised by feminist activists a decade later. These demands, contrary to the argument that there is a clear rupture and contrast between pre- and post-1980 periods in women's activism, show that the building blocks of the post-1980 Kemalist feminism have been evolving rather steadily throughout the multi-party period.

An examination of Kemalist women pre-1980 activism, which I offer in this dissertation, provides a basis from which to problematize the early feminist scholarly accounts of the history of women's activism in general and of Kemalist women's activism in particular. It is true that Kemalist women claimed to be non-political in their activism; they praised Atatürk and Kemalist modernization for their acquired rights; they did not openly challenge the Turkish state; they were also predominantly from upper class backgrounds and/or had high levels of cultural capital. Moreover, Kemalist women's activism contributed to the reproduction of class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious inequalities between women and men and Kemalist women did not actively struggle for eliminating these inequalities. The problem, however, with many of the feminist scholarly accounts of Kemalist women's activism before 1980 is their conceptual positioning of Kemalism and feminism as antithetical to each other. This resulted in a narrow analytical window through which to look at both Kemalism and feminism. Instead, I argue that for Kemalist women there was a tense but

mutual relationship between Kemalism and the ideas around women's emancipation. Thus, positioning Kemalism and feminism as incompatible with each other makes it difficult to account for Kemalist women's activism in the pre-1980 period as well as to understand the emergence and development of Kemalist feminism in the post-1980 period. Furthermore, without taking into account the so-called non-feminist period of women's activism (1935–1980), we isolate the single-party and post-1980 periods of women's activism from each other, and the similarities between different periods of republican (and also pre-republican) history in terms of the relationship between women's activism and the politics of gender remain overlooked.

The methodological-conceptual framework I develop in the next chapter and employ throughout the dissertation addresses a number of important dimensions of women's activism which were not acknowledged in the early feminist scholarship and resulted in the long-term omission of Kemalist women's activism and Kemalist feminism from the history of women's activism. The first of these dimensions is, as I discussed above, the specific class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious dynamics of women's activism that co-constitute women's differential gender agendas. Drawing on the feminist literature on intersectionality, I adopt an intersectional approach to women's activism in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of Kemalist feminist politics that integrates its gender, class, national/ethnic and cultural/religious aspects.

The second dimension pertains to women's autonomous organizing which was perceived, in dominant Western perspectives on women's activism as well as in early feminist scholarship in Turkey, as a prerequisite for pursuing feminist politics, leaving women's gender activism in mixed-sex organizations (including political parties) outside the picture. Just as there is scarce literature on Kemalist women's activism and Kemalist feminism, little attention has been paid to women's activism in and gender politics of the CHP. Feminists have

criticized the lack of a concrete gender agenda in the CHP and women's limited representation in the party administration but have not paid equal attention to women's struggle for gender equality and for the adoption of a gender agenda in the party (see, for example, Üstün 2013).<sup>15</sup> Drawing on de-centered feminist perspectives on women's activism in non-dominant world regions, I offer a history of Kemalist women's activism that covers their organizing in mixed-sex organizations alongside their politics in woman-only organizations and looks at the interaction between these two sites of women's activism.

The third dimension is the development of women's activism in relation to the global processes regarding gender equality agendas. The sociologist Deniz Kandiyoti rightly points out that gender and women's studies in Turkey are restricted by their focus on the binaries of secularism vs. Islam, democratization vs. authoritarianism, modernity vs. alternative modernity and therefore have been "relatively inward-looking despite ... the fact that they have drawn upon the canons of Western academia" (2010, 173).<sup>16</sup> Integrating the transnational dimension of women's activism in its history, I utilize the feminist gender and politics literature and look into the ways in which Kemalist women's activism and Kemalist feminism related to and drew on the global "gender equality regime" (Kardam 2005) in the making of their gender politics.

The dissertation shows that integrating these three dimensions in the analysis of women's activism makes the incorporation of Kemalist women's activism and Kemalist feminism in the history of women's activism possible and enables a more comprehensive understanding of women's activism in Turkey in the early-republican, multi-party, and post-1980 periods.

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<sup>15</sup> While there is no published research on gender relations in the CHP, according to the database of the Council of Higher Education of Turkey, there is only one MA thesis on the relationship between the CHP and women by Özge Yücel (2003).

<sup>16</sup> For the academic context in which women's studies emerged and developed in the Middle East region, see Kandiyoti (1996).

## 1.2. Working definitions, research description, chapter outline

### 1.2.1. *Kemalism, Kemalist women's activism, and Kemalist feminism*

In this sub-section I provide the working definitions of Kemalism, Kemalist women's activism, and Kemalist feminism which I use throughout the dissertation.

**Kemalism** was accepted as Turkey's official state ideology during the fourth congress of the Republican People's Party (CHP) in 1935. The single-party regime defined the six basic principles of Kemalism, which were symbolized in the party's emblem in six arrows, as follows: Republicanism, Nationalism, Populism, Etatism, Laicism, and Revolutionism.<sup>17</sup> Kemalism, in Zürcher's words, "never became a coherent, all-embracing ideology, but can best be described as a set of attitudes and opinions that were never defined in any detail. ... As a result, Kemalism remained a flexible concept and people with widely differing worldviews have been able to call themselves Kemalist" (2004, 181). Since the single-party period, Kemalism has been redefined a countless number of times, by Kemalists themselves as well as by its opponents. According to Çelik, it is no more possible to define Kemalism, as it turned into an "empty signifier" given the structural ruptures and articulations in its definition throughout the republican history; therefore we can only speak of *Kemalisms*(Çelik 1998, 29). My aim here is not to give yet another definition of Kemalism; I do not think it is possible to define Kemalism in a comprehensive way, not least because Mustafa Kemal himself was against the idea of Kemalism becoming an ideology with a clear definition (Belge 2006, 38). Yet, I do believe that it is possible to identify some common tenets of *Kemalisms* and not treat Kemalism as an empty signifier, for it corresponds to a solid movement (although not to a coherent ideology or a monolithic identity) today.

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<sup>17</sup> Initially, in 1927, the CHP adopted the principles of republicanism, populism, nationalism and laicism in its political program. Etatism and revolutionism were added to these at the third congress of the party in 1931, while the notion of "six arrows" got introduced and visualized in the party's emblem. The six arrows, now corresponding to the founding principles of the Turkish Republic, became part of the constitution by a constitutional amendment in 1937.

We might think of Kemalism as a laicist, nationalist, westernist modernization project that dates back to the rule of the Young Turks (1908–1918) and solidified into the Republic of Turkey in 1923. Defined as such, Kemalism was already interpreted differently by the leaders of the new regime before Atatürk's death; a more leftist interpretation was held by the *Kadro* (Cadre) movement (1932–1935), a more liberal one by those who gathered around the short-lived Liberal Republican Party (*Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*, 1930), and a more right-wing one organized around the *Ülkü* (Ideal) journal in the 1930s (see Hanioglu 2011, 188–192). From Atatürk's death in 1938 to the end of the single-party period in 1946, those who opposed the authoritarian regime led by the President of the Republic Ismet İnönü, instead of openly challenging İnönü's rule, introduced the notion of "Atatürkism" (Köker 2006, 111). This opposition thereby claimed ties with Mustafa Kemal while detaching itself from the CHP, and later came to power as the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, DP) upon winning the general elections in 1950. The DP in 1951 issued a law criminalizing the acts that offended Atatürk's memory,<sup>18</sup> and thereby claimed the legacy of Atatürk against the CHP—the party founded by Atatürk himself. Since the 1950s, DP's Atatürkism and CHP's Kemalism evolved into what we might call right-Kemalism (see T. Bora and Taşkın 2006) and left-Kemalism (see Alpkaya 2006), and were transformed and reformulated in diverse ways parallel to the local and global political changes of the twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. Today many people use Atatürkism and Kemalism interchangeably, but the distinction remains in the eyes of left-Kemalists; whereas the military regime of 1980–1983 institutionalized Atatürkism in the 1982 Constitution, for left-Kemalists the 1980 coup, if not the DP's rise to power in 1950, marks the very end of Kemalism.

In spite of Atatürkism's institutionalization, Kemalism's status as national identity was challenged by the rise of political projects based on religion (Islamism), ethnicity (Kurdish

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<sup>18</sup> See Atatürk Aleyhine İşlenen Suçlar Hakkında Kanun (The Law Concerning Crimes Committed against Atatürk).

nationalism), and gender (feminism).<sup>19</sup> In the post-1980 period, the left-right differentiation within Kemalism has lost its salience. Murat Belge (2006) groups Kemalists in the post-1980 period into those who interpreted Kemalism as "isolationism" and those who interpreted it as "westernization." The second group, even though they were the majority, failed to build a political project that would go beyond the idea of "pursuing a modern life-style." The first group, on the other hand, rejected globalization and took a more authoritarian-conservative stance towards the political developments of the late-twentieth century (Ibid., 40). This group is generally perceived to be the continuation of left-Kemalism, but it also belongs to a greater neo-nationalist coalition (*ulusalcılık*) (Ibid.). Indeed, right- and left-Kemalists of the pre-1980 period can be found among both westernists and anti-globalizationists, where westernism and anti-globalizationism are not absolute categories. More concretely, westernism and anti-globalizationism today correspond to two different readings of the 1990s' and 2000s' political conjuncture during which Europeanization and the consolidation of Islamism went hand in hand in Turkey. Kemalists who perceive political Islam as a project backed by the U.S. (i.e. the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative launched by the Bush administration in 2002) and supported by the EU (i.e. implementation of neoliberal policies required by the accession process) take a more neo-nationalist, anti-imperialist, anti-globalizationist stance. Others believe that it is still Western political values with which they can counter the Islamist hegemonic project, especially its cultural implications, and therefore they emphasize laicism, republicanism, and social democracy as tenets of Western modernity. Today it is also common in Turkish politics to perceive the CHP and Kemalism as synonymous entities, or to take the CHP as the main, or even the sole, representative of Kemalism. It is true that in the post-1980 period, like in the previous periods, CHP has been one of the prominent, if not the

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<sup>19</sup> Islamism and Kurdish nationalism were present in the pre-1980 period too, but were not as strong movements as they became after 1980. The nationalist movement, on the other hand, also existed through the pre- and post-1980 periods but never challenged Kemalism as national identity.

only, representative of Kemalism.<sup>20</sup> Yet, the presence of other Kemalist parties and civil society organizations as well as the existence of factions within the party, each holding different interpretations of Kemalism, makes it difficult to argue that CHP alone stands for Kemalism.<sup>21</sup>

Since the mid-2000s, the AKP and its organic intellectuals launched a campaign against Kemalism. Islamists, with the aim of presenting themselves as the new democratic force of Turkish society, labeled Kemalism as anti-democratic and associated the Kemalist notion of laicism with authoritarianism, militarism, and lack of accountability (Kandiyoti 2012, 513). This campaign was backed by court cases such as *Ergenekon* (2008) and *Balyoz* (2010) which served the elimination of the Kemalist factions in the Turkish army and associated Kemalism further with a "coupist mindset" (*darbeci zihniyet*). Today more and more people avoid openly identifying as "Kemalist," yet Kemalism, in its different (neo-nationalist, westernist, laicist, republican, social democratic, socialist) interpretations, continues to be one of the main projects of belonging in the Turkish political field.

The different interpretations of Kemalism, how they evolved and their political implications, are not the focus of this dissertation. But these different interpretations inform Kemalist feminists' political views and the forms their activism take, and I take them into account to the extent that they are meaningful in the analysis of Kemalist feminist activism. Otherwise I refer to Kemalism as a laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist project, and to Kemalists as those who have *political* belonging, loosely or tightly, to this project.

By **Kemalist women's activism**, I refer to Kemalist women who are or have been pursuing gender agendas in the broad field of politics including Kemalist or other political

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<sup>20</sup> When the CHP reopened in 1992 (after being closed down by the military regime in 1981), it used the same emblem with six arrows, which showed the new party's claim to be the continuity of the old CHP.

<sup>21</sup> Apart from the CHP, there are smaller Kemalist political parties, mainly on the Turkish left, such as the Workers Party (*İşçi Partisi*, IP) which combines Maoism with orthodox Kemalism. There are also Kemalist civil society organizations, such as the Atatürkist Thought Association (*Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği*, ADD) which formed in the 1990s based on an anti-imperialist/post-Cold War interpretation of orthodox Kemalism.

parties, mixed-sex or woman-only Kemalist civil society organizations, and feminist organizations. Kemalist woman activists who do not pursue gender politics in mixed-sex organizations, even when they belong to the same organizations as those who do, are not included in this group.

Kemalist women's activism emerged in the late-1920s and early-1930s, and just like Kemalism itself, took shape alongside the socio-political developments in Turkey and globally. In their gender activism, Kemalist women focused on a wide range of issues related to education, poverty, health, family and motherhood, and women's political participation. In the post-1980 period, Kemalist women's activism gave birth to Kemalist feminism, and since then Kemalist women's activism is led by Kemalist feminists. In the 1990s, women joined the ranks of Kemalist women's activism in massive numbers, and Kemalist women's activism became manifestly political. Against the politicization of women's headscarf by Islamists, "laicism" became the dominant theme in Kemalist women's politics as a principle that brings freedom primarily to women. Kemalist women's politics cannot be reduced to laicism, but laicism has often been the language in which gender issues were framed.

Here it is important not to essentialize the category "Kemalist woman" and resist its conflation with identity politics (see Yuval-Davis 2006). Kemalism has contested and changing boundaries, and so does Kemalist women's activism. The notion of "Turkish woman" promoted by Kemalism and supported by Kemalist women homogenizes women in Turkey as Turkish, laic, urban, professional, and middle-class.<sup>22</sup> Yet, Kemalist woman activists themselves are not a homogeneous block. They come from diverse class, ethnic, and cultural/religious backgrounds and their pursuit of gender politics differ according to their

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<sup>22</sup> I use the term middle-class not to denote a purely economic class position but to indicate, following Partha Chatterjee, a class of people who stand "in the middle," who are the principle agents of nationalism, and who mediate the relation between nationalism and its followers. As such, middle-class entails a form of cultural leadership of a hegemonic movement (Chatterjee 1993, 35–36). Accordingly, the middle-class position of Kemalist women refers to the laicist, nationalist, modernist/westernist project within which they pursue their gender activism and relate to the women of other class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious belongings.

positionality vis-à-vis their diverse backgrounds. Recognizing these differences, however, should not dismantle Kemalist women's activism as a meaningful object of analysis. Rather, these differences suggest that it might be the political values represented by Kemalism, namely laicism, nationalism, and modernism/westernism, more than women's class, ethnic, and cultural/religious backgrounds, that keep Kemalist women together. I substantiate this point throughout this dissertation.

As for Kemalist women's gender activism in mixed-sex organizations, in this dissertation I examine the case of CHP. Since the multi-party period not all Kemalist women have been organized in, or even supportive of, the CHP. Their membership in mixed organizations ranged from center-right parties, left Kemalist parties to Kemalist civil society organizations. Thus, women in the CHP only partially represent Kemalist women who are organized in mixed-sex organizations. Yet, when we speak of Kemalist women who pursue gender politics in mixed-sex organizations these are most often women who are organized in the CHP. CHP, having been the oldest mixed-sex organization where Kemalist women mobilized en masse, also provides the opportunity to historicize the gender struggle of Kemalist women in the Kemalist movement at large. Furthermore, CHP is the widest mixed-sex Kemalist organization; it has been the main party of opposition since 2002, and it has the highest degree of collaboration with Kemalist woman-only organizations. Therefore, if we are to discuss the relationship between Kemalism and feminism in concrete terms, it is Kemalist women in the CHP who provide us with a wide range of examples of this relationship.

In defining **Kemalist feminism**, it is helpful to first locate it on the map of feminisms in Turkey. As I discussed above, feminist scholars and activists were divided over their views on the Kemalist gender reforms of the early-republican period. More affirmative and more critical views on these reforms correspond to what we might call "egalitarian" (*eşitlikçi*) and

"anti-system" (*sistem karşıtı*)<sup>23</sup> feminisms respectively, in both activist and academic fields. Egalitarian feminism includes feminists who identify as liberal, egalitarian, laicist, secular, republican, and Kemalist. Anti-system feminism comprises feminists who identify as socialist, materialist, radical, independent, and lgbt/queer. Islamic feminists usually fall in the egalitarian group, and Kurdish feminists usually fall in the anti-system group, but there are exceptions. What differentiates the two groups is mainly their proximity to state structures and institutions of transnational governance (egalitarian feminism are closer to both and anti-system feminism farther and/or critical), but there are some egalitarian feminist organizations that do not lobby or adopt the global gender equality agenda, just like there are anti-system organizations that engage with the global gender equality regime and the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society and transnational governance. In formal politics, egalitarian feminists tend to support center-left and, although less, center-right political parties, whereas anti-system feminists often support socialist-left formations but, again, there are exceptions. "Egalitarian" and "anti-system" are not absolute categories but only useful categorizations to understand where different brands of feminism fall in the political spectrum. Feminists who belong to egalitarian and anti-system groups collaborate with each other (for example in street demonstrations and issue-based campaigns), and some feminists belong to both groups simultaneously.

Kemalist feminism, as a brand of egalitarian feminism, can be defined as a synthesis of egalitarian feminist politics of gender equality and the defining principles of Kemalism's gender project, namely laicism, nationalism, and modernism/westernism. It is, in other words, a politics of gender equality with laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist underpinnings. Kemalist feminism includes all women who identify simultaneously as Kemalist and feminist, or simply as Kemalist feminist, and who pursue or have pursued gender politics in Kemalist

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<sup>23</sup> "System" here refers primarily to patriarchy, and only occasionally to capitalism, i.e. in the case of socialist feminists.

and/or feminist, mixed-sex and/or woman-only organizations. Kemalist feminists are a diverse group of women with different interpretations of Kemalism and feminism, and they do not have a common political program. Nonetheless, basic tenets of Kemalist feminism can be identified in general terms. These basic tenets are for the most part embraced by Kemalist women who engage in the politics of gender even when they do not openly identify as feminist.

Kemalist feminists perceive patriarchy as located primarily, but not exclusively, in the familial sphere. Similar to liberal feminists in dominant Western contexts who identify the root cause of women's oppression "in the customary and legal constraints blocking women's access to the public domain and in prejudices (sexism) and stereotypes concerning their capabilities" (Kandiyoti 1996, 4), Kemalist feminism is based on the premise that gender equality can be achieved by legally ensuring women's public participation on equal terms with men and transforming the cultural norms that associate women with traditional gender roles. Kemalist feminists' support for a laicist (against the Islamic world view in which, according to Kemalist feminists, women are inferior to men) and modern (i.e. supporting women's public inclusion) social organization is based on this premise. Kemalist feminism does not seek a total overthrow of gender division of labor in either—public or private—sphere but supports the transformation of gender relations so as to enable women's full public inclusion as equal citizens with men.

From the 1990s on, feminist activism, both in Western and non-Western contexts, entered a period where demands for recognition "eclipsed" those for redistribution (Fraser 2005). In Turkey too, feminist politics evolved alongside the prevalence of identity politics over left politics (Sancar 2011). Therefore, feminists in Turkey have been generally divided over their approaches to the headscarf issue, the Kurdish conflict and issues related to sexual rights. Only some informal groups or individual feminists have included class issues on their

agendas next to gender issues. In Kemalist feminist politics, women's interests are not differentiated by religion, ethnicity, class, or sexuality. In this sense, Kemalist feminists in their gender activism prioritize gender struggle over any other struggle, they perceive women's rights as universal, and oppose politics of class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious difference in women's activism. They refuse Islamist women's demand to participate in the public sphere on the basis of their cultural/religious belongings by the argument that it is against laicism and, although less and less, modernity, and they refuse Kurdish women's demand to participate in the public sphere on the basis of their ethnic belonging by the argument that it is against the principle of the unitary state (i.e. Turkish nationalism). When it comes to class relations, Kemalist feminists hold different views ranging from liberalism to socialism, but most of them support social democracy. In their gender politics they support the welfare state, but women's labor rights are not on their agenda. Women's employment for them is a matter of education, women's awareness of their rights, and legal reforms to ensure equal opportunity. Sexual politics is an element of Kemalist feminism only to the extent that it serves the purpose of women's public inclusion. For example, they support women's full access to reproductive rights but not all of them fully support sexual rights, such as in the case of LGBT rights. Finally, most Kemalist feminists take the global gender equality agenda and the notion of "women's human rights" as reference points in framing their politics. They have ties with transnational women's networks and they draw on these ties in their orientation towards influencing state policies on gender.

Kemalist feminism is not a movement *per se*, but it is the locomotive of Kemalist women's activism. Feminism is not necessarily embraced by all Kemalist women who are involved in gender politics. Yet, the leaders of Kemalist women's activism either identify as feminists or are sympathetic towards feminism with some reservations. As feminist activism in Turkey grew and the UN-led global gender equality regime increasingly became the

framework of gender activism, more and more Kemalist woman activists got acquainted with feminist ideas and adopted them in their activism in one way or another. Recent research shows that Kemalist women either individually acknowledge that they are feminists or accept being identified as feminists when it means "women's rights advocacy" (Coşar and Onbaşı 2008). Thus, we can conclude that analyzing Kemalist feminist politics gives us a comprehensive understanding of Kemalist women's activism, too.

### *1.2.2. Research description*

The aim of this dissertation is to situate Kemalist feminist activism within the field of gender politics in Turkey by focusing on Kemalist feminists' relationship with the state, transnational governance, political parties, civil society organizations, and feminist, Islamist, and Kurdish women's activisms. In this aim, I based my research on the print and online material provided by Kemalist feminist activism until 2012 and on interviews I conducted with Kemalist feminists. The print and online material includes documents, interviews, reports, leaflets, booklets, articles, journals, books, edited volumes, biographical, and autobiographical works that were written or prepared by Kemalist women including Kemalist feminists, or written or prepared by feminists (activists and scholars, in Turkey and abroad) about Kemalist women including Kemalist feminists. I collected this material at multiple locations: Kemalist women's, feminist, and mixed-sex Kemalist organizations (their offices and websites); the libraries of the CHP, the Worker's Party (IP), General Directorate on the Status of Women (*Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü*, KSGM), and Women's Library and Information Center (*Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi*); online archives of Turkish newspapers *Milliyet* and *Cumhuriyet*; bookstores and second-hand bookstores in Turkey; and the database of Women and Social Movements, International—1840 to Present.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Women and Social Movements, International—1840 to Present.

In addition, I conducted 26 interviews with Kemalist feminists during 2011 in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. By "Kemalist feminist" I mean women who are, or have been, organized in a woman-only and/or mixed-sex Kemalist organization and who simultaneously identify as feminist (or simply as Kemalist feminist), and/or women who are, or have been, organized in a feminist organization and who simultaneously identify as Kemalist (or simply as Kemalist feminist). By "Kemalist organization" I mean all civil society organizations and political parties that adopt "Atatürkism" and/or "Atatürk's values and principles" in their by-laws. By "feminist organization" I mean all civil society organizations, including informal collectives, that are involved in activism for the purpose of eliminating gender oppression and gender-based discrimination and achieving gender equality. In total I interviewed Kemalist feminist activists from 19 different Kemalist and feminist organizations. These organizations are listed together with brief information about them in the Appendix. Most of my interviewees had membership in more than one of these organizations. I chose my interviewees according to snowball sampling technique. Additionally, I conducted interviews in 2011 and 2015 with women who are Kemalist but not feminist activists, feminist but not Kemalist activists, feminist academics, and Kemalist feminists who are involved in activism outside the above-mentioned cities. These interviews are not used in the dissertation in the same way as the other interviews, but rather inform my analysis of Kemalist feminist politics as a control group.

With Kemalist feminists I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews that lasted from an hour and a half to three hours each. The interviews comprised three parts (for the first part, see below). In the second part, I asked Kemalist feminists questions about their organizing and organization/s. These included questions about conditions of membership, number and profile of members, content and scope of activities, agendas pursued and demands raised by organizations and/or their branches. The information I gathered helped me

to map out the parameters of Kemalist women's activism in the cities of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. In the third part, I discussed with my interviewees three main issues: The politics of gender in Turkey in the post-1980 period, with a focus on the role of the state and transnational governance; feminist activism and the women's movement, with a focus on divisions alongside national/ethnic and cultural/religious politics of belonging; and the relationship between Kemalism and feminism, with a focus on both the theoretical and the practical tensions between them. These discussions helped me understand and analyze the class-based, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious underpinnings and implications of Kemalist feminist politics.

In the first part of the interviews I asked Kemalist feminists questions related to their age, place of birth, educational background, profession, marital status; family and social environment with regards to relations of gender, class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion; and how they became Kemalist and feminist activists. Answers given to all these questions are at the same time axes of differentiation among Kemalist feminists and they impact, though not determine, the form and content of the activism individual Kemalist feminists pursue. These axes of differentiation at the same time explain the heterogeneity as well as hierarchies among Kemalist women and they also point out the similarities and commonalities that bring them together as political agents. In this dissertation, I do not account for these differences between Kemalist feminists and their consequences for individual women's politics, except for when they are suggested by my interviewees themselves as motivations behind their activism. This is because I am not convinced that Kemalism and feminism together are sufficient as paradigms within which we can make full sense of these differences. That is to say, it is not possible to draw conclusive correlations between, say, individual women's profession or religious practice and the particular political agendas they seek in their activism.

The woman-only and mixed-sex political structures in which Kemalist women organize were almost exclusively hierarchical where leaders of organizations or their specific units had a decisive say over political agendas. Kemalist feminists I interviewed all occupied leadership positions in the organizations they were members of. Multiple membership is prominent among Kemalist feminists; only 6 out of 26 interviewees belonged to a single organization at the time of interview. These made it possible to map out comprehensively the ways in which Kemalist feminists involved in gender politics through a rather small number of interviewees.

Although I gathered detailed information about the structures in which Kemalist feminists were organized, in the dissertation I treat my interviewees as individual activists and not as representatives of their organizations. I therefore do not discuss the organizations I refer to based on their location and/or political agenda unless such information is relevant for understanding the relationship between Kemalist feminism and the politics of gender in Turkey. My use of these interviews throughout the dissertation is limited to the purpose of understanding the dynamics and the implications of Kemalist feminist politics at large and does not include scrutinizing individual Kemalist feminists' motivations behind their activism. Interview quotations I used in the dissertation are rather complementary to the politico-historical account I devised based on the analysis of online and print material as described above. Thus, I do not offer a discourse analysis of the interviews I conducted with Kemalist feminists. In this dissertation I use pseudonyms for my interviewees in order to maintain their anonymity, except for those in my control group. The list of interviews is included in the bibliography section of the dissertation.

When conducting interviews with Kemalist feminists I disclosed my family and educational background as well as my political affiliation as a socialist feminist activist. As a young woman researcher coming from a Kemalist family background, educated in secular

schools and high-ranking universities, and now doing a Ph.D. in a Western country, I was warmly welcomed by my interviewees. Kemalist feminists talked to me openly, without much reservation. They didn't take my challenging questions and comments negatively; some of them enjoyed an intellectual exchange and others assumed an educator role. The age difference between me and my interviewees—that I could have easily been their daughter—perpetuated their role as educators. Kemalist feminists saw themselves as activists more experienced and politically more equipped than me; they thought if I didn't already agree with their opinions on the issues we discussed, I would understand and agree with them one day, when I grew up. All in all, I believe that my position as a researcher was well-suited to get the most out of the interviews I conducted with Kemalist feminists.

Lastly, some comments on the limitations of this research: This study is by no means an exhaustive account of Kemalist feminist activism. The analysis I provide aims to situate Kemalist feminist activism within the broader field of politics of gender in Turkey, and it is shaped and limited by the methodological-conceptual framework I outline in the next chapter. The most important limitation of the research is the exclusion of cities other than Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. This was because, first, although feminist ideas are present in women's activism all around Turkey, feminist activism is less visible and "feminism" is not equally popular outside these three cities. Had I extended my research so as to include other cities, I would perhaps have concluded that Kemalist feminism *per se* was not very well known by all Kemalist women. Second, political polarization within women's activism on the basis of national/ethnic and/or cultural/religious belongings is less prominent outside Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir.<sup>25</sup> In the fourth biggest city in Turkey, Adana, it is possible to find women from the CHP working next to, or even together with, women from the AKP. Had I extended my research to include other cities, this would have perhaps shifted my analysis of the

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<sup>25</sup> Erdoğan (2000) and Toprak et al. (2011) suggest that this is also the case in general for the civil society in smaller towns in Turkey.

national/ethnic and cultural/religious underpinnings of Kemalist feminist politics towards a more balanced one. Moreover, in this research I limited the culture/religion question to the headscarf issue and the nation/ethnicity question to the Kurdish conflict. Yet, the culture/religion question includes the problems of non-Sunni Muslims (Alevi) and non-Muslim populations (Greek, Jewish, Armenian, Assyrian, Yazidi, etc. people). Similarly, the nation/ethnicity question goes beyond the Kurdish conflict and includes the problems of especially Rom, Dom and Arab citizens, and more recently, of migrants and refugees from various ethnic backgrounds. Had I included other religious and ethnic minorities in my analysis, I would have perhaps, again, come to additional conclusions about the national/ethnic and cultural/religious underpinnings of Kemalist feminist politics. Because their relevance for the Kemalist feminist gender agenda is only indirect, I left Kemalist feminists' views on militarism and the Turkish army outside the scope of my research. Had I included these views, this could have enhanced my analysis of the national/ethnic dimension of Kemalist feminist politics. In a similar vein, Kemalist feminists' views on sexuality in general and LGBT issues in particular are not included in my analysis of Kemalist feminist politics. Finally, Kemalist feminists not only occupy different class positions but also pursue diverse class politics outside their gender activism. For this reason, in my analysis of Kemalist feminist politics, I do not suggest any correlation between individual Kemalist feminists' class position and/or politics and the implications of their gender activism in terms of class relations in Turkey.

### *1.2.3. Chapter outline*

The dissertation is organized in eight chapters. In the next chapter (Chapter 2), I develop a methodological-conceptual framework within which to investigate the relationship between women's activism and gender politics in general and Kemalist feminist activism and the politics of gender in Turkey in particular. The framework I develop in this chapter informs my

examination of Kemalist feminist politics throughout the dissertation. First, I outline the elements of the intersectional and de-centered approach to women's activism in the light of which I analyze the making of Kemalist feminism. Second, I propose a conceptualization of women's activism as women's politics that enables the investigation of not only gender but also class, national/ethnic and cultural/religious aspects of women's engagement in gender politics. Third, I provide a review of feminisms differentiated on two axes: Western and non-Western, and dominant and non-dominant. Through this review I situate Kemalist feminism as a brand of dominant feminism in a non-dominant world region. Fourth and last, I discuss women's activism in relation to what I call the state-civil society-transnational governance tripartite cooperation. This discussion introduces some of the notions and issues I draw on, namely the global gender equality regime and processes of NGOization, when examining Kemalist feminist politics vis-à-vis state-civil society relations.

Chapter 3 provides a brief historical account of Kemalism's gender project in the early-republican era (1923–1938) and the formation of Kemalist women's activism in this period. First, based on a consideration of how the notions of the "new woman" and the "modern family" related to, complimented, and reproduced the class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious aspects of Kemalism, it situates Kemalism's gender project within the Kemalist project as a whole. Second, it discusses the formation of Kemalist women's activism in the light of the disagreements between early-republican feminists and Kemalists with regards to women's political representation and women's interests. In so doing, it offers an alternative reading of the relationship between early-republican feminism and Kemalism and argues that Kemalist women's activism emerged not in opposition to early-republican feminism but maintained early-republican feminist ideas within a Kemalist definition of women's interests. In this chapter I also discuss Kemalism's gender project and the formation

of Kemalist women's activism in relation to other secular and/or nationalist modernization processes in non-dominant parts of the world.

Chapter 4 looks into Kemalist women's activism in the multi-party period, from 1946 until 1980. It provides an account of the progressive development of Kemalist women's gender agenda in relation to the greater context of Turkish politics in general and the changing dynamics of gender politics in particular. It shows how Kemalist women organized independently, as well as in the CHP, as a response to the shift in the significance of women's status in Turkish politics and the differentiation of women's interests based on class and culture/religion. It also investigates how, in the second half of the 1970s, the UN-led global gender equality agenda and the formation of women's studies as a disciplinary field in Turkey guided Kemalist women in formulating their demands for women's rights and framing their gender agenda. The chapter shows that for Kemalist women the ideas around women's emancipation and the Kemalist definition of women's interests co-existed, and the gender agenda Kemalist women built by the end of the 1970s became a founding element of Kemalist feminism in the post-1980s.

Chapter 5 offers a detailed examination of the formation of Kemalist feminism by focusing on the development of Kemalist feminist ideas in relation to those of anti-system and egalitarian feminists, and analyzes the intellectual exchange between Kemalist and other feminists against the background of the post-1980 political conjuncture in Turkey until 2002 (AKP's rise to power). It shows how, against the rise of political Islam in the 1980s, laicism became the dominant theme in Kemalist women's politics and how Kemalist women developed an understanding of feminism that incorporated the Kemalist definition of women's interests. It also discusses Kemalist feminists' views on patriarchy and women's oppression, their approaches to class issues, their silence on the Kurdish conflict, and their involvement in the CHP's women's auxiliary. The chapter maps out the main characteristics of Kemalist

feminism as follows: A laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist understanding of women's rights, a self-demarcation from anti-system feminism and a strategic alliance with egalitarian feminism, a solidaristic approach to the relationship between upper- and lower-class women, simultaneous membership in woman-only and mixed-sex organizations, and an orientation towards influencing, challenging, and/or complementing state policies.

Chapter 6 investigates Kemalist feminists' involvement in the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society, and transnational governance with the aim of furthering gender equality in Turkey, and their simultaneous efforts to mobilize the Kemalist civil society, especially Kemalist women, to defend a laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist definition of women's interests. It covers the period from 1985 (Turkey's adoption of CEDAW) until 2011. During the 1990s, Kemalist feminists synchronized their demands with the global gender equality regime and adopted the forms of organizing that were embraced by this regime. In a strategic alliance with egalitarian feminists they participated in the women's policy agency (KSSGM) and worked together with bureaucrats to make gender policy reforms. This was also Kemalist feminists' strategy to counter political Islam and its views on gender relations. During the 2000s, the processes of Europeanization and Islamization changed the dynamics of gender politics in profound ways and led Kemalist feminists to rely more on the mechanisms of transnational governance in their struggle to further women's rights. In this period Kemalist feminists took part in issue-based platforms that included feminist, Islamist, and Kurdish women's organizations and, at the same time, mobilized the Kemalist civil society for a Kemalist definition of women's interests. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the Kurdish conflict and the issues of social and economic justice found little room in the Kemalist feminist agenda. The chapter discusses these developments in the light of the argument that women's activism is a struggle both for women's rights and for a definition of women's interests in terms of which these rights are framed.

Chapter 7 focuses on Kemalist feminists' grassroots activism and explores how the process of NGOization enabled Kemalist feminists to articulate the notions of women's rights and women's empowerment in Kemalist terms, and thereby to pursue a politics of gender with particular class-based, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious underpinnings. Like Chapter 6, it covers the period from 1985 to 2011. During the 1990s, Kemalist feminists drew on state structures and the mechanisms of transnational governance in their grassroots activism in order to struggle for gender equality, and against Islamism and Kurdish nationalism. During the 2000s, Europeanization and Islamization processes disrupted Kemalist women's organic relationship with the Turkish state and intensified their engagement with NGOization. The chapter shows that, in the post-1980 period, with the help of NGOization, Kemalist feminists formulated the notions of women's rights and women's empowerment in a way in which laicism and Turkishness were the preconditions of the inclusion of lower-class, religious, and Kurdish women into a neoliberal public sphere. In so doing, they maintained and reproduced their middle-class positioning within women's activism.

The concluding chapter (Chapter 8) provides a summary and an overall evaluation of Kemalist feminism and its relationship with the politics of gender in Turkey in the light of the rationale and the methodological-conceptual framework of the dissertation. Then, it outlines the ways in which the dissertation contributes to the existing scholarship on women's activism and gender politics. Finally, it discusses briefly the developments in Turkey's gender politics and Kemalist feminist activism in the aftermath of the research period of this study.

## **2. Women's activism and gender politics: A methodological-conceptual framework for analyzing Kemalist feminism**

In the introductory chapter I problematized the omission of Kemalist women's and Kemalist feminist activism in the feminist and gender studies literature on the history of women's activism in Turkey. I argued that this omission was due to early feminist scholars' positioning of Kemalism and feminism as antithetical to each other, a stance that owed its theoretical underpinnings to dominant Western feminist perspectives on women's activism which held gender-only agenda, woman-only organizing and autonomy from the state as feminisms' imperatives. A consequence of this was, together with the little attention paid to the ways in which global processes impacted on women's activism, the insufficient understanding of the relationship between women's activism and gender politics in Turkey. In this chapter I build a methodological-conceptual framework for analyzing the relationship between women's activism and gender politics so as to integrate Kemalist women's activism and Kemalist feminist politics in the history, and thereby to bridge the gap between different periods, of women's activism in Turkey.

In their book on women's activism, de Haan et al. (2013) suggest that it should be viewed from an intersectional, de-centered, and global perspective. Accordingly, an intersectional perspective is needed because the category of gender alone is not enough to understand women's activism; we need other relevant categories to understand the dynamics behind it and not prioritize the category of gender in our analysis (Ibid., 5). A de-centered perspective corresponds to a move away from westocentrism in the analysis of women's activism by both, including non-Western experiences and positionings in our theoretical perspective and not assuming that these experiences and positionings emerge "from or in relation to 'the West'" (Ibid., 6). Finally, a global perspective means that we seek the interconnections between the developments in different world regions and try to understand how processes of capitalism and imperialism reflect on women, depending on their different

locations and/or positions (Ibid., 5). The methodological-conceptual framework I develop in this chapter is in line with de Haan et al.'s suggestion. In the following chapters, I employ this framework to provide a non-westocentric analysis of Kemalist women's and feminist activism that simultaneously builds on the intersecting categories of gender, class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion. Although I do not offer a study of Kemalist feminism vis-à-vis processes of global capitalism and imperialism, I integrate global developments into my analysis, especially in the discussions related to women's activism and transnational governance (Chapters 6 and 7). In addition, I differentiate between dominant and non-dominant feminisms as an additional axis of analysis of women's activism. This differentiation enables me to situate Kemalist feminism as a type of dominant women's activism in a non-dominant world context. In this chapter and throughout the dissertation, I draw on Deniz Kandiyoti's definition of gender politics as: "processes of appropriation, contestation and reinterpretation of positions on women's rights by the state, non-state and global actors" (2011, 11).

The chapter is organized in five sections. In the first section I specify the elements of the de-centered and intersectional approach I adopt when analyzing Kemalist feminism and its relationship with Turkey's gender politics. In the next three sections I introduce, in the light of my de-centered and intersectional approach, a number of concepts and issues pertaining to the analysis of the relationship between women's activism and gender politics. I first propose a formulation of women's activism as women's politics through a consideration of the different ways women's participation in politics takes due to their conditional inclusion in the public sphere and unequal access to citizenship rights. Second, I examine some common characteristics shared by non-Western and non-dominant Western feminisms that differ from dominant Western feminisms, and reflect on their implications for a de-centered, intersectional definition of feminism. Third, I discuss feminists' engagement in gender politics within the scope of state-civil society relations that is marked by what I call a

tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society and transnational governance in the last four decades. These three sections respectively draw on three literature clusters that inform the analysis I offer in the following chapters, namely: Feminist literature on citizenship, public and private spheres, and women's political mobilization under nationalist modernization projects (mainly Chapters 3 and 4); literature on feminisms, with a focus on feminisms in non-Western contexts (mainly Chapters 4 and 5); and gender and politics literature, with a focus on feminisms-state relationship, transnational governance, and NGOization (mainly Chapters 6 and 7). I conclude the chapter with some final remarks on the methodological-conceptual framework offered in this chapter, which informs my analysis of Kemalist feminist politics.

### **2.1. A de-centered and intersectional approach to women's activism**

Within the scope of this dissertation, the need for a de-centered perspective derives from the concern to analyze Kemalist women's activism as a brand of feminism within the context of its location in non-dominant world regions. The purpose of this is to move, with inspiration from the postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) critique of historicism, beyond the simplistic "first in the West, then in the rest" understanding of political modernity. Concepts that inform my analysis of Kemalist feminism such as citizenship, public and private spheres, the state, civil society, and (women's) human rights "all bear the burden of European thought and history," yet "European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations" (Ibid., 4, 16). In this dissertation when I refer to dominant and non-dominant world regions I use the terms "Western" and "non-Western." But this is not to imply a binary opposition between these regions. My use of the term non-Western is similar to Raewyn Connell's (2009) use of "Southern theory," where she does not suggest a clearly defined category of states and societies but emphasizes the relations of "authority, exclusion and inclusion, hegemony,

partnership, sponsorship, appropriation—between intellectuals and institutions in the metropole and those in the world periphery" (ix). That is to say, I consider the non-Western context in relation to, not as opposed to, the Western context. Drawing on both Connell and Chakrabarty, I perceive the local arguments that are produced in the non-Western context as "texts to learn *from*, not just *about*" (Ibid., viii), especially in relation to how certain concepts that are produced in the West such as gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment attain new meanings when adapted to women's local contexts.

Situating Kemalist women's activism as a brand of feminism in a non-dominant world region allows for analyzing it in relation to other women's activism in non-dominant world regions. Feminist research on women's activism in non-dominant world regions reveals, alongside contextual differences, common features shared by different cases. Some of these features which I further discuss below are overlapping agendas of women's movements and nationalist modernization projects, women's identification with the cultural domain of national sovereignty, the complex ways in which women relate to the West and concepts and ideas they associate with the West, and the problematic relationship between women and the state where the state is both the perpetrator of women's oppression and the agent of social change (Heng 1997; Chatterjee, 1993; Abu-Lughod 1998, Menon, 1999). Based on these similarities we can understand the relationship between women's activism and gender politics in Turkey much more profoundly than through a simple comparison between Turkey and dominant world regions (with their non-dominant components) where Turkey would be defined by the lack of the institutions and—therefore—developments in these regions. From a de-centered perspective, a non-westocentric discussion of the Turkish case also goes beyond the context of the Middle East. Given their common histories, women's activism in Turkey has a lot of commonalities with women's activism in the Middle East. But the critique of political modernity as Western domination (in line with Chakrabarty's critique of historicism)

that is limited to the Middle East region results in "privileging the themes of Islam versus the West in studies of the Middle East" (Kandiyoti 2002, 2). This is problematic not only because it assumes an Islam and the Middle East that is idealized and homogenized by the West (Zubaida 2011; Massad 2015) but, although the region offers ground for comparative analysis, the assumption of regional coherence (that is not limited to Islam) is also found to be "empirically unfounded and theoretically problematical" (Joseph 2000, 5).

A possible shortcoming of a de-centered approach is thus the homogenization of "Western" and "non-Western" even when these categories are not taken as binary opposition. Both Western and Non-Western contexts are diverse, having locations hierarchically positioned vis-à-vis each other at local, national and regional levels. Especially in the era of globalization and migration Western and non-Western refer to more than geographical location. To overcome the risk of homogenization some feminist scholars have come up with a definition of "Third world" that included both colonized and/or exploited countries, regions and continents and oppressed peoples from these areas who now reside in the "First world" such as minority people and people of color in the U.S. (e.g. Johnson-Odim 1991; Mohanty 1991). In Chandra Talpade Mohanty's definition "Third world women" are an "imagined community," a term Mohanty borrows from Benedict Anderson (1983), not because they are a unitary group but because they have shared experiences with and struggles against racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism (Mohanty 1991, 2–3). With a similar concern about the risk of homogenization, I propose to differentiate between dominant and non-dominant world regions as well as between dominant and non-dominant women's activisms. Dominant and non-dominant women's activisms are differentiated based on their understood by their proximity to state power and global hegemonic discourses. They coexist with each other, across the West and non-West, at any given—local, national, regional and transnational—context. In this dissertation I employ the differentiation between dominant and

non-dominant women's activism only on national and transnational levels (omitting local and regional levels). As such, I situate Kemalist women's activism as both a brand of feminism in a non-dominant world region and dominant women's activism in its historically specific context.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, one of the flaws of the existing literature on Kemalist women's activism was its exclusive focus on the national/ethnic and cultural/religious aspects of Kemalist womanhood. Such a limitation imposed by the dominant laicism-Islamism grand narrative resulted in the neglect of class and transnational dynamics of Kemalism's gender project and the dismissal of Kemalist women's activism as a legitimate brand of feminism in Turkey. Thus the intersectional approach I adopt in this dissertation serves to move beyond the laicism-Islamism dichotomy when analyzing Kemalist feminism; this is necessary to understand both the multiple dynamics (i.e. gender, class, nation/ethnicity and culture/religion) that motivate Kemalist feminist politics and to understand how Kemalist feminism has influenced, reproduced and/or challenged the politics of gender in Turkey. The dual positioning of Kemalist women's activism as a brand of feminism in a non-dominant world region and a dominant women's activism in its national context also calls for an intersectional approach as non-Western feminisms are situated vis-à-vis and engage with Western feminisms differently based on their location within the relations of class, nation/ethnicity and culture/religion in their local contexts.

The term "intersectionality" was coined by the feminist critical legal studies scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (1991), to suggest the interrelatedness of the systems of domination based on gender, class, race, etc. (structural intersectionality), the conflicting political agendas of diverse groups as related to race, gender, class, etc., that define the parameters of each other's strategies (political intersectionality), and the mutually reinforcing character of each single form of subordination (representational intersectionality). As such the

term intersectionality drew attention to “how single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice” (Cho et al. 2013, 787) and “the necessity of understanding relations of rule and power differentials as co-constituted and co-constitutive” (Lutz et al. 2011, 7–8). Around the same time as Crenshaw formulated intersectionality similar interventions came from feminist scholars and activists such as Combahee River Collective’s “interlocking oppressions” (1982), Patricia Hill Collins’s “interlocking systems” (1990), Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis’s “racialized boundaries” (1992), and Deborah King’s “multiple jeopardies” (1988) (See Lutz et al. 2011, 4 and Lykke 2011, 209). An “intersectionality-like thought” (Hancock 2016), that is feminist efforts to investigate the intersections of gender and other categories of social relations was present before this time, the prioritization of gender as an analytical category and the neglect of the experiences of women of color in feminist scholarship had been already criticized for two decades by Black feminists and Third world feminist scholars as being white, middle-class and Western (Davis 2011; de Haan et al., 2013).<sup>26</sup> Other accounts of intersectionality’s intellectual history refer to Black women’s activism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Hancock 2016) and Russian Bolshevik feminists such as Alexandra Kollontai who investigated the intersections of gender and class (Lykke 2011, 209). Nonetheless intersectionality “gave voice to theoretical endeavours that until then had been widespread and outspoken in feminist theorising but lacked the kind of joint nodal point that a shared concept can give” (Lykke 2011, 209; see also Lutz et al. 2011).

Since the late 1980s, a wealth of scholarship has been produced in women's and gender studies exploring how the relations—and therefore categories—of gender, sexuality, class, race, nation/ethnicity, age, disability, etc. are embedded in each other and cannot be

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<sup>26</sup> This does not mean that an intersectional perspective was inaccessible to white, middle-class, and Western women. See, for example, Elisabeth V. Spelman, who pointed at the need to understand racial and class oppression not only as phenomena from which some women suffer, but also as processes sustained by some women, and argued that the “problem of difference” was the structural basis of the power relations among different groups of women (1988, 167).

analyzed in isolation from each other for individuals occupy dominant and subordinate positions simultaneously (L. Weber 2004). This scholarship provides theoretical discussions on the entanglement of these categories as well as empirical works on how intersectionality plays out in the family, civil society, politics, etc. (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Collins 1998; McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2007). More recent works that offer an overall assessment of intersectionality conclude that intersectionality does not correspond to a grand theory or a systematized methodology but can be “best framed as an analytic sensibility” (e.g. Cho et al. 2013, 795). Cho et al. further emphasize that intersectionality is not primarily interested in categories, identities or subjectivities but in the political and structural inequalities that underlie them (Ibid.). Similarly, MacKinnon points out that identities and subjectivities are the “outcomes of the dynamic intersection of multiple hierarchies, not the dynamic that creates them” (2013, 1023). These political and structural hierarchies also shape the field of women’s activism by giving women of different class, national/ethnic and cultural/religious belongings differential access to power.

Assessing the different uses of intersectionality across a wide range of disciplines, Cho et al. (2013) suggest that “intersectionality studies” is becoming a field in itself. In this field they identify three broadly defined tendencies of applying intersectionality; (1.) adoption of an intersectional framework or investigation of intersectional dynamics, (2.) discussions on the methodological and theoretical implications of intersectionality, and (3.) politically motivated analyses that draw on intersectionality. My use of intersectionality falls under the first category as I inquire into the processes of inclusion and exclusion in gender politics and the intersectional dynamics of Kemalist feminism. In particular, I follow the framework recently developed by the sociologist Sylvia Walby (2009) with slight modifications. Walby conceptualizes the relations of gender, class, and ethnicity as “regimes of complex inequality” that have ontological bases simultaneously constituted in four institutional domains; economy,

polity, violence, and civil society. Both "regimes of inequality" (relational structures) and "institutional domains" (institutional structures) are conceptualized as systems, which Walby formulates as follows:

[E]ach system takes all others as its environment. This distinction between sets of social relations (regimes) and institutional structure (domains) enables the simultaneous theorization of several different sets of social relations within each institutional domain. Each regime of inequality is a system that possesses ontological depth, through the inclusion in each case of the economy, polity, violence, and civil society. These systems are not reducible to each other, although they mutually adapt in a changing global fitness landscape. (Ibid., 58)

In this formulation, gender, class, and ethnicity are taken not as absolute categories but always co-constituted by and through each other simultaneously in the domains of economy, polity, civil society and violence. As intersecting regimes, gender, class and ethnicity mutually adapt to each other. They occupy different positions in each institutional domain; therefore, one regime can be temporarily more significant than the other, but is rarely overwhelming (Ibid., 273).

Reflecting on intersectionality twenty years after its introduction, Crenshaw comments that she has used intersectionality "as a prism for examining a host of issues, conditions, policies and rhetorics" but, at the same time, underlines the case-specific character of an intersectional approach and thus the need for contextualization (Crenshaw 2011, 222; 231). Contextualizing intersectionality for the analysis of Kemalist feminism, I adapt Walby's formulation to my case as follows: I limit my analysis to the domains of polity, which includes not only the state but also institutions of transnational governance and organized religions (Walby 2009, 65), and civil society. This is because the interplay between women's activism and gender politics is more significant in these domains (although it exists in the domains of economy and violence as well). Further, when analyzing Kemalist feminist politics I take—instead of gender, class, and ethnicity—gender, class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion as categories of analysis. I add nation next to ethnicity because Kemalist

feminist politics have rested on the perspective of the majority ethnicity, namely Turkish, which is perceived to compose the nation.<sup>27</sup> I also add culture/religion as a shadow category which doesn't correspond to a system as defined by Walby but nevertheless shapes both the regimes of gender, class, nation/ethnicity and the domains of polity and civil society in Turkey given the grand narrative of laicism vs. Islam (see Kandiyoti 2012).

More specifically, I investigate how the categories of class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion co-produce Kemalist feminist politics and reveal themselves in Kemalist feminist activism.<sup>28</sup> Intersectionality applies to individuals as well as to systems (Cockburn 2007). But because my aim is to analyze Kemalist feminist politics and the interplay of Kemalist feminist activism and gender politics in Turkey, I take these categories more as categories of analysis than as categories of practice. That is to say, I look at the gendered, class-based, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious dimensions of Kemalist feminist politics rather than at the gendered, class-based, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious practices of individual Kemalist women. In other words I look at the following: (1.) how gender relations have been understood and challenged and/or reproduced in Kemalist feminist politics, not at women's individual gender practices; (2.) how class relations have been constitutive of Kemalist feminist politics and the class-based implications of Kemalist feminist activism, not at women's individual class positions; (3.) how nation/ethnicity plays out in Kemalist feminist politics, not at women's ethnic backgrounds; (4.) the cultural/religious underpinnings of Kemalist feminist politics, not at women's individual opinions about or practices of religion; and (5.) how these categories are constructed by and through each other. Although both analytical and practical dimensions are intrinsic to these categories (Brubaker and Cooper

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<sup>27</sup> When researching dominant groups, following Nira Yuval-Davis, one has to keep in mind that "everybody, not just racialized minorities, have 'ethnicities' and that members, especially men in the hegemonic majorities, are not just 'human beings' but are also gendered, classed, ethnicized, etc." (2011, 8).

<sup>28</sup> For example, the well-known statement that "There is no 'women's rights' without laicism" might sound like a self-evident feminist sentence that every feminist would agree with. Yet, in the Turkish context, laicism corresponds to an anti-Islamist, anti-Kurdish, anti-class conflict political position. It is universalizing and it treats all women's problems as undifferentiated by these categories.

2000; Lorenz 2011), findings of my research reveals no necessary causation between Kemalist feminist politics and individual Kemalist feminist women's opinions on and practices of gender, class, nation/ethnicity or religion/culture. In differentiating between analytical and practical dimensions of my categories of analysis, I follow Nira Yuval-Davis who argues that "there is no direct causal relationship between the situatedness of people's gaze and their cognitive, emotional and moral perspectives on life" (2011, 7). Similarly, Rosaura Sanches points at the distinction between one's positioning as a class-based, ethnic, gendered location in social reality and one's positionality, which refers to the awareness of this positioning which can "be mediated as much by hegemonic discourses as by critical anti-hegemonic discourses" (Sanchez 2006, 39).

In the remaining of this chapter I discuss the conceptual implications of an intersectional, de-centered approach to women's activism with regards to analyzing Kemalist feminism and its relation to the politics of gender in Turkey.

## **2.2. Women's activism as women's politics**

Writing in 1996, the well-known gender and politics scholar Georgina Waylen asked: "[W]omen often participate as political subjects in political activity in different ways from men, which raises questions about the distinctiveness of 'women's political activity' – should it be classified and analysed as a separate entity?" (Waylen 1996, 7). Indeed, women's conditional inclusion in the modern public sphere and their unequal access to citizenship rights across the West and non-West in many instances have shaped their political participation in such a way that it takes place outside the field of institutional politics. The wide-spread perception that the scope of women's activism was a continuation of the tasks they performed in the private sphere rendered their political agency invisible outside institutional politics. In this section I formulate women's activism as women's politics,

meaning that women's gender activism is a significant constituent not only of gender politics but also of politics at large.

Citizenship is a key notion with which to think about women's activism for it enabled women's inclusion in public life in processes of modernization and nation-building.<sup>29</sup> The notion of citizenship, in its liberal and civic republican understandings (as well as in its later communitarian, cosmopolitan, or social democratic formulations) did not take gender as a meaningful variable that characterized individuals' or collectivities' access to rights. Starting in the 1980s, feminist theory challenged the notion of universal equality and the abstract conceptualizations of citizenship, and showed that gender relations are constitutive of citizenship and citizenship shapes the relations of gender in return (Elshtain 1981; Pateman 1988; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Walby 1994; Lister 1997; Joseph 2000). For feminists, the problematization of the distinction between public and private spheres was key to understanding how gender relations translated into differential access to citizenship rights (Fraser 1992; Landes 1993; Landes 1998; Okin 1998).<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, women's identification with the private realm (i.e. gender division of labor), together with the modern conception of family as a "unitary being and set of interests" (Walby 1994), was the source of women's unequal access to citizenship rights. Oppressive gender relations in the private sphere resulted in women's disadvantaged status in the public sphere, including economic, political, and cultural fields. At the same time, becoming members of their political community through

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<sup>29</sup> Citizenship is also the historical basis of the transformation from private to public forms of patriarchy (Walby 1990; 1994). Throughout the dissertation I adopt Sylvia Walby's definition of patriarchy: "[A] system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. The use of the term social structure is important here, since it clearly implies rejection of biological determinism, and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one" (1990, 20).

<sup>30</sup> Feminist scholars challenged the public-private distinction by exposing the consequences of keeping the body and sexuality hidden from view; by denying that freedom applied equally to women and men; and by showing that the line between these two spheres were constantly being renegotiated (Landes 1998, 3). Feminists furthermore emphasized the need to go beyond the simplistic understanding of public vs. private and look into the multiplicity of domains that had a bearing on women's citizenship. Some scholars came up with formulations of their own, such as Yuval-Davis (1997) who suggested a differentiation between the spheres of the state, civil society and the domain of family, kinship and other primary relationships, or Joseph (1997) who divided the gendered organization of social life into governmental, non-governmental and domestic spheres.

citizenship gave women the legal status with which they could seek their gender, alongside other, interests. As Pettman suggests, citizenship provided a formal space for first-wave feminists and women in anti-colonial struggles to contest women's unequal treatment and to demand further rights (1999, 207). In this sense the notion of citizenship should be seen as both, a legal status that indicates entitlement to certain rights, and as acts of politicization of those rights and their lack thereof.

Women's identification with the private sphere and their conditional inclusion in the public sphere thereof was not the only reason why they were not equal citizens with men.<sup>31</sup> As Werbner and Yuval-Davis indicate, the simultaneous recognition of women's new public role as representatives/reproducers of the nation equally impeded their access to rights, especially in the male-dominant political sphere (1999, 12).<sup>32</sup> Women everywhere, both individually and collectively, struggled to define the conditions of their citizenship (Joseph 2000b) but their mobilization often went hand in hand with nationalist projects and nation-building processes which shaped their participation in politics in historically specific ways. As Walby (1992) points out, gender relations influenced the definition and scope of national projects, and women have been more supportive of those projects that served and protected their gender interests and less of others. But women's support for new regimes did not necessarily mean that those regimes aimed at women's emancipation (Molyneux 1998). In fact, especially in non-Western world regions, women's involvement in nationalist projects has been

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<sup>31</sup> There are diverging views on the character of women's conditional inclusion in the public sphere. Where some argue that women's identification with the private, the emotional and the particular is a structural necessity for the construction of a masculine, rational and universal public (Eley 1992; Fleming 1995), others hold the view that the philosophical and moral framework for equal citizenship exists while women's exclusion is an effect of the political interests of the privileged (Vogel 1983), or the pragmatics of commonsense reasoning (Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 1999). But all agree that women's exclusion did not mean their depoliticization as a social and political group nor their passive subjection to citizenship politics. On the contrary, women's very exclusion transformed them into subjects of the modern system of political representation (Landes 1993, 205).

<sup>32</sup> In their well-known text, Anthias and Yuval-Davis point out five major ways in which women are involved in nation building processes: As biological reproducers of members of ethnic communities, as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/racial groups, as participants centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture, as signifiers of ethnic/national differences, and as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles (1989, 7). See also Jayawardena (1986).

problematic because their membership in the political community has been highly regulated via gender specific rules (Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999). In many examples, these gender specific rules meant women's exclusion from state-building processes and made the institutional sphere of politics inaccessible to them.<sup>33</sup>

Women's inclusion in nation-building simultaneous with their exclusion from state-building, under certain circumstances, has directed women who had political motivations to what can be called a "feminine public" where they could exercise motivations without interfering with the male-dominant sphere of formal politics except for when they complemented it. Historically, in nationalist projects of belonging, women's activism often functioned as the deliberately depoliticized flipside of male-dominant politics. At the same time women, by politicizing motherhood and care, brought new qualities to the public sphere based on difference and complementarity between sexes and helped the "feminization of citizenship" (Werbner 1999). Walby points at women in the inter-war period Britain who were involved in welfare-oriented activism where they adhered to the separate spheres of

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<sup>33</sup> Differentiating between state-building and nation-building, Anthias and Yuval-Davis point out that the dynamics of citizenship are not limited to the state, because citizenship is tied to national processes and these national processes go beyond state processes (1989, 3). That is to say, citizenship goes beyond a formal procedure between the individual and the state, and we need to redefine citizenship as "a more total relationship, infected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and a sense of belonging" as opposed to the mainstream liberal and political science tradition (Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999, 4). The notion of citizenship, perceived solely as a legal process which takes place between the individual and the state, proves blind to people's differential access to citizenship rights based on their gender, class, racial, national/ethnic, and sexual identities. Proposing an examination of citizenship in a non-westocentric way, Yuval-Davis introduced the notion "multi-layered citizen," arguing that "citizenship cannot be understood exclusively in terms of the 'nation-state'... citizenship needs to be understood as a multi-layered construct, in which one's citizenship in collectivities in the different layers – local, ethnic, national, state, cross- or trans-state and supra-state – is affected and often at least partly constructed by the relationships and positionings of each layer in specific historical context" (1999, 119). Such an understanding is also necessary to make better sense of the dynamics of differentiation and conflict within women's activism, particularly because citizenship is also the instrument with which the differences between women are contained and reproduced. This is especially important in a globalizing world. While initially citizenry was defined through a common national identity based on shared history, language and culture, starting from the 1980s, political developments have challenged this definition by bringing in differential interests of racial, ethnic, religious, and identity groups within a nation state (McMahon 2012, 3). Similarly, whereas in early conceptualizations citizenship rights were classified as civil, political, and social rights (Marshall 1965), the influence of globalization and neoliberalization brought about contemporary claims to cultural, reproductive, sexual, disability, ecological, consumer rights, which were articulated to the concept of citizenship, resulting in further lines of differentiation within women's activism alongside the notions such as "cultural citizenship," "intimate citizenship," "consumer citizenship," "ecological citizenship," "cosmopolitan citizenship," and so on (see Lister et al. 2007; Isin and Nielsen 2008).

women and men but "sought to enlarge what was encompassed by women's sphere" (1990, 167).<sup>34</sup> In a similar vein, Werbner warns against underrating philanthropic women's organizations and motherist movements as perpetrators of capitalism and patriarchal oppression, and suggests that fund-raising activities or international support from women's networks help women in their local contexts to mobilize large numbers of women and attain autonomy from and influence over the male-dominant public sphere (1999, 240–241).

Today women's activism can be more openly and legitimately political even when it is based on so-called feminine values, while discrimination against women in the formal political sphere remains. Therefore, as Ruth Lister argues, women's grassroots activism is still a viable alternative to the participation in formal politics. This is so because the latter might be more alienating than empowering for women, as opposed to local activism that can give them self-esteem, political consciousness, and a sense of agency (Lister 1997, 33). Similarly, Werbner and Yuval-Davis suggest that women's grassroots activism is not only a source of raising consciousness and self-confidence but also a "base for social movements and it has the power to effect real long-term changes in mainstream politics" (1999, 30). It is precisely because of this reason that in certain contexts we need to look for women's political practices in the field of activism rather than in the institutional sphere of politics. If women's activism outside formal politics is theorized and analyzed as political practice, women's political participation in general and their contribution to the politics of gender will prove to be more significant than often thought.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See also Buckley (2001) on "wife-activism" in Soviet Russia where woman activists' task was defined as social mothering but they did achieve many goals, acquired social self-worth, and transformed themselves as well as the local community.

<sup>35</sup> Considering that in Turkey women's and feminist activism historically went in parallel with the development of women's and gender studies, a broader definition of politics should also recognize knowledge production as a form of activism and an expression of political citizenship. At the crossroads of activism and academia, Kemalist women themselves provided a lot of "indoor" material on their movement as well as on the issues of women's rights, citizenship, laicism, Kemalism, the headscarf issue, and the like (see, for example, Arat 1997; Çiğ 2005; Saylan 2009).

Indeed, to make better sense of women's political participation, feminist scholars called for a broader definition of politics that goes beyond the institutional sphere of political parties and the parliament, and includes women's politically motivated engagements outside the field of formal politics (Jonasdottir 1988; Joseph 2000; Joseph and Slyomovics 2011, Waylen et al. 2013).<sup>36</sup> This call is meaningful for the Turkish case where women's participation in politics through formal channels has been limited and thus, pursuing politics via informal means has been of particular significance (Y. Arat 2004, 282). In Turkey, the notion of the public sphere did not emerge as an autonomous sphere but the one that is closely related to the state (Özbek 2004, 31).<sup>37</sup> In a context where civil society was often perceived as part of the state, women's exclusion from politics and state-building led to an understanding in which women's activism was isolated from politics rather than being just non-political (see Akşit 2010, 183). From the 1980s onwards feminist scholars produced a wealth of literature on women's political engagements outside the formal sphere of politics on local, national, regional and transnational levels. The study of "women in politics *in their own terms*" (Waylen et al. 2013, 11, emphasis added) proved to be fruitful especially in some non-Western contexts where lower degrees of institutionalization in politics (compared to Western

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<sup>36</sup> This perspective is similar to that of Engin Isin, who introduces the concept "acts of citizenship" in order to go beyond the duality between citizenship as legal status and as practice, and to investigate "those acts when, regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due" (2008, 2). These acts, while being the basis of political citizenship, "are also ethical (as in courageous), cultural (as in religious), sexual (as in pleasurable) and social (as in affiliative) in that they instantiate ways of being that are political" (Ibid.).

<sup>37</sup> Feminist scholars in the West have similarly criticized the Western notion of public sphere as a specific sphere of democratic discussion emerging out of civil society. For example, in his seminal book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Habermas (1992) suggested that the private persons who took part in rational-critical debate in the public sphere gained their political autonomy on the basis of private ownership of economic reproduction and the household which hosted the bourgeois family ideal. Although dependent on the sphere of labor and commodity exchange, the new patriarchal conjugal family was perceived as independent from the society and as the domain of pure humanity (Ibid., 46). In their critique of Habermas's concept of the public sphere, feminist scholars pointed at the power relations in the domestic sphere and the rules governing the sexual division of labor which were left unattended by Habermas (Benhabib 1992, 92). Habermas in this way has idealized the liberal public sphere because he failed to create conceptual space for other forms of public spheres where women organized and challenged the boundaries between the public and the private (Fraser, 1992 123). Consequently, Habermas's theory remains blind to the transformations in the private sphere, the politicization of the private sphere and the changing boundaries between public and private spheres, resulting from the emergence of women's movement, women's participation in the labor force and politics, and hence to the issue of different experiences of men and women in all domains of life.

contexts) further confined women's political mobilization to the informal sphere of politics (see Waylen 1996).

Women's exclusion from institutional politics and state-making makes the field of activism the only available place where they can pursue not only gender politics but also politics of other social relations. "Women's activism as women's politics" means, then, that activism is not only a valid way of women's participation in politics as women but also a means of women's involvement in politics at large as members of a certain class, nation/ethnicity and culture/religion. This brings back the relevance of an intersectional approach in analyzing women's activism. It is now well-established in the literature that gender is neither the only nor the primary dynamic behind women's activism (see e.g. Boydston 2008) but that women's gender politics shape relations other than gender is rather underemphasized and needs more unpacking.

Here I find especially useful Molyneux's (1998) differentiation between women's strategic and practical gender interests. Against the assumption that "women have certain common interests by virtue of their gender, and that these interests are primary for women," Molyneux states that women's interests are "shaped in complex and sometimes in conflicting ways" because different groups of women are situated differently in their societies (Ibid., 231–232).<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, strategic interests derive from the analysis of women's subordination and are formulations to overcome it by abolishing the sexual division of labor and other institutionalized forms of discrimination on the basis of gender. Practical interests, on the other hand, "arise from the concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gender division of labor" and are "usually a response to an immediately perceived need, and they do not generally entail a strategic goal such as women's emancipation or gender

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<sup>38</sup> This is not to dismantle the category women altogether. I agree with scholars who have warned against the dismantling of the category of women given that the structural position "woman" entails a common basis for experience and therefore struggle, such as, for example, the basis of women's exclusion from full citizenship (Lister, 1997; Gunnarsson 2011).

equality," and "they do not in themselves challenge the prevailing forms of gender subordination" (Ibid., 233). These practical interests are influenced by other categories of social relations.<sup>39</sup> Women in their activism pursue strategic and practical gender interests simultaneously, where practical interests derive from women's positionality within the relations of class, nation/ethnicity and culture/religion and—therefore—their pursuit shape those relations in return.

Discrepancies between women's strategic and practical gender interests in many cases resulted in women's prioritization of the latter for they were more compatible with the nationalist modernization projects in which they mobilized. For instance, tensions between women's citizenship rights and their identification with culture and tradition often resulted in women's articulation of their gender interests in nationalist terms, muting their more radical demands (Kandiyoti 1991, 431). As Joseph (2000) argues, women's differing identities and commitments often led their alignment with men of their class, nation/ethnicity, religion, etc. rather than with other women. These categories have in fact been more salient than gender in allowing or curtailing women's rights and responsibilities as citizens (Joseph 2000, 11). In return, women often found themselves divided alongside competing "politics of belonging" (Yuval-Davis 2011)<sup>40</sup> that drew on as well as shaped these categories and formulated different gendered notions of citizenship thereof. That is to say, women's differential political belongings based on their class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion resulted in their support for competing interpretations of women's gender interests. From this perspective, the link between women's gender activism and politics is that women become constituents of politics

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<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Werbner (1999, 229) explains that women's collective consciousness is "contingent and contextual, arising from the articulations of different dimensions of their activism and their long-term ideals and goals." Therefore, there's no necessary hierarchy between "feminist" (radical and strategic) and "female" (practical and traditional) consciousness to the advantage of the latter (Ibid.).

<sup>40</sup> Throughout the dissertation I prefer to use "belonging" instead of "identity" because, "politics of belonging involve not only maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries of the community of belonging by the hegemonic political powers (within and outside the community), but also their contestation, challenge and resistance by other political agents" (Yuval-Davis 2011, 20). Yet sometimes "identity" is inescapable, for example when talking about the rejection of Kurdish identity (i.e. ethnicity, language) by the Turkish state.

by drawing on, constructing, challenging, or reproducing gendered as well as class-based, national/ethnic and cultural/religious notions of citizenship so as to seek their differential interests. In that a certain version of gender politics entails a certain version of politics of citizenship and thereby specific politics of class, nation/ethnicity and culture/religion.

### **2.3. Feminisms**

In both Western and non-Western world regions, it has been those women who belonged to dominant social, political and economic groups who, in their activism, got to define the terms of women's interests as the politics of citizenship they adhered to situated them closer to state power and global hegemonic discourses. Yet women in non-Western contexts as well as those who belonged to non-dominant groups in Western contexts have been more reluctant to adopt the label feminism in their pursuit of gender politics. This section looks at women's activism through the lens of feminism and argues for an inclusive definition of feminism so as to include women's activism that seek women's strategic (alongside practical) gender interests, such as Kemalist women's activism, within a broad terrain of "feminisms."

"Feminism" was first used in the West as a term but it was never a uniquely or exclusively Western phenomenon. Feminist ideas and struggles emerged in different places, in different contexts, and under different circumstances throughout the globe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Jajawardena 1986, Chaudhuri 2005; de Haan et al. 2013; Dhamoon 2013). A narrow definition of feminism based on white, middle-class, Western feminists' universalized assumptions about women's interests have been challenged by women of color, working class women, lesbian feminists, postcolonial feminists across the West and non-West (e.g. hooks 1981, Cagatay et al. 1986). Challenges posed to Western white hegemonic feminism brought to feminist historiography new questions as well as reconceptualizations of certain notions such as agency and resistance (Mohanty 1991, 3). Non-Western women have not constituted an automatic unitary group, their engagement with

feminism have been historically specific and dynamic with alliances and divisions based on class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and history (Ibid.). Yet, in the 1980s, “feminisms” appeared as a plural noun to indicate the plurality of definitions of/meanings attributed to feminism across different historical, political, geographical frames (Hawkesworth 2010, 25).<sup>41</sup> From the 1990s on, feminist analyses of women’s activism more commonly acknowledged the need to move away from mainstream perspectives on analyzing women’s activism based on dominant Western notions of feminism (see Beckwith 2013). Parallel to this, feminist scholars called for a broader definition of feminism, such as “the broad goal of challenging and changing gender relations that subordinate women to men and that thereby also differentially advantage some women and men relative to others” (Ferree and Tripp 2006, vii; see also Abu-Lughod 1998; Offen 2000; Moghadam 2005; Dhamoon 2013). Pointing at one problematic aspect of having a broad definition of feminism, Hawkesworth warns that “[a]ssimilating those who repudiate feminism into an encompassing definition of feminism replicates the problem of imperialism that troubles many critics on Western feminism in the first place” (2010, 27). In this dissertation I nonetheless refer to women’s activism that seeks to transform social relations with an aim to end women’s oppression and discrimination on the basis of gender as “feminist activism.”

Historically, dominant Western feminisms were entangled with imperialism and orientalism. Western women who belonged to dominant groups saw themselves as agents of progress and civilization in the colonies and allied with their colonial governments in a fashion of maternal imperialism (Liddle and Rai 1998).<sup>42</sup> Newman (1999), looking at the

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<sup>41</sup> Hawkesworth (2010) lists a variety of ways in which feminism can be understood as follows: “[A]n idea, a set of political convictions, a mode of identification with other women, a way of being a woman, a collective identity available to men and women, a form of political mobilization, a policy agenda, a legacy, a means of forging ‘we’ that Beauvoir thought women lacked, a strategy for forging alliances and building allegiance, a praxis, a vision of alternative possibilities, an imagined community, a process of creating something new, a tactic for transforming social relations, an inclusive, participatory politics, and an expansive conception of justice encompassing economic distribution, political rights and liberties, collective responsibility, and dispute resolution” (25).

<sup>42</sup> For the relationship between imperial feminism and the anti-slavery movement see Midgley (1998).

racial origins of feminism in the U.S., suggests that white woman's rights activists measured the lagged "social progress" of non-white races in terms of their "lack" of conformity to Anglo-American Protestant middle-class gender relations. In this way, white woman's rights activists empowered themselves and strengthened the imperialist rhetoric that delegitimized dissent from non-white and non-Christian women (Ibid., 7–8). Weinbaum (2001) similarly underlines the relationship between issues of racism, nationalism, and imperialism, and shows how, in the case of nineteenth-century American feminism, maternalist feminism was reproduced through racial nationalism. As Mohanty's (1984) comparison between Western feminist self-representation and Western feminist re-presentation of women in the non-Western world showed, the assumption of a singular and privileged First world, the discursive self-representation of Western women as secular, liberated, and having control over their lives, was based on a dominant discourse which created the "Third world difference" by depicting non-Western women as sexually constrained, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family oriented, and victimized (Mohanty 1984, 353; see also Narayan 1997 and Slavova 2006).<sup>43</sup>

International women's organizations such as the International Council of Women (ICW) and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) also participated in the reproduction of imperialism by undertaking the issues of peace and women's suffrage (respectively) as gender-only issues and thereby silencing the issues and concerns of dominated communities (Zimmermann 2014; Zimmermann 2015). At the same time, as Rupp (1996) indicates in her study on internationalism in the first wave of the women's movement, the exchange of ideas between Western women and women from Latin America, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa in some cases provided a check to the imperialism of the international

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<sup>43</sup> It is true that stereotypes of non-Western women are integral to white Western women's constructions of themselves, yet Bulbeck (1998) warns against taking Western feminism as uniform: (1.) with the exceptions of Germany and France, European feminism has little influence on "Western feminism," and (2.) even within Anglo-American feminism there are sharp differences between human rights-oriented US feminism, welfare state-oriented British feminism, and bureaucratically oriented Antipodes feminism (4–5).

women's organizations, paving the way for a more global internationalism in the late-twentieth century (8). International women's movement of the early-twentieth century also provided a basis for "collective identity", and reflected the dynamic process of contestation between feminisms (Rupp and Taylor 1999, 364–365).

As we saw in the previous section, in non-Western and non-dominant Western contexts women's activism often emerged hand in hand with nationalist, anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggles. The imperialist connotations of the word feminism, combined with women's selective adoption of the cultural aspects of modernity and their concern for defending national culture and the family against external threats, lead many women to reject the term (Heng 1997; Fleischmann 2010). In addition, dominant Western feminisms tended to pursue gender-only agendas and neglect other forms of political and social inequalities, whereas for many other women it was possible to articulate their gender interests only in relation to their (often subordinate) positionality in other social relations. A broad literature today reveals the various forms of feminisms in non-Western as well as non-dominant Western contexts and the diverse array of agendas and organizational strategies upon which women's activism has been built. Focusing on the U.S. context, Mohanty suggests that what differentiates white Western middle class feminism from the politics of women of color is that the former has a singular focus on gender as a basis for the struggle for rights whereas the former understands gender as part of broader liberation struggles (1991, 11; see also Gluck 1998).<sup>44</sup>

Apart from imperialist-racist and gender-only agendas of dominant Western feminisms, another common reason for non-Western and non-dominant Western women's avoidance of using the term feminism has been pragmatic motivations such as avoiding

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<sup>44</sup> In the U.S., the singular focus on gender was initially not the case even for white middle-class feminisms as they had that emerged in close relationship to the civil rights and new left movements; what made them single-axis movements was their co-optation by the more popular liberal brand of feminism (see Johnson-Odim 1991; Mohanty 1991).

allegations of Western, bourgeois or imperialist influence by traditionalist forces in their local contexts (Hawkesworth 2010, 26). This is an ongoing trend in the era of identity politics where leaders of national, ethnic and religious projects of belonging reject "modernization" as Western mimicry and European cultural imperialism (Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999, 13).<sup>45</sup> In these cases, women avoid identifying as "feminists" to prove their adherence to national values. For instance, as Nadjie Al-Ali (2000) shows for the case of Egypt, secular women who belong to the upper class are accused of being too westernized and too elitist to represent the national culture. Similar to Egypt and various other contexts in the Middle East, a common strategy of women in Turkey has been to replace feminism by "women's rights" which, being a constitutive element of Turkish modernization, was a more legitimate and convincing way to frame feminist demands. Interestingly, under the Islamist AKP rule, many women embraced feminism this time precisely for being a Western label, drawing on the westernization ideal of Turkish modernization as opposed to the Islamization of society led by the successive AKP governments since 2002.

Another commonly shared characteristic of non-Western and non-dominant Western feminisms, one that is disproportionately less acknowledged in feminist scholarship, relates to the dual questions of autonomy from men and autonomy from the state. Dominant Western feminist approaches presuppose women's independent organizing a precondition for feminist activism, yet throughout history women pursued feminist politics in woman-only or mixed-sex organizations, depending on the "political opportunity structures" (Ewig and Ferree 2013) that were available to them (Orozco 1997; Tripp 2000; Slavova 2006). Molyneux (1998) distinguishes between independent, associative, and directed forms of women's collective action, and argues that there is no necessary correlation between autonomous organizing and

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<sup>45</sup> Throughout the dissertation I adopt Moghadam's (1994) definition of identity politics: "[D]iscourses and movements organized around questions of religious, ethnic, and national identity ... that are making a bid for state power, fundamental juridical changes, of for cultural hegemony" (ix). In this sense, I do not consider feminism as identity politics. Yet, it is also clear that feminisms might and often do have overlapping agendas with identity politics.

the pursuit of women's gender interests or women's empowerment.<sup>46</sup> Even when women organize autonomously, "feminisms are never autonomous but bound to the signifying networks of the contexts which produce them" (Kandiyoti 1996, 9).

When it comes to women's autonomy from the state, recent research on women's activism under state socialism offer mind-opening examples of women's agency in state-led organizations. In her research on women's activism in state socialist Bulgaria, Kristen Ghodsee (2014) criticizes that state-run mass women's organizations were seen solely as support-gatherers for male-dominant communist parties and treated with suspicion by Western feminists. Discussing the differential treatment of state feminism—celebrated in Western democracies and condemned in state socialisms—Ghodsee points out that this bias came from an understanding of women's emancipation as autonomous individuals that was popular in Western liberal democracies and notes two distinct problems with such an approach. The first problem is that "[t]he idea that women's self-actualization requires the production of individual, autonomous subjects liberated from all social obligations reifies a particularly Anglo-American conception of the feminist project" (Ibid., 540). The second, related problem is that the same feminist project "privileged independent, nongovernmental organizations over state-based policy agencies and women's mass organizations even when there is clear evidence of the latter's significant achievements ... that must have contributed to women's self-actualization" (Ibid., 541). A growing body of literature now shows that women's organizations under state socialism pursued feminist ends and "regards a totalitarian or top-down model (from the state or the Party to women) as inadequate and tries to replace it with more complex and multidirectional approaches" (de Haan 2016, 105; see also Zheng 2005; Popa 2009; Bonfiglioli 2012).

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<sup>46</sup> For a recent discussion on woman-only organizing and the issue of agency see Funk (2014) and Ghodsee (2015).

Inspired by this recent scholarship, I include Kemalist women's activism in mixed-sex organizations in my analysis of Kemalist feminist politics. Women in the Middle East region were not as massively organized as state socialist women. Especially in Turkey we cannot really talk about a mass organization of Kemalist women even though some organizations were nation-wide. But questioning certain assumptions about the correct way to pursue women's liberation such as considering women's independence in organizing as a necessity are valid for the Middle East region, too. In the case of nationalist modernization projects, for example, there is no necessary correlation between authoritarian regimes closing down independent women's organizations and an actual worsening of women's condition in society. The deep embeddedness of the state within civil society in non-Western contexts imply that there is nothing necessarily progressive about the civil society—a space dominated by groups that compete over state power—and that there is nothing necessarily polluting about state intervention in women's organizing (see Rai 1996; Menon 1999). The civil society might accommodate women's political participation better than the state but "there's a danger that in the prevailing context of neoliberalism, the slogan 'civil society' may end up reinforcing a gender-hierarchical division of labor as states and societies move toward a 'refamilialization' of reproduction" (Hagemann et al. 2011, 2). I elaborate on this point in the next section, together with a discussion on the similarities between dominant feminisms in Western and non-Western contexts.

#### **2.4. Gender politics in the state-civil society-transnational governance triangle**

This dissertation takes state-civil society relations as the main site to look at in to understand the interplay between women's activism and gender politics. In analyzing the positioning of women's activism vis-à-vis state-civil society relations, my main point of reference is Deniz Kandiyoti's proposition that "we adopt more rigorous forms of institutional analysis that transcend the categories of religious versus secular, Western vs non-Western, global vs local

and modern vs traditional (or 'alternative' modern) to better come to grips with fluid networks of influence that shape struggles for gender equality in different contexts" (2011, 10). Thus a better understanding of the politics of gender entails paying "detailed attention to fluid networks of influence at the global, national and local levels and engagement with a multiplicity of international, state and non-state actors" (Ibid., 11–13).

In the last four decades, institutions of transnational governance (mainly the UN and the EU) have played a more significant role than before in shaping gender politics through their adoption of a global gender equality regime progressively built on UN International Women's Year (1975), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and UN conferences at Nairobi (1985), Vienna (1993) and Beijing (1995) (see Kardam 2005).<sup>47</sup> Parallel to the formation of this regime have been feminists' efforts to influence states' gender policies as the regime's agenda proposed the formation of national machineries for achieving gender equality (see Bunch and Frost, 2000). Drawing on the global gender equality regime, feminists called on the state "to assist, underwrite, support, finance and facilitate in myriad ways improvements in the status of women" (Rittich 2011, 97). Many states across the globe adopted a gender agenda in line with the global gender equality regime through means such as ratifying CEDAW and similar binding agreements. The regulative power of transnational governance structures served in the West, no less than in the non-West, as an opportunity for women's groups to participate in decision making because they bypassed the hierarchical structures of the state that gave little room for women (Sauer and Wöhl 2011, 109). Today when we say politics of gender, we are automatically

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<sup>47</sup> I borrow the term "gender equality regime" from Nüket Kardam, who defines it as progressively built on UN International Women's Year (1975), CEDAW (1979) and UN conferences at Nairobi (1985), Vienna (1993) and Beijing (1995). Accordingly, the existence of a gender equality regime can be identified by "a) its formal components: principles, norms, legal instruments and monitoring mechanisms; b) the behavior (and compliance) of states who are party to this regime; and c) a cognitive framework – an emerging intersubjective consensus at the global level that women's rights are an integral aspect of human rights" (Kardam 2005, 16)

talking about what can be called a "tripartite cooperation" between the state, civil society, and transnational governance.

In this dissertation my analysis of Kemalist feminism's positioning within the state-civil society-transnational governance triangle relies on a Gramscian conceptualization of civil society which entails a symbiotic relationship between the state and civil society where the latter belongs to the broader notion of statehood (Katz 2009; Sauer 2011). What this implies is that just like civil society cannot be demarcated from the state; women's activism is part and parcel of state politics by being a constituent of civil society. Therefore, women's activism, even when activists are excluded and marginalized by the state, should be evaluated in relation to the state by virtue of its presence in civil society. In the case of Turkey, similar to other cases in the Middle East and elsewhere, citizenship was brought by state formations in a top-down manner, resulting in an enmeshment of state and civil society (Joseph 2000, 9). Yet, the focus on the state's role in shaping civil society in Turkish social science, has left civil society "as a locus of explanation, out of most analyses" (Acar and Altunok 2012, 33). Thus an understanding of civil society as part of statehood allows for reclaiming women's activism as an indispensable constituent of gender politics. In the era of globalization and neoliberalism, feminists face a dual situation where non-state actors are called upon to substitute for public services previously provided by the state and state funds for gender equality policies are shrinking (Sauer 2011, 287). This increases women's involvement in the tripartite cooperation by introducing the mechanisms of transnational governance in their activism, especially when it comes to funding. Therefore, more recent contributions from a Gramscian perspective theorize civil society as an integral part of "internationalized statehood," based on its involvement in the formation of hegemonic forms of problematizing certain issues and the solutions proposed to them (Schultz, 2010).

From this perspective, feminism-state relationship cannot be judged by a simplistic autonomy vs. assimilation approach but in its complexity, as a mutual engagement in which power and influence circulates (Randall 1998, 185). Women are not simply recipients of state policy as if the state is "something 'out there' and external to women's lives and women are 'done to' by a state over which they have little control" (Waylen 1998, 4). The state is a historical process in which women directly or indirectly participate through the political struggles they are involved in. Yet, feminists' relationship with the state is ambiguous because they simultaneously struggle for a woman-friendly state and against a masculinist state (Pettman 1999, 208). In the Turkish case, Ecevit similarly points at the volatile and self-contradictory position of the state, which created new opportunities for women through legislative and administrative reforms while at the same time maintaining women's dependency on men through pro-natalist policies and a support for women's traditional roles (2007, 187). The inconsistent attitude of the state is perpetuated by the global gender equality regime, as the states are held responsible for ensuring gender equality, sometimes against their will. This creates a complex relationship that cannot be reduced to assimilation even when women's organizations are incorporated by state structures.

One way to unpack the complex feminists-state relationship is to bring into the analysis the differentiation between dominant and non-dominant feminisms. Non-state actors of gender politics have differential access to state power. Among these actors are feminists and institutions of transnational governance but also political parties, social movements and civil society organizations that, with their religious, conservative, masculinist or democratic, gender-egalitarian political programs, compete over state power as well as the definition of women's interests. Dominant feminisms have better access to state power and are more likely to both constitute and represent their version of women's interests at the state level. But since the groups that are able to articulate their interests at the state level and hegemonize their

claims are historically specific and therefore partial and temporary, the content and scope of the interaction between the state and other actors of gender politics is conjunctural and temporary (Pringle and Watson 1992). In this sense dominant and non-dominant feminisms are not fixed categories with pre-defined gender agendas; inclusion and exclusion in these categories depend on which social groups have access to state power at a given historical context.

Looking at the state-feminism relationship through the lens of dominant and non-dominant feminisms is useful to investigate the dynamics of feminists' participation in the state-civil society-transnational governance tripartite cooperation and the ways in which their participation shapes their agendas and the relationship between different women's activisms. Drawing on the notion of political opportunity structures, Ewig and Ferree argue that "[f]eminist organizing strategies shift between autonomy and embeddedness, emphasizing autonomy when gender concerns are ignored or trivialized by other movements and embeddedness when their participation is welcomed" (2013, 451; see also Rai 1996). Political opportunity structures at global, regional, national and local levels influence the appeal and effectiveness of feminists' strategies of autonomy or co-operation (Ibid., 443). At the same time, women's differential access to political opportunity structures based on their class, ethnic, religious and sexual belongings bound the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society, and transnational governance by processes of inclusion and exclusion. Both the gendered, class-based, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious interests sought by the state and the framework of the global gender equality regime limit the scope of gender issues to be negotiated in the tripartite cooperation. In particular, the salience of the global gender equality regime creates similar forms of participation in gender politics across the globe that favors certain feminist agendas over others. The global gender equality regime with its gender-only agenda favors dominant feminist positions and encourages non-dominant feminisms to

subsume their intersectional demands under a gender-only agenda as a prerequisite to participate in decision making processes within the state-civil society-transnational governance framework. While the organizations and activists who fail to frame their agendas in the language required by the global gender equality regime—namely the "language of rights" (Molyneux and Razavi 2002)—might not be recognized by transnational actors and risk remaining marginal, those who challenge the state might be excluded even if they fully adopt the framework of the global gender equality regime. As a result, certain definitions of women's interests become legitimate and eligible for politicization at the expense of others, marking the field of women's activism with "domination, heteronomy, exclusion and injustice" (Sauer 2011, 295).

That the global gender equality regime triggers similar processes across the globe does not overshadow the differences between Western and non-Western feminisms in terms of the extent to which their agendas overlap with that of this regime. Problems related to poverty, education, health, national liberation and war are more prominent in non-Western feminists' agendas while Western feminisms tend to politicize issues related to greater economic opportunity, political representation, and sexuality (Smith 2000, 7). These agenda differences are used in claiming that women's rights are achieved in the West and the non-West still needs to achieve them (Grewal 2005). But the prevalence of neoliberalism and the co-existence of multiple and differential feminist agendas also show that the dynamics which differentiate the West from the non-West exist also on national (as well as local and regional) levels. These dynamics reveal themselves with regards to both, women's positioning vis-à-vis the state and the institutions of transnational governance, and the diversification within women's activism. For example, Sauer's analysis of women's activism in the EU countries show that "those women's associations that had the infrastructures, resources, and strategic frames to interact with state institutions became hegemonic, while other women's organizations became

marginalized and failed to gain a voice or agency in civil society or in state institutions" (2011, 295). Similarly, Naples points at the difference between small-scale grassroots organizations and well-established institutionalized organizations and suggest that instead of viewing this difference as an expression of the inequality between Western and non-Western feminists, we "acknowledge the ways in which class and status differences frequently characterize relationships between women's groups within nation-states" (2004, 276).

A particular process that characterizes feminists' engagement in the state-civil society-transnational governance triangle across the West and non-West is NGOization. As the global gender equality regime increasingly becomes the legal-legitimate framework of gender politics, it forces local feminisms to institutionalize and organize in the form of NGOs that are compatible not only with this regime but also with the accompanying neoliberalism that is promoted on both national and global levels. The "NGO-ization of feminism" (Lang 2000) works to compensate for the absence of welfare state provisions by enabling certain services to be delivered to disadvantaged women, albeit quite randomly and for a short period of time. According to Schultz, the political outcome of NGOization is that women's organizations "orient themselves toward a pragmatic shaping of state-oriented politics (to the neglect of protest and social movement politics). They tend to labor 'lobby' and 'dialogue politics' in so-called government networks –integrating themselves or being integrated into the 'integral state' as experts, political consultants, or service providers" (2010, 179). While this process renders the notion of gender equality a crucial element of democratic society, it problematically depoliticizes the radical concepts of "empowerment" and "liberation" by equating feminism with women's temporary access to resources without necessarily aiming at the structural transformation of gender relations. Drawing attention to NGO's dependence on foreign donors, albeit their possible independence from their states, Ghodsee indicates that the celebration of NGOs as non-state actors is "rooted in a Cold War bias against state-based

solutions to social problems” (2014, 561). Yet, in line with the attempt to move beyond the assimilation vs. autonomy approach to feminism-state relationship, NGOization should be discussed in terms of its positive and negative results for women’s activism. For many local feminisms NGOization creates an opportunity space to gain relative independence from local non-state actors of gender politics whose agendas are potentially less egalitarian and democratic. Moreover, as Bernal and Grewal (2014) argue, women's NGOs still have room for maneuver because neoliberal conditions do not dictate everything that they do or practice. Women also seek strategies to neutralize the negative effects of NGOisation. Thus NGOization and women’s autonomy are not mutually exclusive. Against the idea that institutionalization and professionalization caused women's movement to lose power, Sawer and Jamieson claim that the "loss of political influence has less to do with institutionalisation than with a changed discursive environment that constructed the welfare state and women's reliance on it as a problem. Nonetheless, women's movement institutions have continued to sustain feminist values and engage in differently organised but effective campaigns" (Sawer and Jamieson 2014, 403).

## 2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I built a methodological-conceptual framework that I use in the analysis of the relationship between Kemalist feminism and the politics of gender in Turkey. In the next five chapters I employ this framework in the following manner. A de-centered approach to women’s activism enables a discussion on the characteristics of Kemalist feminism in its own terms, as opposed to identifying through a comparison with dominant Western forms of feminist activism. An intersectional approach coincides with a decentered approach at the point of problematization of the dominant Western definitions of feminism (see Davis 2011). Together, a de-centered and intersectional approach makes it possible to situate Kemalist feminism as a brand of dominant women’s activism in a non-dominant world region. Looking

at Kemalist feminism as a dominant women's activism in a non-dominant world region means paying attention to how "privileged intersectionalities" (Carbado 2013) play a role in the reproduction of inequalities, something that often falls outside the focus of feminist works on intersectionality because of their concern with integrating marginalized perspectives (Lutz et al. 2011, 7). Formulating women's activism as women's politics allows for an examination of how Kemalist feminist politics have engaged with not only the politics of gender but also—simultaneously—the politics of class, nation/ethnicity and culture/religion. Finally, locating feminists' involvement in gender politics within the scope of state-civil society-transnational governance tripartite cooperation helps to trace both, the global processes that have shaped Kemalist feminist politics, and the ways in which the relationship between Kemalist women and the Turkish state has changed over the course of time. In the final chapter of the dissertation I reflect further on the implications of the methodological-conceptual framework I built in this chapter for the analysis of the relationship between women's activism and gender politics.

### 3. Kemalism's gender project and the formation of Kemalist women's activism (1923–1935)

Kemalist women's activism emerged simultaneously with the consolidation of Kemalism following the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. In the single-party period (1923–1946), both Kemalism in general and Kemalist women's activism in particular immensely shaped the politics of gender in Turkey. While the notions of "new woman" and "modern family" lied at the heart of the Kemalist project, women who actively participated in building the Turkish nation became the pioneers of a certain kind of women's activism that pertained to Kemalist nationalism. Kemalist women in the multi-party period (1946 onwards) and Kemalist feminists in the post-1980 period adapted the ways in which they interpreted, politicized, and realized Kemalism's gender project to the political conjunctures in which they pursued activism. But throughout the republican history they remained loyal to the founding principles of Kemalism, namely laicism, nationalism and modernism/westernism, and, albeit to a lesser extent, to the Kemalist notion of citizenship based on the ideas of Turkishness, classless society, and the modern family. For Kemalist women and feminists, Kemalism was the precondition for defending women's interests and furthering women's rights in Turkey.

This chapter offers a brief historical account of Kemalism's gender project and the formation of Kemalist women's activism in the early-republican period, from the foundation of the Republic in 1923 until the dissolution of the Turkish Women's Union (*Türk Kadın Birliği*, TKB) in 1935. It provides the historical background for the analyses and discussions of Kemalist women's and Kemalist feminist activism that I undertake in the following chapters of this dissertation.

The chapter has two objectives. The first one is to situate Kemalism's gender project within the Kemalist project as a whole, by looking at how the notions of new woman and modern family related to, complimented and reproduced the class, national/ethnic and cultural/religious aspects of Kemalism. Politicization of the "woman question" in Turkey was,

unlike what the official Kemalist historiography proposed, far from being introduced by Kemalist leaders. Public discussions around the woman's status in society had started around mid-nineteenth century, in the context of Ottoman modernization. However, it was Kemalists who articulated the "woman question" in their socio-political agenda as an immediate problem to be solved. A number of reforms inspired by Kemalism's founding principles of laicism, nationalism, and modernism/westernism improved women's status in the family and enabled them to join the public sphere in large numbers. At the same time, women's inclusion in the public sphere was restricted by these very principles as well as by the Kemalist definition of citizenship. While the preservation of the patriarchal relations of gender in the private sphere restrained women's access to public life, Kemalists' promotion of a womanhood that was Turkish, non-Islamic (but not non-Muslim), urban and professional excluded Islamic, non-Turkish, and non-middle-class women from the Kemalist public sphere. The notions of new woman and modern family helped to construct and reinforce the gender, class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious aspects of the Kemalist project.

The second objective of the chapter concerns the formation of Kemalist women's activism in the light of the interplay between early-republican feminism and Kemalism. As I discussed in the introductory chapter, feminist and gender studies scholars in Turkey posited Kemalism and feminism as antithetical to each other and argued for an inherent incompatibility between the two political projects. Şirin Tekeli, one of the first feminist scholars to systematically criticize Kemalism, argued that the "state feminist era" (i.e. the early-republican period) had desubjectified women and disabled them from a rights-based struggle due to the top-down character of Kemalist gender reforms (Tekeli 1991, 76). According to Tekeli, early-republican feminism in Turkey came in two stages where the grassroots movement of the first stage had "disappeared to give way to state feminism" (Ibid., 12). Tekeli's view was confirmed and reproduced by other feminist and gender studies

scholars in the 1990s and 2000s (see, for example, Toska 1998; Zihnioğlu 2003). As I argued in the first chapter, the treatment of feminism and Kemalism as mutually exclusive entities makes it difficult to account for Kemalist women's struggle for gender equality in the multi-party period and for the Kemalist feminism of the post-1980 period. Therefore, in this chapter, I suggest an alternative reading of the relationship between early-republican feminism and Kemalism, and a different evaluation of the formation of Kemalist women's activism thereof.

More specifically, I suggest to focus on the continuities, and not only on the ruptures, between early-republican feminism and Kemalist women's activism, and on the transformation of early-republican feminists into Kemalist woman activists. Seen from this perspective, my analysis is as follows: Kemalist reforms, their top-down character notwithstanding, were at the same time partial answers to the demands raised by the early-republican feminists who were elite women supportive of republicanism, laicism, modernism, and Turkish nationalism. The main lines of disagreement between the early-republican feminists and the Kemalists were over the issues of women's political representation and the relationship between the interests of women and those of the nation. Kemalists were intolerant of women's autonomous organizing for political rights and they eventually eliminated the self-organized early-republican feminism from the political field. Moreover, whereas feminists' priority was women's full equality with men, Kemalists defined women's interests by subsuming them to those of the nation. Kemalists' preference for a women's activism that is primarily concerned with mobilizing women in the service of the Kemalist project has defined the course of Kemalist women's activism. Like in other secular nationalist modernization projects, it was Kemalism that enabled and simultaneously limited the capacity of women's activism with regards to furthering women's rights. At the same time, early-republican feminist ideas were partially appropriated by the Kemalist discourse of women's rights. Therefore, Kemalist women's activism was an—albeit uneven—synthesis of early-republican

feminism and Kemalism. This synthesis made it possible for Kemalist women to challenge women's oppression and raise gender-equality demands in the multi-party period and, as we shall see in Chapter 5, enabled a later generation of Kemalist women to simultaneously identify as feminists in the post-1980 period.

The chapter is organized in five sections. The first two sections situate Kemalism's gender project within the Kemalist project as a whole by discussing the three founding principles of Kemalism (laicism, nationalism, modernism/westernism) and three discursive features of Kemalist citizenship (Turkishness, classless society, the modern family), with a focus on how they related to Kemalism's gender project. The next two sections investigate the transitioning of early-republican feminism into Kemalist women's activism and the assimilation of feminist ideas into the Kemalist definition of women's interests, respectively. The historical account of Kemalism, early-republican feminism, and Kemalist women's activism offered in these four sections is limited to its relevance for the future stages of Kemalist women's and Kemalist feminist activism that are the subject of this dissertation. Therefore, some major topics in Kemalism that don't have direct relevance for the following chapters such as the economy, the Turkish army, Turkey's relations with Western countries and with the Soviet Union, non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim minorities in Turkey are omitted in this chapter.<sup>48</sup> The final section summarizes the analysis presented in the chapter and discusses Kemalism's gender project and the formation of Kemalist women's activism in relation to other secular and/or nationalist modernization process in non-dominant parts of the world, with the aim of situating Kemalism's gender project and the formation of Kemalist women's activism in a broader world context.

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<sup>48</sup> For comprehensive accounts of the early-republican period see B. Lewis (2002), Ahmad (2002), Zürcher (2004), and Mango (2009).

### 3.1. Kemalism's three pillars and the terms of women's public inclusion: Laicism, nationalism, and modernism/westernism

"Kemalism" as a term entered the CHF's (*Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası*, CHF, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP after 1935) party program for the first time in 1931 (Köker 2006, 201). The CHF accepted Kemalism as the official state ideology in its 1935 Congress. In 1937, the six principles of Kemalism (Republicanism, Populism, Nationalism, Laicism, Etatism and Revolutionism) entered the constitution as the defining characteristics of the Turkish Republic.<sup>49</sup> Despite CHF's belated adoption of the term, Kemalism was a nationalist project which rested on the legacy of the Young Turk movement (Zürcher 2004). The Young Turks, organized under the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, ITC), came to power following the 1908 Revolution and ruled during the last decade of the Ottoman Empire (the Second Constitutional Era), until 1918 when the British troops occupied Istanbul following the Armistice of Mudros.<sup>50</sup> In 1919, the nationalist struggle resumed under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, who presided the Association for the Defense of the Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia (*Anadolu ve Rumeli Müdafaa-i Hukuk Cemiyeti*). Following the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1922), the Association was succeeded by the People's Party (*Halk Fırkası*, *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası* in 1924). In October 1923, the Turkish

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<sup>49</sup> See 1924 Anayasası (1924 Constitution).

<sup>50</sup> Hanioglu (2001) traces the Young Turk movement back to 1889 when it emerged in opposition to Sultan Abdülhamid II's oppressive regime. The content of the Young Turk intellectual propaganda included positivism, elitism, and Social Darwinism. In its early stages, the ITC was an umbrella organization that was comprised of various ethnic and religious groups. Yet, following the 1908 revolution, as the ITC consolidated its power among the Ottoman army and bureaucracy, their notion of equality which was based on the equality of different ethnic and religious groups within the Ottoman Empire evolved into a strong preference for Turkish nationalism and Turkification policies. In Mardin's (2000) analysis, the Young Turks grew up on the ideas of Young Ottomans who introduced Enlightenment ideals into Turkish public life while trying to synthesize them with Islam (4). As the Young Ottomans evolved into the Young Turk movement which later gave birth to Kemalism, there was a successive weakening of the Islamic content of these three episodes of Ottoman-Turkish modernization (Ibid., 404). On the other hand, Hanioglu (2008) warns against a deterministic approach and the assignment of an ideological mission to the late-Ottoman history when discussing the contextual continuity between the Young Ottoman, Young Turk, and Kemalist periods: "[An] examination of the ideological debates of the late Ottoman times should avoid projecting this later historical reality of a struggle between revolutionary secularists and religious conservatives onto an earlier, altogether different one. Nor will it do simplify historical reality by depicting two imaginary camps upholding the contending banners of scientific progress and religious obscurantism - as is too often the case with modern commentators blinded by the modern Republican reality" (2).

Parliament, comprised exclusively of the CHF members, proclaimed the Republic of Turkey. The parliament subsequently elected Mustafa Kemal as the President of the Turkish Republic.

Kemalists were an elite cadre who had held high positions in the Ottoman state and army and who based their political project on "Anatolian populism" as opposed to Ottoman elitism (Göle 1996, 62). Three ideological foundations that Kemalism inherited from the Young Turks, namely laicism, nationalism and modernism/westernism, became the main pillars of the Republic and set the terms for Turkish citizenship in a co-constitutive way (cf. Cagaptay 2006). Two other principles of Kemalism that I discuss in the next section, namely populism and etatism, supported the discursive formation of citizenship. Secularization of social, cultural, political, and economic life had been ongoing in the Ottoman Empire since the early-nineteenth century (Berkes 1998). Yet, it was Kemalists, particularly Mustafa Kemal,<sup>51</sup> who adopted laicism as a founding principle of Turkish nationalism. In Nur Betül Çelik's account, laicism had a double meaning: First, it was the expression of national sovereignty—as opposed to religious authority—and the related secularization of the state machinery. Second, it meant the organization of the society according to the scientific rules and principles upon which modern societies were built (Çelik 2006, 85). As such, laicism linked to both nationalism and modernism/westernism, and provided the moral-cultural framework for Turkish society. Kemalists employed laicism as an instrument of social engineering in their attempts to exclude Islam from the socio-political realm and to westernize society in a top-down manner (Taspinar 2005, 203).

Following the foundation of the Republic, a series of reforms formed the legal framework of Kemalist laicism. In 1924, the Caliphate was abolished and replaced by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*), founded under the Prime

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<sup>51</sup> For a comprehensive account of Mustafa Kemal's intellectual biography see Hanioglu (2011).

Ministry.<sup>52</sup> The 1924 Law on Unification of Education (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu*) banned religious schools, united all schools under the Ministry of Education, and made primary education universal and free to all citizens. In 1925, dervish orders (*tekke* and *zaviye*) were banned and their shrines (*türbe*) were closed. The new Civil Law (*Türk Kanunu Medenisi*), which replaced the Islamic *Mecelle* in 1926, closed down the Sharia courts and rendered all jurisdiction secular. According to Berkes (1998), the Civil Law was the "greatest coup of the new period" because it deprived religious men of their function both in civil procedure and courts. In 1928, Islam as the official religion was deleted from the 1924 Constitution (*Teşkilât-ı Esasîye Kanunu*). The Surname Law (*Soyadı Kanunu*) in 1934 banned the use of religious titles such as *hacı*, *molla*, *hafız*, and *şeyh*. In 1937, laicism—together with the other principles of Kemalism—entered the constitution. Finally, the Law of Associations (*Dernekler Kanunu*) in 1938 prohibited social or political organizing on the basis of religion, sect or religious order (*tarikât*), and criminalized religious propaganda. Kemalists' intention to replace the unifying function of religion with the positivist idea of a laic nation made these developments ground-breaking in character (Köker 2003, 156). However, as Atasoy indicates, the laicist reforms did not imply a strict separation between the state and religion, nor the total eradication of Islam from the public sphere: "In political terms, citizens were regarded as good Muslims and expected to embody an ethos of responsibility before other citizens, the nation and the state" (2011, 107).<sup>53</sup> The Directorate of Religious Affairs was made responsible for the interpretation of Sunni-Islamic practices and beliefs and the administration of the mosques and the religious personnel. The Directorate also contributed to the "Turkification of Islam," through measures such as the introduction of the call for prayer

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<sup>52</sup> The sultanate was already abolished in 1922. Upon the abolishment of the Caliphate, all members of the Ottoman dynasty were forced to exile.

<sup>53</sup> According to Berkes, the "lack of a doctrinal basis has inevitably been a vulnerable feature of the Kemalist secularism. The regime has been criticized by the communists for its toleration of religion, by the Islamists for its persecution of religion, and by the Western liberals for its keeping religion within the fold of the state" (1998, 502).

(*ezan*) in Turkish in 1926 (Üstel 2004). By making religious practice available in Turkish, the Kemalist leaders aimed to "raise the moral standards of the masses" as well as to render the existing religious establishment obsolete and religion a private matter (Hanioglu 2011, 153–155).

In terms of its transformative influence over gender relations, the Civil Law was the most significant of all laicist reforms in Turkey. The new law outlawed polygamy and recognized the equality of sexes in marriage, divorce, custody of children, and inheritance. Civil marriage was made compulsory to ensure women's social and economic rights. Religious marriage was not banned but criminalized if not accompanied by civil marriage (1936). The new law also allowed women to take up professions that were hitherto only open to men, such as in the judiciary sector.<sup>54</sup> With the Civil Law, laicism became the backbone of the Kemalist discourse of women's rights. For Kemalists, laicism rescued women from oppression disguised as Islam which, in their opinion, was the major source of their "backwardness" and their confinement to the domestic sphere. Indeed, greater civil rights improved women's status in the family and enabled their greater access to the public sphere. However, the Civil Law did not aim to challenge the patriarchal nature of gender relations beyond improving women's condition in the family and allowing their inclusion in the public sphere. For example, it recognized the husband as the head and the representative of the family. In case of disagreement, the custody of children was given to the father. Woman's employment was subjected to the husband's approval. The recognition of the husband's authority in the Civil Law maintained the traditional foundations of gender norms whose legitimacy was hitherto provided by the Islamic doctrine (Saktanber 2003, 326).<sup>55</sup> In this

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<sup>54</sup> See 743 Sayılı Türk Kanunu Medenisi (Turkish Civil Law no. 743).

<sup>55</sup> In some cases, the new law was even to the detriment of women's rights, such as in the case of land ownership. Whereas prior to the Civil Law women had the right to inherit land according to the Islamic law, the new law stated that women could inherit an agricultural holding only if none of her brothers wanted it. This led women peasants, in many cases, to avoid official marriages, leaving themselves and their children, in the absence of Sharia courts, devoid of legal personhood (Kocabicak 2016).

sense, the Civil Law improved women's social status but at the same time replaced private patriarchy (Islamic law) with public patriarchy (state control over the family institution) (cf. Walby 1990).

Modernism/westernism and nationalism co-constituted laicism in the Kemalist project and its discourse of women's rights. Kemalists' modernization motto was "to reach the level of contemporary civilization" (*muasır medeniyet seviyesine ulaşmak*), that is, the level of European modernity. With this aim, the Kemalist regime's outlook was to both westernize Turkey and to "make it powerful enough to resist the West" (Kahraman 2005, 71). This dual approach, which was inherited from the Young Turks, led the Kemalists to differentiate between anti-imperialism and anti-westernism (Berkes 1998, 433); Kemalists waged an anti-imperialist struggle against the West, but this didn't keep them from adopting westernism as a reference point of Turkish modernization. According to Güneş-Ayata and Acar, the co-existence of westernism and anti-imperialism was possible because neither the Turkish Republic nor the Ottoman Empire were colonized: "Turkish modernizers did not find it contradictory or difficult to be simultaneously Western oriented and nationalist because the two notions did not carry, in this culture, real memories of deep hostility that often come from being dominated, exploited and humiliated" (1999, 338).<sup>56</sup> More importantly, identifying with the West helped Kemalism to other Islam in the name of modernization (Alaranta 2011).<sup>57</sup> In

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<sup>56</sup> Indeed, Hanioglu (2008) argues that the economic, social, and cultural influence of Europe on the Ottoman Empire since the late-eighteenth century makes it impossible to treat "modernity" as an entirely European phenomenon; by the end of the nineteenth century, a uniquely Ottoman modernity was established.

<sup>57</sup> Alaranta's analysis of the relationship between Kemalism, Islam, and the West is worth quoting at length: "[T]he Turkish Revolution, in order to be legitimate, needed to accomplish something crucial that the Ottoman Empire was inherently and essentially incapable of achieving. This crucial 'something' was the enlightenment. That is to say, in the Kemalist discourse *aydınlanma* (enlightenment) and *muasır medeniyet* (contemporary civilization) are 'foreign' only until 19 May 1919 [the day that the War of Independence started]. At that moment they were made an internal part of the 'new Turkey' by its founding father, Atatürk. This ... explains why there was such a pressing need to construct a glorious pre-Islamic antiquity, represented ... as the 'cradle of civilizations.' Thus, in the Kemalist discourse, it is not the 'West' that is the fundamental 'other' of the Turkish nation, it politicizes Islam represented by the Ottoman Empire. This is why Kemalist writers have so systematically argued that the *Türk İnkılâbı/Atatürk İhtilali* (Turkish Revolution/Atatürk Revolution) is the execution of the universal enlightenment project in the Turkish nation-state: the 'revolution' was legitimate because it executes the enlightenment in Turkey. If the Kemalist discourse had proclaimed that the Ottoman Islamic Empire had already during the eighteenth-century been capable to produce the enlightenment, the

the eyes of the Kemalists, Islam was also against Turkish nationalism because it was imposed on Turks by Arabs and it had weakened the Turkish national identity (Hanioglu 2011, 132).

In line with the aim of reaching the level of modern civilization, the Kemalists adopted, with minor changes, the Civil Law and the Property Law from Switzerland, the Law of Commerce from Germany, and the Penal Law from Italy (Berkes 1998). Turkey also synchronized with the West by adopting the Gregorian calendar (1926), Western numerals (1928) and weights and measures (1931). The rest day changed from Friday to Sunday in 1935. The Turkish alphabet, derived from the Latin alphabet, replaced the Ottoman script in 1928. In 1929, Arabic and Persian was removed from the school curricula. Later, in the 1930s, the Turkish language reform was launched to eliminate the Arabic and Persian words and grammatical features from the Turkish language (G. Lewis 2002). With these reforms, westernization complemented laicism and nationalism, by cutting off ties with the Islamic script and strengthening the Turkish national identity.

One of the most significant aspects of modernization/westernization was the reform in dress. In 1925, what is commonly known as the Hat Law (*Şapka Kanunu*) banned the wearing of fez for men and made it compulsory for state employees to wear the European-style hat. It also prohibited the wearing of men's religious gear such as *cübbe* or *sarık*, except in the case of religious men who were employed by the state. The adoption of Western attire did not ban veiling but strongly encouraged women to uncover. Uncovering distinguished the "new woman" from her traditional, Islamic counterpart.<sup>58</sup> It also symbolized laicism as it implied religion's limitation to the private sphere. From 1925 on, and especially in the 1930s, local branches of the state and the CHF launched anti-veiling campaigns to encourage women to stop using the face veil (*peçe*) and the full-body veil (*çarşaf*) (H. Yılmaz 2013; Libal 2014;

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Atatürk Revolution and the Kemalist regime established by it would have completely lost their legitimacy" (2011, 340–341).

<sup>58</sup> For women's public participation and the status of veiling and uncovering under Kemalist modernization, see Göle (1996) and Yeğenoğlu (1998).

Adak 2014). In Adak's account, these campaigns played an important role in defining the Kemalist public sphere as laic and modern (2014, 47). They also enabled women's involvement as visible actors of the westernization process, turning them into the "agents of the new regime" (Ibid., 57). Women of the urban, educated, upper classes, especially civil servants, promoted the European-style dress with enthusiasm (H. Yılmaz 2013, 15).

Kemalists had adopted the values of Western modernity while constructing an independent national identity by inventing the idea of an "authentic and intact Turkish origin" (Yeğenoğlu 1998, 123).<sup>59</sup> The notion of new woman, with her laic status and modern appearance, mediated the tension between modernism as westernism and Turkish nationalism with its alleged Anatolian roots. This mediation was, in Chatterjee's words, made by "separating the cultural field of nationalism into material and spiritual spheres" (Chatterjee 1993, 120–121). Similar to other nationalist modernization projects in non-dominant world regions, it was the material sphere where Kemalism had its vision of reaching the contemporary level of civilization; in the spiritual sphere, the aspiration was to strengthen the "Turkish essence" of national culture. The new woman stood, among other things, for the resolution of the conflict between the material and spiritual spheres; women would bridge these two spheres, embracing both the tradition (Turkish culture) in the spiritual sphere and the principles of modernity (Western life-style) in the material sphere. In this aim, a "unique combination of Western and Turkic images" was used to transform the gender roles of women (Güneş-Ayata and Acar 1999, 339).

On the other hand, the new woman's mediating role between the Turkish culture and Western life-style subjected her active involvement in public life to male control. The Kemalist elite, who saw the "Turkish woman" as emblematic of the rupture from the Ottoman Empire, contrasted between the "backward," "traditional" Ottoman women and the "modern,"

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<sup>59</sup> In line with this aim, Ankara replaced Istanbul as the new capital in 1923. This underscored the Kemalists' eagerness to detach from the Ottoman Empire and their preference for rooting the origins of the Turkish nation in Anatolia.

"enlightened" Republican women. In this way, women became the symbols for both the "dark" past and the "luminous" future (Bora and Sayılan 1998, 135). Yet, Kemalists supported the ideal of Turkish woman also against the threat of "over-westernization" of women. In public life, the new woman would neither look like her "ignorant, traditional" sister nor like her "frivolous, degenerate" Western counterpart (Sancar 2004). Mustafa Kemal himself emphasized that women's clothing should reflect their modern life style but also maintain the national spirit and avoid imitating the West (Yeğenoğlu 1998, 173). Those women who adopted this appearance, in turn, acquired the respectable status of active citizenship and public visibility (Sancar 2012, 314).

### **3.2. Three discursive features of Kemalist citizenship: Turkishness, classless society and the modern family**

Alongside the founding principles of laicism, nationalism and modernism/westernism, three discursive features of Kemalist citizenship were employed to generate popular support for the Kemalist project: Turkishness, classless society and the modern family. The populism and etatism principles of Kemalism supported the formation of these features. The Kemalist notion of citizenship lied within the civic-republican tradition where citizens' duties towards the state and society came prior to their rights. Defining Turkish citizenship, Kemalists drew on both the French notion of a contractarian, assimilationist and state-centered citizenship, and the German notion of organic, differentialist and dissimilationist citizenship (Kadioğlu 1998). Rather than being gained through struggle from below, Turkish citizenship was imposed from above by the state in order to facilitate the implementation of the Kemalist project (Ibid.; Kahraman 2005). The discursive features of citizenship, namely Turkishness, classless society and the modern family, overlapped with the national/ethnic, class, and culture/religion dimensions of Kemalism's gender project, respectively. As I discuss in the next sections, these were also features that shaped Kemalist women's activism.

By the time of the foundation of the Republic, Turkey was left with a ninety-eight percent Muslim Anatolian population and with Turkish and Kurdish as its two main languages (Zürcher 2004, 164). The 1924 Constitution defined the name "*Türk*" as a political term that included all citizens of the Turkish Republic, without distinction of, or reference to, ethnicity or religion. In practice, however, the legal definition of citizenship as devoid of ethnic and religious connotations did not apply; Turk was an ethno-secular term (Yıldız 2007).<sup>60</sup> There were three sets of "others" excluded from full access to citizenship: Non-Muslims, non-Turkish speaking and non-Sunni populations (Kadıoğlu 2007). These groups were subjected to systematic assimilation and Turkification, with the aim of creating "a country speaking with one language, thinking in the same way and sharing the same sentiment" (Ülker 2008, 2).<sup>61</sup> The cultural assimilation politics of the Kemalist state imposed a uniform and anonymous village/peasant and city/urbanite Turkish identity upon citizens in spite of the multi-cultural, multi-religious and ethnically heterogeneous reality of Anatolia (Üstel 2004, 326). The Lausanne Treaty (1923) which, according to Mango (2009), is the founding document of the Turkish state, had defined the non-Muslim (mainly Jewish, Armenian, Greek) population as minorities but the same did not apply to the Muslim population such as Kurds and Arabs or the non-Sunni Muslim population such as Alevis. This enabled the official denial of the ethnic and religious identities of Muslim minorities. For example, in the name of propagating Turkishness, education in Kurdish and the use of Kurdish language in

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<sup>60</sup> The ethno-cultural significance of Turkishness in the Kemalist notion of citizenship was supported by a rewriting of Turkish history and national consciousness based on the pre-Ottoman past (Ersanlı 2009). According to the new official history, Anatolia and Thrace had always belonged to Turks, who "moved into this land from its eastern gates, and through setting and creating the first constructions ... made it prosperous" (Keyman and Kancı 2011, 324). School textbooks depicted the Turkish nation as "the greatest, the most ancient, and the purest" in the history of world civilizations (Inan 1931, quoted in Hanioglu 2011, 182). This vision was supported by the works of the institutions such as the Society for the Study of Turkish History (*Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti*, 1931) and the Society for Research on the Turkish Language (*Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti*, 1932), which aimed to disconnect the history of Turks from their Ottoman past by establishing a pre-Ottoman past. For example, the Sun Language Theory (*Güneş Dil Teorisi*), produced by the Society for Research on the Turkish Language, claimed that all other languages were derived from the ancient Turkic language, which proved that the Turkish civilization was the cradle of world civilizations (Zürcher 2004, 190–191).

<sup>61</sup> For the Turkification efforts before the Republic see Ülker (2005).

courts were banned, and the geographical term Kurdistan was removed from the school textbooks (van Bruinessen 1992; Uçarlar 2012). In line with this view, Mustafa Kemal claimed, in his famous Speech (*Nutuk*, 1927),<sup>62</sup> that the Turkish War of Independence was waged—not to save the Ottoman Empire but—to found the new Turkish state (Zürcher 2004, 175) and it signified the "Turks' collective effort for enlightenment" (Alaranta 2011, 19; 28).<sup>63</sup>

Similar to the Young Turks before them, Kemalists did not launch a socio-economic reform program that could change the property relations in Turkish society (Zürcher 2004, 173). As early as in 1923, at the Izmir Economic Congress (*Izmir İktisadi Kongresi*), the regime declared its adoption of capitalism on the condition that the economic relations with the imperialist West would not resume (Kazancıgil 2006, 237). Populism (*halkçılık*), one of the six principles of Kemalism (see Section 2.1), targeted class relations. Mustafa Kemal defended that: "Our people is composed not of social classes with conflicting interests, but of classes whose coexistence is indispensable for one another" (quoted in Berkes 1998, 462). "Society with no privilege and class" (*sınıfsız ve imtiyazsız toplum*) became Kemalists' motto for addressing class relations. In Zürcher's analysis, populism positively indicated "putting the interests of the nation before those of any group or class," but negatively it meant the denial of class interests and the prohibition of politics based on these interests (2004, 182). This view was adopted in the right-wing and left-wing versions of Kemalism alike. For example, a group of left-wing Kemalists, organized in the early-1930s around the journal *Kadro* (Cadre), argued from a historical materialist perspective that Turkey was not a class society like the societies in the Western world (Hanioglu 2011, 188–199).

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<sup>62</sup> For a detailed analysis of Mustafa Kemal's Speech, see Parla (1991).

<sup>63</sup> In line with this claim, a shift in the school curricula "from the Ottoman world to that of the specifically Turkish; from Islamic society to the emphatic laicism of the single-party period, with an emphasis on the pre-Islamic history of Turks; from the urban to the rural as Anatolia was emphasized at the expense of Istanbul; and from the elite to the populace" (Fortna 2011, 32–33) ensured that the new generations of the Republic did not identify with their Ottoman past.

Kemalism's denial of differential class interests and appraisal of a classless society had three interrelated consequences. First, it legitimized the role of the state in preventing the emergence of class antagonism (Köker 2006, 110). The regime adopted a corporatist ideology according to which society was not made up of classes but occupational groups whose interests were represented by the state (cf. Parla and Davison 2004).<sup>64</sup> Second, etatism (*devletçilik*), another of the six principles of Kemalism, meant in fact creating a Muslim bourgeois class in the interests of the society as a whole (Keyder 2009, 101–115).<sup>65</sup> Finally, class differences were translated into a difference between urban and rural groups, which then overlapped with binaries such as modern vs. traditional and developed vs. under-developed. The state on one hand targeted the education of the rural population; on the other hand, it addressed the urban population and gave them the responsibility of changing the lives of rural people (Fortna 2011, 35). This gave the upper classes the task of social engineering, turning populism into an elitist form of nationalism (Çelik 2006, 78). Those who assumed this task formed, following Chatterjee's definition, the Kemalist middle class; a class of people who stood "in the middle," who were the principle agents of nationalism, and who mediated the relation between nationalism and its followers, assuming the cultural leadership of a hegemonic movement, i.e. Kemalist nationalism (Chatterjee 1993, 35–36).

The third discursive feature of Kemalist citizenship was the modern family. The Turkish state sought to regulate citizen's private lives as for how they dressed, spoke, and performed recreational activities (Kadioğlu 1998; İçduygu et al. 1999). In the Kemalist notion of publicity (*kamusalılık*), the acceptable codes of behavior were defined so as to include private life, where citizens' duties towards themselves and their family formed a continuum with their duties towards the nation and the state (Üstel 2004, 323). In this vein, the family

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<sup>64</sup> According to Çelik, populism is the constitutive principle of Kemalism which keeps all other principles together (2006, 76–77). Populism, in Belge's account, worked as a remedy for the four enemies of the single-party regime: Liberalism, communism, reactionism, and separatism/Kurdish nationalism (2006, 34).

<sup>65</sup> For the etatism and the economic policies of the single-party period see Keyder (2009, 117–140).

became of crucial importance in raising responsible citizens. The modern family, as an institution, formed the basis of the "good child=good citizen" equation; as a metaphor, the nation was envisioned as a big family, which provided the basis for solidarity among its members and implied kinship ties among citizens (Şerifsoy 2004).<sup>66</sup> In the new family, women's and men's gender roles were redefined in laicist, nationalist, and modern terms.<sup>67</sup> Women's status in the family was higher thanks to the newly attained civil rights, but the family=nation equation drew on clearly differentiated gender roles. While the main citizenship duties for men were to vote, to serve in the military and to pay taxes, women's duties towards the state and the nation were primarily to raise children, to run the family institution and to provide logistic support for male citizens from home; this made the relationship of man and woman one of solidarity and a common aim (Üstel 2004). The recognition of women's honorable role of raising the children of the Republic supported their newly attained prestige in the public sphere. At the same time, patriarchal gender roles such as the sexual division of labor and women's duty to obey and respect their husbands were smoothly articulated to the notion of the family. The definition of care work and household duties as women's tasks complemented the male control over women's public appearance.

The primacy of care work and household duties in women's lives, in the absence of public child care services, made pursuing a professional career difficult for many urban women (Makal 2010).<sup>68</sup> Kemalists were not concerned with women's participation in paid employment as much as they were with their adoption of a modern life-style. Women's education, a constitutive element of the Kemalist women's rights discourse, served the need of preparing young women for modern motherhood and housewifery rather than employment. School textbooks did not mention women's participation in employment even though

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<sup>66</sup> For the relationship between militarism and the notion of the nation as a big family see Altınay (2004).

<sup>67</sup> Suad Joseph argues that, unlike the Western societies where the basic unit of society was the individualized citizen, Middle Eastern states perceived the family as the basic unit of society and claimed responsibility over its protection (2000, 22).

<sup>68</sup> For an account of women's paid labor in the early-republican period see Makal (2010).

vocational schools for women existed since the mid-nineteenth century. Instead, they stressed women's primary roles as managers of the home economy and treated their employment as exceptional (Üstel 2004).<sup>69</sup> Girls' Institutes (*Kız Enstitüleri*) and Evening Art Schools for Girls (*Kız Akşam Sanat Okulları*) that opened during the early-republican period and were attended by thousands of young women were examples of this understanding (Akşit 2005). Women who participated in professional life in the early-republican period were mostly upper-class women who belonged to and/or were raised by the Kemalist elite and who had already, to a significant degree, adopted a modern life-style in the pre-republican period. For women belonging to the lower classes, these women were role models as far as the adoption of a modern life-style was concerned but not with regards to participation in public life (Y. Arat 1997). Thus, contrary to the Kemalist imagination of a homogeneous, classless society, women in republican Turkey were always-already divided along class lines. Class divisions further coincided with ethnic and religious divisions. For women who belonged to Muslim minorities, such as the Kurdish minority whose existence was denied in the Kemalist project, modernization meant not only housewifization but also subjection to a politics of assimilation and Turkification (Akşit 2009).

Notwithstanding the conditional inclusion of women in the public sphere based on their class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion (see previous section), the groundbreaking character of Kemalist reforms for women's lives cannot be undervalued. Many women benefited from the new regime as mothers, wives and daughters in the private sphere and, although to a lesser degree, as teachers, doctors, lawyers, judges, social workers, public administrators, and members of the parliament in the public sphere. As recent studies on oral history show, a considerable number of women adopted the Kemalist reforms with great

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<sup>69</sup> For an examination of the depiction of women in the school textbooks in the early-republican period, see Gümüsoğlu (1996).

enthusiasm (Akşit, 2005; Özyürek 2006). The first generation of Kemalist woman activists were among these women.

### 3.3. Women's political mobilization: Kemalism vs. early-republican feminism

In spite of their from-above character, Kemalist reforms were at the same time partial answers to the demands raised by Ottoman feminists since before the foundation of the Republic. The discussions in Turkey on women's inclusion in the public sphere, especially through education, had started already around the mid-nineteenth century (Işın 1988). Ottoman women themselves participated in these discussions by writing in women's journals of the period (S. Çakır 1994), but their actual political mobilization took place only in the early-twentieth century.<sup>70</sup> Ottoman feminists, especially since the Second Constitutional Era (1908–1918), organized in independent women's organizations as well as around the Young Turks' ITC which ruled the Ottoman Empire during this period. Together with the nationalist and modernist/westernist male intellectuals, Ottoman feminists discussed the "woman question" in journals, newspapers and clubs. They gained public visibility through involvement in organizations for supporting the army, helping the poor, women's education and employment, and in organizations defending women's rights. They formulated their demands around women's education and reform in women's dress within a nationalist paradigm, emphasizing their role as mothers in raising the children of the Turkish nation (cf. S. Çakır 1994; Demirdirek 2011; Toprak 2015). In the meantime, the political and economic ties between Ottoman women's organizations and the ITC cadres had a crucial role in mobilizing women for the nationalist cause (Durakbaşa 2000).

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<sup>70</sup> In Zihnioglu's (2003) periodization, "first wave feminism" in Turkey came in three periods: Ottoman women's movement during the Reform Period (*Hareket-i Nisvan*, 1868–1908), Ottoman feminist movement of the Second Constitutional Era (1908–1922), and feminism of the early-republican period (1923–1935). Although before the mid-nineteenth century Ottoman women were not organized around the issue of rights, they participated in the public sphere through their involvement in charitable activities. For instance, Isin and Üstündağ's (2008) study on women's participation in *evkaf* (charitable foundations) show that Ottoman women had, especially between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, cultivated civic identities and became active citizens of their cities through gift-giving practices.

In its discursive construction from the mid-nineteenth century on, the "woman question" was discussed within a modernization paradigm and the solutions offered to improve women's social status drew increasingly less on Islam and more on Western feminist ideas (Durakbaşa 1988) as well as less on the Ottoman and more on the Turkish national identity. By the time of the Turkish War of Independence, the link between feminism/women's emancipation and nationalism was clear for many activists. An example of this was the journal *Türk Kadını* (Turkish woman), published from 1918 to 1919, which followed the political line of the ITC. An article in *Türk Kadını* argued that Western feminist demands for women's participation in education, professional life, and politics was compatible with the Turkish culture as long as family and morality remained primary issues for women (Necmeddîn Sâdık 1918). Another article held women's advancement and the advancement of society as synonymous, and based on this demanded suffrage rights for women (Müfide Ferid 1919). On the other hand, the increased emphasis on Turkish national identity was to the detriment of the ethnic and religious plurality of the Ottoman feminist movement (Kutlar 2010; Osmanağaoğlu 2015). For instance, in 1919, Kurdish women organized around separatist demands (Karakışla 2003).<sup>71</sup> By the end of the War of Independence, what was left of the Ottoman feminist movement were mostly women who aligned themselves with Turkish nationalism with its laicist and westernist underpinnings.

In the early-republican period, a new generation of feminists organized around civil, social and political demands. They supported republicanism as a political project and in 1923, under the leadership of Nezihe Muhiddin, organized to found the Women's People's Party (*Kadınlar Halk Fırkası*, KHF). The Kemalist government, however, was not so fond of women's autonomous organizing, especially around political demands. The government did not grant the KHF legal approval, declaring the attempt divisive of the national struggle.

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<sup>71</sup> For Circassian and Armenian women's activisms in the pre-republican period see Karakışla (2001) and Ekmekçioğlu and Bilal (2006), respectively.

Feminists in 1924 founded the Turkish Women's Union (*Türk Kadın Birliği*, TKB) and defined the aim of the organization as "activism for raising womanhood to a modern level in intellectual and social spheres" (Zihnioğlu 2003, 151), omitting their political demands. Yet, in practice, as Zihnioğlu shows, the TKB politicized the issue of women's suffrage. In 1926, some members of the TKB applied for membership in the CHF. For the 1927 elections, feminists in the TKB first campaigned for women's right to vote and to be elected as part of their citizenship rights, then it supported the candidacy of feminist men (Ibid., 196–200).<sup>72</sup> Following the elections, an oppositional group in the TKB allied with the women organized in the Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*), an organization that functioned as the CHF's auxiliary,<sup>73</sup> and, with the help of the government, dismissed the administrative body of the TKB (Ibid., 240–243). Nezihe Muhiddin was excluded from politics, and the TKB's new administration, headed by Latife Bekir, focused on cultural, economic and charity activities, openly stating that the TKB would not raise political demands (Ibid., 250).

This uneasy relationship between the early-republican feminists and Kemalists should be read against the regime's intolerance for political organizing outside the CHF. The period that started with the Sheikh Said Rebellion<sup>74</sup> in 1925 resulted in the dominance of the centralist wing of the RPP and the suppression of eventually all—including potential—opposition to the Kemalist regime. In the framework of the 1925 Law on the Maintenance of Order (*Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu*), the short-lived Progressive People's Party (*Terakkiperver*

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<sup>72</sup> The TKB was not a strictly woman-only organization as men could be members of the organization. However, male members did not have a right to vote or to be elected for the administrative board at the TKB's congresses. The TKB's political agenda was prepared only by women, among whom were non-Turkish and non-Muslim ones. The organization disseminated its feminist ideas through its publication *Kadın Yolu/Türk Kadın Yolu* (Woman's Path/Turkish Woman's Path) (see Zihnioğlu 2003).

<sup>73</sup> For a critical study on the Turkish Hearths, see Üstel (2010).

<sup>74</sup> Among the reasons that triggered the rebellion were: The prohibition of the use of the Kurdish language; Kurds' exclusion from high-rank state and military posts, especially in Kurdistan; the abolition of the Caliphate which was the bond between Turks and Kurds; and the government's support for one Kurdish *aşiret* (tribe) against another in order to control and dominate the Kurdish region (van Bruinessen 1992, 282–283; Uçarlar 2012, 270–271). Between 1925 and 1938, the single-party regime suppressed a total number of eighteen Kurdish and Islamist uprisings: "As a result, Kurdish nationalism and political Islam have been identified as "existential threats" to the Kemalist modernization project" (Taspınar 2005, 203).

*Cumhuriyet Fırkası*, 1924) was dissolved; the non-state-led press was closed down; large numbers of Kurds were resettled in the western part of Turkey (Zürcher 2004, 168–175). Kemalist reforms took a radical and authoritarian turn after this: The CHF declared a single-party regime in 1931, which was followed by another wave of political repression (Ibid., 176–181). As I discuss in the next section, these developments increased the regime's intolerance for women's independent organizing.

In a similar vein, Kemalists had a preference for the representation of women's political interests by the institutions of the new regime—as opposed to women's autonomous organizing. In fact, some of the early-republican feminists had relations with Kemalist organizations such as the Turkish Hearths and later the People's Houses (*Halkevleri*, 1932).<sup>75</sup> For instance, the Draft Family Law of 1924 which preceded the 1926 Civil Law was discussed at the Turkish Hearths, and TKB's president Nezihe Muhiddin and Halide Edib, another prominent feminist figure, participated in these discussions in Istanbul where they also gave speeches on women's rights (Kaplan 1992, 163). By 1926, the Turkish Hearths already argued that it was time for women to gain political rights (Ibid.). As this example shows, Kemalists were not by definition against political rights for women but against the propagation of these rights by the TKB, an autonomous women's organization. They wanted women to be involved in philanthropy (Zihnioğlu 2003, 226) and to complement the regime's efforts to modernize the country. This view was also adopted by a number of women who were organized in the TKB. For example, İffet Halim (Oruz), when she founded the Diyarbakır branch of the TKB in 1927, claimed that the association should work as a charity organization (Davaz 2014, 742). The adoption of this view by women who adhered to the Kemalist regime signaled the formation of Kemalist women's activism.

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<sup>75</sup> For a study on the People's Houses, see Şimşek (2002).

From this time on, Turkish womanhood was represented mostly by women who had organic ties with the new regime, preferably by wives and daughters of the Kemalist elite themselves. The Mothers' Union (*Anneler Birliği*) in 1927, the Society for the Protection of Children and Helping Women (*Himaye-i Eftal Kadın Yardım Cemiyeti*)<sup>76</sup> in 1928 and the Women's Philanthropic Union (*Kadınlar Yardım Birliği*) in 1930 were founded mostly by the wives and daughters of the state elite and the high-rank army officers.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, some Kemalist women became members of the political community. Following women's acquisition of political rights at the municipal level in 1930, Afet Inan, Mustafa Kemal's adopted daughter, became the first woman member of the CHF. Latife Bekir, the TKB's president after Nezihe Muhiddin, became a member of the Istanbul City Council.<sup>78</sup> On 5 December 1934, women gained the right to vote and be elected at the national level. In the 1935 general elections eighteen women entered the parliament, all chosen as candidates by Mustafa Kemal himself. Most of these women had served in municipalities and city councils since 1930 and had been members of women's organizations, including the TKB (Kaplan 1998, 203).<sup>79</sup> The woman members of the parliament firmly adopted the official ideology and represented the collective identity of the new nation, and did not represent women in a more autonomous style (see Acuner 1999, 120).

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<sup>76</sup> See Türkiye Yardım Sevenler Derneği Tarihçesi (History of the Turkish Philanthropic Association).

<sup>77</sup> As Akşit (2009) indicates, this was similar to the Young Turk period where elite women, whose husbands and fathers held high positions in the ITC, were involved in philanthropic activities to compensate for the devastating consequences of the wars which eventually brought the end of the Ottoman Empire, creating a female public that had organic ties with the nationalists and the state.

<sup>78</sup> Another elected member of the Istanbul City Council was Nakiye Elgün who, as a member of the administrative board of the Turkish Hearth in Istanbul, had allied with Latife Bekir in dismissing the TKB's administration in 1927. Both Latife Bekir and Nakiye Elgün became members of the parliament in 1935.

<sup>79</sup> In 1930, Mustafa Kemal supported the foundation of another pro-regime party as a failed attempt to transition to multi-party politics. One of the founders of the Liberal Republican Party (*Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*, SCF) was his sister Makbule. According to Kaplan, Makbule's involvement in the SFC was a tactic to encourage women to participate in party politics and, in fact, the foundation of the SFC positively influenced women's political participation. The SFC had also included women's rights to vote and to be elected in its party program (Zihnioglu 2003, 247).

### 3.4. Kemalist definition of women's interests: Assimilating feminism into

#### Kemalism

With the acquisition of suffrage rights, women's inclusion in the public sphere was formally completed.<sup>80</sup> Kemalists, in a similar fashion to the early-republican feminists, framed the issue of women's political inclusion as a prerequisite of citizenship and national sovereignty. Kemalist women themselves played an important role in this framing by publicly defending women's political rights—through channels other than the TKB—as well as by taking part in politics themselves. On 3 April, 1930, the day the parliament passed the Municipal Law which gave women the right to vote and to be elected at the municipal level, Afet Inan spoke in defense of women's political inclusion at the conference "Universal Suffrage for Women" organized by the Turkish Hearth in Ankara (Kaplan 1998, 164). In her speech, Inan argued that women's suffrage was a prerequisite of democracy and that women had gender interests to defend (Toprak 2014, 459).<sup>81</sup> In 1931, the CHF stated in its program that the party perceived no difference between women and men in terms of political rights. In the same year, Afet Inan's book on citizenship education, which was taught in secondary schools for many years to come, spoke of women's political rights with arguments similar to those of early-republican feminists (Üstel 2004, 237; Taşkıran 1973, 132).

Early-republican feminists' demands for political inclusion were fulfilled, but this also strengthened the argument against women's autonomous organizing. In 1932, at the opening of the People's Houses, Mustafa Kemal claimed that there is no such issue as "women vs. men" but as "altogether gravitating towards the revolutions" (Davaz 2014, 745). This foreshadowed TKB's closure in 1935. The view that women's interests were one and the same as the nation's interests was propagated also by an increasing number of Kemalist women. For example, İffet Halim (Oruz), as a member of the CHF's Istanbul Branch, defended this

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<sup>80</sup> Since women's public visibility and uncovering was directly related, universal suffrage triggered a new series of anti-veiling campaigns (Adak 2014, 44).

<sup>81</sup> For Inan's full speech, see Toprak (2014, 454–460).

position in spite of her membership in the TKB's administration. In her 1933 book *Yeni Türkiye'de Kadın* (Woman in New Turkey), she criticized the TKB for being a continuation of Ottoman feminism and the suffragette movement in the West and for not understanding the uniqueness of the republican revolution. She said: "Woman's Union is a child of the Republic, but not of the Turkish Republic!" (14). With these words, Oruz recognized the TKB's support for a republican regime but reproached the organization for not serving what she saw as the interests of the nation.

Kemalists likewise understood the class differences between women in terms of a solidaristic co-existence of two types of womanhood: The first type was the urban, modern, professional woman who still yielded to male authority at home and in the public sphere. This womanhood was embodied in Mustafa Kemal's adopted daughters such as Afet Inan, Ülkü, and Sabiha Gökçen, who had successful careers yet who never challenged the authority of their father/leader. The second type was the Anatolian woman who belonged to a lower class position, for whom raising the children of the Republic and the management of the household economy were primary duties. In the Kemalist definition of women's interests, the first type of womanhood was responsible for advancing the second type through teaching them their rights and the significance of their participation in nation-building, and modernizing them thereof. Kemalist women propagated this view of solidaristic co-existence of two types of women. For example, Oruz, in her 1933 book, differentiated between three groups of urban women. The first group comprised housewives who did not take part in employment, in Oruz's terms, "the consumer (*müستهلك*) woman." Among them, the useful ones ran the household economy, looked after the other family members, and raised their children according to the Republic's ideology (48). The harmful ones, on the other hand, confused modernity with fashion, indulged in luxurious consumption, and were unintelligent. These ones were "as dangerous as the green turban [i.e. the men of Islam]" and had to be stamped out (49). The second group of

women was working-class women. Oruz argued that working-class women's awareness should be raised to a level at which they understand the link between doing good to one's family and doing good to one's nation (49). The third group was professional women, who belonged to a higher order and who were very valuable for the (republican) revolution. Yet, their value was conditioned by their ability to go beyond improving their own condition, assuming the responsibility of imbuing the rest of society with revolutionary ideas, and not propagating "the faulty ideas that circulate in Europe and the U.S." (50–51). By saying this, Oruz drew a clear line of demarcation between feminists and Kemalist women. Finally, Oruz moved on to the rural women and glorified their Turkishness and their contribution to the economy and demography of Turkey (52–53). She pointed at the need for raising the awareness of rural women, who were backward because of religion and lack of education, with the following words: "The course of our revolution [that heads] towards populism commands being occupied with this [rural] class very closely and very sincerely!" (17). In Oruz's formulation, women who were useful for the Republic excluded the Ottoman elite women (who indulged in luxury) and the feminists (who circulated "foreign" ideas about women's emancipation). Moreover, by employing Kemalism's populism principle and by holding professional (upper-class) women responsible for elevating the level of awareness of the rest of womanhood to that of their own, Oruz dismissed the significance of class differences between women beyond the necessity of a solidaristic co-existence of women in the service of nation-building.

Another line of disagreement between Kemalists and the early-republican feminists was over TKB's relationship with the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAWSEC, International Alliance of Women, IAW since 1946). For Kemalists, women's relations with international women's networks were desirable to the extent that they served the nation's interests. The TKB had become a member of the IAWSEC in 1926 and

participated in the IAWSEC conferences in 1929 in Berlin, in 1931 in Belgrade, and in 1933 in Marseilles. Founded in 1902/1904 by some U.S. suffragists under the name International Woman Suffrage Alliance, the IAWSEC had established close relations with the League of Nations during the interwar period.<sup>82</sup> TKB's membership in the IAWSEC was considered by some as against the anti-imperialist political line pursued by the CHF. For example, Sabiha Sertel, a prominent feminist and leftist journalist, criticized TKB's participation in the IAWSEC's Berlin Conference for being an instrument of "international imperialist and reactionist movements" (Zihnioğlu 2003, 251–252). Oruz, herself part of the TKB administration, expressed her view that the TKB's membership in the IAWSEC was against Turkey's interests because it was under the influence of the League of Nations (Davaz 2014, 745). In any case, TKB's international relations were tightly controlled by the government. For instance, the organization was invited to participate in the Eastern Women's Congress in 1930 in Damascus and in 1932 in Tehran, but the government "advised" the TKB to not participate in these congresses for Turkey was a Western and not an Eastern country (Ibid., 249–250; 276–277).

The IAWSEC's held its twelfth congress in Istanbul in 1935. The TKB hosted the IAWSEC delegates at the former imperial Yıldız Palace, and the Turkish—as well as international—media closely followed the congress. The congress resolutions put a special emphasis on peace and disarmament which targeted the rise of fascism and national socialism and their potential implications on women's rights (Toprak 2015, 484). According to Toprak, the congress agenda was against the CHF's international politics for the party sought a rather close alliance with Germany and Italy (2015, 481). In Libal's (2007) view, the conflict between Turkey's international politics and the IAWSEC's conference resolutions strengthened the contention that the TKB's membership in the IAWSEC was against Turkey's

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<sup>82</sup> For an account of how feminism, imperialism, and orientalism influenced the IAWSEC's agenda see (C. Weber 2001).

interests. The congress resolutions were criticized also by feminists such as Nezihe Muhiddin and Sabiha Sertel for defending peace without tackling imperialism and global inequalities and for separating women's issues from other, for example class, issues (Davaz 2014, 738–740). Following the congress, the TKB dissolved itself, declaring that women's rights were fully recognized by the Turkish Republic, hence there was no longer any need for the organization to exist. Latife Bekir, the TKB's president, stated that most of the members anyway held membership in the CHF—which represented women's political interests—and directed them to charity activism in women's organizations (Toprak 2014, 503; Libal 2007, 47).

In Davaz's account, the decision to close down the TKB was taken by the government and Latife Bekir right after the acquisition of universal suffrage, but the parties agreed to postpone the closure for after the IAWSEC congress for it had been decided much earlier that the TKB was going to host the event (2014, 747). In fact, organized only a few months after the acquisition of women's suffrage, the congress was an opportunity to receive an international affirmation of Turkey's advancement in gender equality. Yet, feminists' interest in participating in international women's networks in general and their adherence to the IAWSEC's agenda in particular led to their marginalization and isolation in Turkey (Akşit 2008, 84). Upon TKB's dissolution, Mustafa Kemal received a letter from Margaret Corbett Ashby, the then president of the IAWSEC, where she expressed her regret for Latife Bekir's resignation, and her expectation that Turkey will keep being represented at the IAWSEC. In her letter, Ashby also noted that there's no hindrance to the IAWSEC's collaboration with mixed-sex organizations. Mustafa Kemal responded to Ashby's request by asking the—now—CHP's secretariat to establish an office for women's issues which would ensure communication and collaboration with women's organizations at home and abroad (Kaplan

1998, 198–199).<sup>83</sup> The message here was once again clear: The regime genuinely cared about women's political inclusion but women's interests were best represented by the Kemalist party-state and its institutions.

The suppression of women's autonomous organizing for political rights left the early-republican feminists with little other choices than joining the CHP if they wanted to be involved in politics and to promote women's political mobilization. At the same time, Kemalists' claim to represent women's interests, viewed as synonymous with the nation's interests, provided women who adhered to the laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist definition of women's interests with opportunities to push forward for gender equality. Following the transformation of feminist activism into Kemalist women's activism, there have always been Kemalist women in the CHP and in other Kemalist—including women's—organizations who, even if they did not utter the word feminism, followed the path of the early-republican feminists in their struggle for gender equality. As the early-republican feminists' political demands were partially appropriated by the Kemalist women's rights discourse, for Kemalist women who adopted this discourse, Kemalism and feminism came to have the same meaning (Saktanber 2003, 328). On the other hand, the legacy of the late-Ottoman and early-republican feminists who had been struggling for women's emancipation for more than half a century was altogether ignored (Zihnioğlu 2003), and replaced by the official historiography according to which rights were "presented to women on a golden plate" by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in return for their active involvement in the nation-building process. Until the end of the single-party period (1946), Kemalist women did not organize independently of the party-state and avoided any claim to be recognized as a political group. Woman members of the parliament remained largely inactive (Y. Arat 1998). According to Sancar, the idea that women owed their rights to the state and not to their own struggle

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<sup>83</sup> Kaplan has no further note on the aftermath of this event. I have not come across any mentioning of this; it is most likely that the office was never established or, if it was, it was short-lived.

legitimized the limitation of their role to "participant but silent and well-behaved women" (2012, 177). Yet, as I present in Chapter 4, some of these women re-politicized the issue of women's rights, including women's political representation, in the multi-party period.

### 3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed Kemalism's gender project and the formation of Kemalist women's activism in the early-republican period (1923–1935). Kemalism's gender project was a unique synthesis of Kemalism's founding principles of laicism, nationalism, and modernism/westernism. The notions of new woman and modern family lied at the core of Kemalism. Thanks to Kemalist gender reforms, a small but significant group of women benefited from the new regime not only in the family but also as professional women. On the other hand, women's active involvement in public life was hindered by the ideological primacy of their household and care work duties over their public participation. In Sancar's (2012) analysis, this characterized Turkish modernization as "family-oriented modernization." Moreover, women's mediating role between Western values and Turkish culture subjected their public behavior to male authority and control. Women who resembled the old regime (covered women) and "over-westernized" women were not welcome in the Kemalist public sphere. Conservative and elitist regulatory mechanisms over women's public inclusion resulted in women's inclusion in nation-building but their exclusion from state-building processes. In the early years of the Republic, women did not take part in the strategic institutions of the Turkish state (the army, intelligence agency, higher judiciary, treasury, foreign relations, etc.) except for a few symbolic figures; they were not allowed in the decision-making processes of the state as active citizens but in lower-rank positions as the "daughters of the Republic" under male tutelage (Sancar 2012, 307). Similarly, the institutional field of politics was inaccessible for women except for a few who were appointed to their posts by Mustafa Kemal and other high-rank party men (Y. Arat 1998). Women's

inclusion in public life was furthermore restricted by ethnicity and class. While non-Turkish (and non-Muslim) people were assimilated and Turkified by the new regime, Kemalism's populism principle translated class differences into an urban vs. rural dichotomy where the urban population was held responsible for including the "yet-to-be-modernized" rural population in the public sphere. This responsibility was shared by women and men alike, although it translated into different practices of modernizing. All in all, Kemalism's gender project to a significant extent enabled women's emancipation but also replaced private (Islamic) patriarchy with public (modern) patriarchy (Walby 1990).<sup>84</sup>

Kemalist gender reforms partially met the demands raised by the early-republican feminists organized in the TKB. Kemalism and early-republican feminism had overlapping agendas as well as a tense relationship. The main lines of disagreement between early-republican feminists and Kemalists concerned women's political representation and the assimilation of women's interests into those of the nation. Kemalists perceived early-republican feminists' quest for representing women's interests as divisive of the national agenda and opposition to the regime. They claimed that women's interests were synonymous with those of the nation and best represented by the CHF and other Kemalist organizations. The formation of Kemalist women's activism as an uneven synthesis between early-republican feminism and Kemalism accompanied the tensions between the early-republican feminists and Kemalists which finally resulted in TKB's dissolution. The analysis provided in the third and fourth sections of this chapter suggests that there was no clear separation between early-republican feminism and Kemalist women's activism but rather a gradual transition from the former to the latter. Some of the prominent women who propagated the Kemalist definition of women's interests were themselves early-republican feminists

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<sup>84</sup> Walby draws attention to the "need to separate the notion of progress in the position of women from that of changes in the form of gender inequality. That is, to distinguish analytically between changes in the degree of patriarchy from changes in its form" (1990, 23). This perspective is useful in understanding what has improved in women's lives with the Republic without disregarding the new forms of patriarchal control exerted on them in public and private spheres.

organized in the TKB. They often had membership also in the CHF or in the Kemalist organizations such as the Turkish Hearths and the People's Houses. Therefore, it is difficult to pose Kemalism and early-republican feminism simply in opposition to each other. Yet, as I showed in the case of TKB's IAWSEC membership, Kemalists clearly rejected early-republican feminists' quest for self-organization, and promoted a women's activism in the service of Kemalist nation-building. Early-republican feminists, despite their nationalism and elitism (Akşit 2008, 89) and their loyalty to the Kemalist reforms (Davaz 2014, 744) were excluded from the political field. After the dissolution of the TKB, Kemalism became the only legitimate ground available for women's activism (Tekeli 1992, 140). In Akşit's (2008) analysis, as the early-republican feminists' international links strengthened, they were marginalized on the national level. Yet, some of the feminist aims could be pursued by women who found a place for themselves within Kemalist nation-building.

The overlapping agendas of and the tensions between early-republican feminism and Kemalism, as well as the formation of Kemalist women's activism, exemplify the course of women's activism that grew alongside secular and/or nationalist modernization projects in non-dominant parts of the world. In the remainder of this concluding section, I briefly discuss the similarities between Kemalism and other secular and/or nationalist modernization projects with regards to women's public inclusion and the development of women's activism, in order to situate Kemalism's gender project and the formation of Kemalist women's activism in a greater context than that of Turkey.

In many contexts, women's inclusion in the public sphere, mainly through education, was a prerequisite of modernization. Like in Turkey, nationalist leaders in the early-twentieth century Middle East, such as those in Iraq, Iran, Egypt and Afghanistan, formulated women's education and their participation in public life as serving the interests of the nation (Joseph 2000, 6). In India, during the second half of the nineteenth century, women's education was

perceived by Hindu nationalists as contributing to the improvement of welfare and civilization (Chatterjee 1993, 124). In early-twentieth century China, the norms of the "emancipated woman" included being an educated, modern citizen; having self-reliance and autonomy in marriage and career; and a concern for the oppressed women in Chinese society (Wang 1999).

On the other hand, similar to the Turkish case, women's public inclusion was limited in a number of ways. As Chatterjee (1993) argues, nationalist imaginations in non-Western contexts were based on a difference from Europe. Yet, this difference was constructed accordingly to the new national culture adopted by the new middle classes, and expected to reflect on women's public appearance and behavior. For example, Hindu nationalists distinguished themselves from the West as well as from the mass of their own people, and their argument about preserving the "national" difference was relevant mostly for certain sections of the middle class (Menon 1999). In Iran, the male control over women's public appearance which was supported by compulsory unveiling rendered older female cultures as backward, ignorant and lower-class (de Groot 1998). In state socialist Hungary where, unlike under Kemalism, women's participation in paid employment was promoted, gender equality in the domestic sphere was affirmed; yet women who made the most out of paid employment were, like in Turkey, upper-class, educated, professional women who could redistribute housework and care work to lower-class women (Zimmermann 2010).

As women's public inclusion became a constitutive element for secular and/or nationalist modernization projects, many women actively supported and participated in them. However, as Molyneux argues, there was no necessary link between women's emancipation and the states' gaining women's support by addressing their practical needs or class interests (1985, 235). As Joseph (2001) indicates for the Egyptian and Iranian cases, women's political participation did not necessarily change their traditional gender roles significantly, nor did their activism bring radical structural change in their lives; in both cases, women were the

emotional workers of their respective nationalist and modernist movements. Moreover, in many cases, the strategic alliance between feminists and nationalists during times of national struggle thanks to their overlapping agendas regarding women resulted, in later stages of nation-building, in the suppression of women's autonomous activism and its assimilation into nationalism. In Iran, the articulation of the "woman question" in the nationalist discourse marginalized women's autonomous demands for equal rights as an interest group (de Groot, 1998). The independent Patriotic Women's League was banned in 1932 and, in 1935, the state-sponsored women's association Ladies' Center was established (Fleischmann 2010). Similarly, in Egypt, the state monopolized women's issues upon independence and suppressed the autonomous women's movement (Al-Ali 2002). Feminists who had allied with nationalists in the struggle to end the British rule were excluded from politics; like in the Turkish case, a few years after women's acquisition of universal suffrage, the Egyptian state closed down feminist organizations in 1959 (Badran 1991).

The picture was similar under state socialism where radical changes in class relations, instead of national struggles, accompanied the modernization projects. In the Soviet Union, Bolsheviks embraced the idea of women's empowerment but labeled the autonomous women's movement as "bourgeois feminism" (Holt 1980). By the end of the 1920s, leaders of the communist women's movement who were active before and around the time of the 1917 revolution were replaced by new, inexperienced cadres who identified with the Soviet regime rather than the preceding feminist struggle (Ibid.; Waters 1989). Furthermore, in Buckley's (2001) account, the Women's Department of the Party (*Zhenotdel*), which aimed in the 1920s at overcoming women's political "backwardness" compared to men, was abolished in 1930 when Stalin declared that the "woman question" was solved. In the 1930s women organized in "the movement of wives" (*Dvizhenie Zhen*), which was in line with the idea of the revival of the family and which replaced personal emancipation for women with the role of "social

mothering" (Buckley 2001, 298). Similar examples were present outside of the Soviet Union. The communist regime in Bulgaria abolished the Bulgarian Association of University Women, claiming that the Party would take care of women as well as their international contacts (Slavova 2006). In Poland, the Party sought spreading political ideology by reaching politically "backward" women through the League of Women. The women agitators in the League had the mission of educating and enlightening the "backward" women, typically rural women and housewives (Nowak 2005).

These examples show that strategies similar to those Kemalists followed to include women in the public sphere and to promote one type of women's activism over another were repeatedly used by other secular and/or nationalist modernization projects in the non-dominant parts of the world. In these examples, as well as in Kemalism, there was an inherent tension between women's struggle for emancipation and the male-dominant political struggles within which they sought equal rights. In the early-republican period, the tension between feminists and Kemalists was—forcefully and temporarily—resolved by the assimilation of early-republican feminism into Kemalist women's activism. The politics of gender pursued by Kemalist women shaped the course of women's activism in Turkey for many decades to come. Yet, as I analyze and discuss in detail in the next chapters, the tension between feminism and Kemalism remained a constitutive element of Kemalist women's activism, revealing itself in different ways and forms throughout the republican history.

#### 4. Kemalist women's activism in the multi-party period (1946–1980)

The previous chapter discussed the transition of early-republican feminism to Kemalist women's activism and the partial incorporation of early-republican feminists' demands into the Kemalist discourse of women's rights. From the dissolution of the Turkish Women's Union (TKB) in 1935 until the end of the single-party period (1946), Kemalist women had not organized around political demands independently of the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) and limited their woman-only organizing to charity work. The political conjuncture of the multi-party period reshaped the dynamics of Turkey's gender politics. In the 1950s, when different interpretations of Kemalism could legitimately exist in the political field and the discussions around women's rights dropped out of the political agenda, Kemalist women founded new organizations with the aim of preserving women's already-acquired rights and raising the awareness of Turkish womanhood on being dutiful citizens.

From the 1960s on, the rise of left politics and the subsequent differentiation of women's interests based on differential politics of class and culture/religion helped Kemalist women to translate their individual attempts to challenge gender-based oppression and discrimination into collective efforts to further gender equality in Turkey. Organized both in the CHP and in an increasing number of woman-only organizations,<sup>85</sup> Kemalist women raised demands that ranged from greater political representation for women and the recognition of women's unpaid labor at home to revisions in the Civil Law and Labor Law eliminating legal discrimination against women. In more than three decades, Kemalist women framed a gender agenda in which they politicized a multiplicity of women's issues and yet, at the same time, remained loyal to the Kemalist discourse of women's rights and maintained the definition of women's interests in laicist, Turkish nationalist, modernist/westernist terms. In the second half

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<sup>85</sup> As I mentioned in Section 1.3, Kemalist women's organizations were not strictly woman-only in that men were allowed to be members of and participate in the activities of these organizations. Yet, the administrative boards of Kemalist women's organizations were woman-only, which meant that men did not take part in the decision-making processes, and the vast majority of their members were women anyway. Therefore, in this chapter and in the following chapters I refer to Kemalist women's organizations as woman-only organizations.

of the 1970s, the UN-led global gender equality agenda and the formation of women's studies as a disciplinary field in Turkey guided Kemalist women in formulating their demands for women's rights and framing their gender agenda. The gender agenda Kemalist women developed by the end of the 1970s became, in the post-1980 period, the foundational basis of Kemalist feminism.

This chapter provides an overarching account of Kemalist women's activism in the multi-party period until 1980. It assesses the dynamics of and the ways in which Kemalist women, first individually, then collectively, politicized the "woman question" in Turkey and raised demands for gender equality. The aim of the chapter is to challenge the widespread conviction in feminist and gender scholarship that, from the mid-1930s until the 1980s, there was no significant women's movement in Turkey. In Chapter 1, I suggested that this conviction was due to feminist scholars' positioning of Kemalism and feminism as incompatible with each other and their omission of women's activism in mixed-sex organizations. I argued, instead, that for Kemalist women there was a tense but co-existing relationship between Kemalism and the ideas around women's emancipation, and that Kemalist women who pursued gender politics, even if they did not embrace feminism as an ideology, adopted an agenda in which they sought women's gender interests. In this chapter I substantiate this argument by looking at the progressive development of Kemalist women's gender agenda and by situating their activism within the greater context of Turkish politics. In so doing, I also aim to contribute to the recent but growing body of feminist and gender research on women's activism in the multi-party period until the 1980s.<sup>86</sup>

This chapter is organized in five sections. The first section discusses the new context of Turkish politics under the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, DP) rule (1950–1960) and

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<sup>86</sup> Recent scholarly contributions on women's activism in this period include Yaraman's (1999) work on women's quest for political rights, Sancar's recent book (2012) on the formation of the modern Turkish family, Okutan's (2010) research on the journal *Kadın Gazetesi*, Dişbudak's (2008) MA thesis on the post-1949 history of the TKB, Davaz's (2014) study on the TKB with a focus on its relationship with the international women's networks, and Akal's (2003) and Akkaya's (2011) oral history research on socialist women's organizing.

Kemalist women's response to the changing status of the "woman question" with the start of the multi-party period. It argues that Kemalist women's independent organizing, as well as their aim to preserve women's acquired rights and to raise the awareness of Turkish womanhood, were a response to the shift in the significance of women's status in Turkish politics. The next three sections tackle the three themes that influenced Kemalist women's gender agenda from 1960 to 1980 in chronological order. Section 4.2 looks at Kemalist women's activism in woman-only organizations and in the CHP, and examines the gender equality demands raised by Kemalist women in relation to the political developments of the period. It shows how the rise of left politics, and the subsequent differentiation of women's interests based on class and culture/religion, mobilized Kemalist women against centre-right and religious politics and approximated them to CHP's left-of-center political outlook. Section 4.3 investigates the relationship between Kemalist women's activism and international women's networks, in particular Kemalist women's involvement in the UN International Women's Year (IWY) in 1975. It first provides a brief account of how Kemalist women in woman-only organizations drew on their experiences with international women's networks in building their gender agenda. Then, it focuses on how IWY influenced Kemalist women's politics by synchronizing it with the newly emerging UN-led global gender equality agenda and thereby rendering it more legitimate in the Turkish context. Section 4.4. concerns the formation of women's studies as a disciplinary field in Turkey; it looks at the works of Kemalist women scholars on women's status in Turkey in the 1970s and shows how Kemalist women switched from an affirmative to a more critical position in their evaluation of the Kemalist gender reforms. The analysis I provide in the first four sections of this chapter is based on a number of publications by independent women's organizations, as well as on an increasing but still limited number of secondary sources that provide—direct and/or indirect—information on women's activism during in the multi-party period until 1980. In the

final section, I present an overall assessment of Kemalist women's activism in this period in the light of its previous evaluation in feminist and gender scholarship. In so doing, I also provide a critical assessment of the feminist scholarly account of Kemalist women and Kemalist women's activism of this period.

#### **4.1. Democrat Party and the changing status of the "woman question" (1950–1960)**

The political conjuncture within which women's independent organizing reemerged was quite different than that of the early-republican period. The Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, DP) rule from 1950 onwards gave a conservative twist to Turkish modernization. The CHP government of 1946–1950 had, for populist concerns, already loosened the staunch understanding of laicism of the early-republican period by introducing religion as an elective course at schools, opening vocational schools for state-employed imams and allowing departments of theology in universities. The DP, founders of which had previously belonged to the conservative circles within the CHP, went even further by integrating Islamic beliefs and practices into the official state ideology as aspects of Turkish national culture (Atasoy 2011). During the 1950s, the number of mosques and religious schools rapidly increased, brotherhoods were legalized, and call for prayer was changed from Turkish to Arabic—its original language before 1932. The Ottoman and Islamic past of Turkish society was restored in school curricula by drawing similarities between Turkish culture and Islam (Keyman and Kancı 2011). The incorporation of Islam into Turkishness, according to Brockett (2011), led to the emergence of a popular national identity in Turkey for the first time since the foundation of the Republic.

As Anderson (2008) states, the now bolder equation of Turkishness and Muslimhood, although it for long was a tacit substratum of Kemalism, antagonized the elite who advocated the official, stauncher version of laicism. The DP cadres with their younger outlook and a

background mostly in commerce or law represented a different section of the Turkish elite as opposed to the military and bureaucracy-oriented CHP cadres (Zürcher 2004, 221). Moreover, the DP closed down the People's Houses and the Village Institutes (*Köy Enstitüleri*), the organizations of the single-party era which functioned to recruit people into the Kemalist project, and handed over the CHP's material assets to the state treasury (Ibid., 223). It also ended the state's financial support for Kemalist institutions such as the Turkish Language Association (*Türk Dil Kurumu*) and Turkish Historical Association (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*) (Turan and Özel 2007, 132). On the other hand, the DP positioned itself against the CHP but never against Mustafa Kemal, and claimed to restore Kemalism that was degenerated under the single-party regime (Bora and Taşkın 2006). It redefined Kemalism as parliamentary majoritarianism against the idea that the CHP represented the state and not the people (Ciddi 2009). The DP thereby claimed the legacy of the early-republican era; Atatürk was made an untouchable symbol of the nation by means of making "insulting Atatürk" a punishable crime by law (Anderson 2008). In this way, the CHP ceased to be the sole representative of Kemalism, but Kemalism nonetheless remained the official ideology.<sup>87</sup> As years went by, the DP's and the CHP's versions of Kemalism slowly solidified into conservative republicanism (right-Kemalism) and left-Kemalism, respectively.

The conservative turn in Turkish politics was accompanied by a sharp decrease in women's political representation and the strengthening of their role as mothers and wives in political discourses. Sancar (2012), characterizing this period as "conservative modernization," indicates that women's participation in the public sphere was no longer a

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<sup>87</sup> In the multi-party period, Kemalism remained to be the state ideology, not by the fact that all its tenets were strictly applied but because they were not openly challenged. Until the end of the 1970s, Kemalism was the condition of possibility for all political projects in Turkey, such as nationalism, socialism, pan-Turkism, Islamism, and the Kurdish political movement (see Çelik 2006). While it is possible to look at the multi-party period as one of struggle between more progressive and more conservative tendencies within Kemalism which existed already during Atatürk's rule (cf. Hanioglu 2011), until 1980, Kemalism was the framework in which politics took place, meaning that everyone who appeared in the political scene praised and paid due respect to Atatürk. This included the Turkish army: The military coups of 1960 and 1980 and the interventions of 1971 and 1997, having different political agendas, all made equally strong references to Kemalism (Belge 2006, 40).

marker of modernization; instead, the 1950s saw women's "transfer" back to the domestic sphere. Unlike the early-republican era, school textbooks in the multi-party period emphasized that women's fundamental duty was housework and care work (Gümüšođlu 1996, 17). According to Ayata, this was because, first, new expressions of westernization such as market economy, industrialization and democratization became more popular, and second, because women's participation in the economy as producers and consumers, and in public life in various professions, overshadowed the importance of their political representation (1998, 237). In the 1950 elections, women's representation in the parliament fell down to less than one percent. While political parties limited women's representation to elite women who were mostly the relatives and/or acquaintances of high-rank bureaucrats or party members, discussions around women's citizenship disappeared from the political agenda. The importance of women MPs as proof of adherence to Kemalist gender reforms were not denied but, with the emergence of legitimate, democratic competition on the political field, women came to represent their respective parties unlike those in the early-republican period who were appointed by the Kemalist regime on behalf of women (Y. Arat 1998, 250; 257). Sancar (2012) further notes that this was a turning point in Turkey's gender regime where the previous discussions around and the struggle for women's rights was erased from the social memory. The "Turkish woman discourse," which was based on a definition of modernity as the construction of a modern everyday urban life starting from home, marriage, and raising children, replaced the Kemalist woman's rights discourse of the single-party regime (see Chapter 3) (Ibid., 208).

Chronologically speaking, it was the omission of women's issues from the Turkish political agenda that marked the beginning of Kemalist women's independent organizing. The Turkish Women's Union (*Türk Kadınlar Birliđi*, TKB) which had dissolved in 1935 (see Section 3.4) re-formed in 1949 by Kemalist women, some of whom had served in the

parliament during the single-party era (see Davaz 2014, 781–786). Mevhibe İnönü, the wife of İsmet İnönü (the Prime Minister from 1923 to 1937 and the successor of Atatürk as the second President of the Republic from 1938 to 1950), became the president of the organization. One of the primary aims of the new TKB was to preserve the rights that women had gained during the early-republican period. The emphasis on "preserving" indicated that the Kemalist women who founded the new TKB believed that women's rights were in danger under the DP rule. Defending women's rights, on the other hand, went hand in hand with an accentuation on women's traditional roles. The way the new TKB formulated its mission was as follows:

Preserving the rights provided to women by the Turkish revolution; Ensuring the improvement of Turkish women in the cultural sphere; Developing women's understanding of rights, duties and responsibilities within Turkish democracy; Raising well-educated Turkish mothers for the nation, who are aware of their rights and of when and how to use them, and who serve their men and children with conscious knowledge, loyalty and altruism (Quoted in Dişbudak 2008, 77).

Indeed, emphasizing women's roles as modern, dutiful mothers and wives and their contribution to nation-building thereof was, at least on paper, emblematic of women's activism of this period. Throughout the 1950s, many other woman-only organizations were founded, such as Istanbul Soroptimist Club (*Istanbul Soroptimist Kulübü*, 1948, Turkish Federation of Soroptimist Clubs, *Türkiye Soroptimist Kulüpleri Federasyonu* after 1953), Association of Turkish University Women (*Türk Üniversiteli Kadınlar Derneği*, 1949), Institution for the Investigation of Women's Social Life (*Kadının Sosyal Hayatını Tetkik Kurumu*, 1953, Association for the Research and Investigation of Women's Social Life, *Kadının Hayatını Araştırma ve İnceleme Derneği* after 1968), Turkish Mother's Association (*Türk Anneler Derneği*, 1953), Association for the Preservation of Women's Rights (*Kadın Haklarını Koruma Derneği*, 1954), and Women's Solidarity Association (*Kadınlar*

*Dayanışma Derneği*, 1959, Association of Turkish Women's Council, *Türk Kadınlar Konseyi Derneği* after 1967).

These organizations were founded by urban, well-educated, professional women who adhered to Kemalism as the guarantor of women's rights in Turkey. Many of them were involved in women's activism in the early-republican period. For example, the old TKB's president Latife Bekir Çeyrekbaşı and member Lamia Refik Fenmen were among the founders of the new TKB. Müfide Ferit Tek, founder of the Istanbul Soroptimist Club, had written in the journal *Türk Kadını* (Turkish woman) and invited Turkish women to adopt a feminist ideology as early as in 1919 (see section 3.3). Afet Inan, Atatürk's adopted daughter, was one of the founders of the Institution for the Investigation of Women's Social Life. The names of women's organizations founded in the 1950s did not refer to Kemalism; they were simply called "women's associations" (*kadın dernekleri*). Yet, they explicitly claimed to carry out Atatürk's mission and, as the above quote shows, adopted in their gender agenda the Kemalist definition of women's interests: The equivalence of women's interests with those of the nation and the solidaristic co-existence of upper- and lower-class women where the former assisted the inclusion of the latter in the Kemalist project through education and modernization.

During the DP rule, women were mostly excluded from the state and the institutional sphere of politics. Hence, in the 1950s, woman-only organizing gave Kemalist women the opportunity to participate in the politics of gender by problematizing issues such as women's political representation and raising demands to improve women's status in the family and in public life. An early example of Kemalist women's politicization of the "woman question" can be found in the journal *Kadın Gazetesi* (Woman's gazette).<sup>88</sup> Its editor in chief, İffet Halim Oruz, was a prominent figure in Kemalist women's activism in the early-republican era (see

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<sup>88</sup> The journal was published for thirty-two years from 1947 until 1979; in 1955 it became the official publication of the TKB's Istanbul branch.

section 3.4). Prior to the 1950 elections, Oruz had already claimed that laicism and the woman revolution were under threat because of the sharp decrease in women's representation in the parliament, and demanded a fifty percent women's quota (Yaraman 1999, 84–87). In 1954, Zehra Celasin wrote in *Kadın Gazetesi* that women's political rights, which they had deserved and acquired, were now being taken away from them illegitimately (Ibid., 92–93).<sup>89</sup> In fact, in *Kadın Gazetesi*, political parties were systematically criticized for not nominating women candidates in the elections. In 1954, Oruz made her point very clear with regards to women's organizing:

Among those who told us that the TKB was unnecessary, that we instead had the People's Houses where we could raise the nation as women and men, Atatürk came first. We joined those who seemed [to be] revolutionary. ... We defended the idea that independent women's organizing was unnecessary. ... Now it's clear that depriving women from their own organizations is unacceptable. This is especially needed in democracies. ... The issue of women's political participation has to be supported by young women. (Ibid., 94)

Clearly, from the beginning of the multi-party period, some Kemalist women, rather than maintaining their silence about the unequal relations of gender in Turkish society, started questioning them. As Oruz's comment on women's organizing implies, they were also evaluating the importance of women's independent organizing. In 1957, the Association for the Preservation of Women's Rights (KHKD) declared its intention to establish a women's party which would participate in the 1962 elections.<sup>90</sup> *Kadın Gazetesi* supported this initiative and celebrated "the return of the suffragette movement in Turkey," emphasizing the need for lobbying for female candidacy in parliamentary elections, and suggesting that the TKB be one such supra-party body to undertake this task (Yaraman 1999, 96–97). This initiative failed but for the 1962 elections independent woman candidates released a joint statement where they

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<sup>89</sup> Zehra Celasin, one of the first woman university graduates in Turkey, also wrote a book in 1946, titled *Tarih Boyunca Kadın* (Woman throughout History), where she focused, among other things, on the significance of women's political participation.

<sup>90</sup> Kaplan (1998) mentions that in 1946, a group of women founded the National Woman Party but the party shut down shortly. However, she doesn't provide any reference for this and I have not come across any information on this party elsewhere.

demanded equal rights for women and men at work, complete preservation of the rights provided by Atatürk, employment opportunities in jails for women convicts, and the prevention of prostitution (Ibid., 104).

Apart from women's representation in the formal sphere of politics, independent organizations also dealt with issues such as violence against women, prostitution, veiling, and women's status in the family. The TKB included the issue of prostitution in its agenda in 1956. In 1958, the KHKD attempted to open a shelter for battered women (Sancar 2012, 287). Women's organizations also repeatedly expressed their concern about the use of *çarşaf* (full-body veil) among women. When it came to women's status in the family, Kemalist women acknowledged that women were discriminated on the basis of their gender. In 1951, the TKB organized a meeting in Istanbul to discuss some articles in the Civil Law such as men being the head of the family and women having to take the surname of their husbands (S. Çakır and Gülbahar 1999). Starting in 1955, women in the Association for the Research and Investigation of Women's Social Life (KASAIID) discussed women's issues extensively at the monthly conferences they organized.<sup>91</sup> For example, Meliha Çalikoğlu, in her presentation on women in the family, focused on violence against women. One of the examples she gave was of a woman who was murdered by her husband for rejecting to eat. Çalikoğlu argued that if it was the husband who refused to eat this incident wouldn't have happened, indicating that the woman was killed because of her subordinate position before her husband (KASAIID 1967, 75). Çalikoğlu also criticized the fact that in cases of divorce women, and not men, were judged on the basis of being chaste and virtuous (Ibid., 82). In another presentation of KASAIID's monthly conferences, Neda Armaner stated that the obstacles to women's realizing their natural and legal rights were ignorance, oppressive traditions, wrong interpretations of religion, as well as the selfishness of men (Ibid., 87). In the 1950s, the issue of women and

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<sup>91</sup> Some of the presentations given during the conference series were later collected in two edited volumes in 1967 and 1973.

work was not visible on Kemalist women's formal political agenda. However, during the monthly conferences of KASAIID, women's double burden was repeatedly acknowledged. For instance, Meliha Çalıkoğlu mentioned the difficulties women faced when they were employed given that men didn't do housework (KASAIID 1967, 76). There were also demands for woman MPs to initiate discussions on family and welfare. In 1957, Oruz complained in *Kadın Gazetesi* that there were no woman ministers in the cabinet and called for woman MPs to tackle the issues of social security, social aid, and women and children (Yaraman 1999, 99).

Evidently, even though Kemalist women felt indebted to Atatürk for providing them with rights, they were aware of women's oppression in the family, and they held men partially responsible for this. In the early years of the multi-party period, there was no collective mobilization of Kemalist women around a set of demands regarding gender equality. Yet, individual women criticized, sometimes systematically, different aspects of women's unequal status in Turkish society and raised a number of demands to alleviate women's oppression. One of the reasons for Kemalist women's inability to mobilize a greater number of women in their activism was, as mentioned above, the absence of the woman question in the general political agenda, especially in that of the CHP.

On the other hand, in the 1950s, political parties discovered "women" not only as an important source of voters but also as crucial vote-catchers and attempted to establish offices to facilitate women's political mobilization. The CHP was first to form such a unit; in 1951, the ninth congress of the party issued the decision to form a women's auxiliary which came into existence four years later, in 1955. The bylaws of women's auxiliary assigned women the task of going into homes and making party propaganda. The aims of women's auxiliary were identified as, "integrating women citizens into society;" "raising women's awareness of their rights;" and "mobilizing women against the totalitarian ideology of the Democrat Party" (see Kumaş 1999, 114). In 1959, at the fourteenth congress of the CHP, the president of women's

auxiliary became an ex officio delegate at the party congress.<sup>92</sup> Having recruited about two thousand members by the end of the 1950s, CHP's women's auxiliary set themselves as "Atatürk women" and vowed to be successful in politics (Sancar 2012, 281–282). Yet, activity reports of the women's auxiliary (Kumaş 1999) show that its main function was to maintain the CHP's electoral base without having a gender agenda of its own.<sup>93</sup> As I explore in the next section, Kemalist women organized in the CHP developed a gender agenda in the 1960s, and this in fact went hand in hand with their collective efforts to mobilize women for furthering women's rights in woman-only activism.

#### 4.2. The rise of the left and the differentiation of women's interests (1960s and 1970s)

The military coup of 1960 ended the DP rule. This was welcomed and supported by the CHP, the press, and public intellectuals, who agreed that the Kemalist revolution was under threat. In 1961, a new constitution was written by a team of jurists appointed by the military regime. In Anderson's (2008) account, the new constitution aimed to prevent the abuses of power by the state administration, and in this aim created a constitutional court and second chamber, introduced proportional representation, strengthened the judiciary, guaranteed civil liberties and academic and press freedoms. These were already the demands raised in the CHP's Declaration of First Objectives (*İlk Hedefler Beyannamesi*) which was issued at the party's eleventh congress in 1959. Indeed, many Kemalists referred to the 1960 coup as a

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<sup>92</sup> A summarized history of the formation of the women's auxiliary can be found at CHP Kadın Kolları Tarihi (History of the CHP's Women's Auxiliary).

<sup>93</sup> Güneş-Ayata notes that, in the beginning, provincial and district party leaders resisted the establishment of a women's auxiliary in their constituency in spite of the strict directives from the party leader İnönü. Then, once the party leaders realized that the women's auxiliary increased the party's votes and was successful in fund raising, they embraced the separate organizing of women in the CHP (1995, 241–242). Here it's also important to note that as early as in the 1950s Kemalist women were in disagreement over whether a special unit for women was necessary in political parties. Halide Ahiska, an MP of the DP, for example warned against the danger that women's auxiliary might antagonize women and men and proposed that it was more appropriate for "all Turkish women to gather as a union outside all forms of political influences" (Sancar 2012, 282). Similarly, in Kemalist women's print media, we come across debates on whether women should stand at equal distance to all political parties or support the party that is pro-women the most; Kemalist women could be found on both sides.

"revolution." On the other hand, the new constitution also created a National Security Council dominated by the military, which acquired wide-ranging powers (Ibid., 5).

The 1960s came with a new political conjuncture for women's organizing. Thanks to the liberties brought by the 1961 Constitution as well as the upsurge of radical politics in European politics, the "Left" in Turkey became a legitimate position. Parallel to this, gender emerged as a category of—mainly quantitative—analysis as new research on health, population, migration, education and labor, both in Turkey and abroad, became available to Turkish social scientists. In Özbay's account, in the 1960s and early-1970s, modernization once again became an area of scholarly focus given the ubiquity of rapid social and economic transformation, particularly of rural-urban migration. In this context, fertility and family planning were included as topics of inquiry in social policy research, where scholars detected "an inverse relationship between fertility and the status of women" (1990, 5). According to these scholars, education was the primary factor to affect women's status. Employment, on the other hand, was not considered to be a relevant dynamic. The research on fertility and family planning was based on modernization theories and, as such, it provided "empirical validation" for Kemalist reforms: "Since the status of women was defined in terms of level of education, it was concluded that, first, women in rural areas had a lower status than those in urban areas, and second, the status of women had improved in Turkey with the growth of opportunities in education, and with urbanization and modernization" (Ibid.) In other words, new research on women's status became utterly relevant for Kemalist women's activism because it reaffirmed the corporatist understanding of the relationship between women of the upper and lower classes where the former's responsibility was to assist the latter's public inclusion through educating and modernizing them.

On the other hand, the modernization paradigm of the 1960s led Kemalist women to approach the issue of women's oppression in a multi-dimensional way and to situate it in the

greater context of social inequality. A number of publications by Kemalist women in this period focused on women's involvement in politics and the struggle for equal rights. Although these publications did not challenge the official ideology according to which women had gained rights thanks to Atatürk, they acknowledged two important things for the first time; the necessity to take further steps to improve women's status (i.e. the insufficiency of Kemalist reforms) and women's struggle for rights which preceded the gender reforms. Two of these publications were books written by Beria Önger: *Atatürk ve Kadınlarımız* (Atatürk and Our Women) in 1965, and *Kadınların Kurtuluşu* (Emancipation of Women) in 1967. In Sancar's account, Önger's argument was that women were pacified by the idea that they gained their rights without struggle. Now there was need for women's political empowerment in order to deal with their own issues. In fact, only women could deal with women's issues effectively (Sancar 2012, 299). Another book by the TKB's president Günseli Özkaya, *From Captivity to Freedom, Women's Fight*(1981), recognized women's struggle for social, economic and political rights in the late-Ottoman and early-republican periods.

Indeed, the rise of the left and the ideas of equality and freedom, together with an activist/academic focus on gender as part of modernization studies, brought the "woman question" back into public discussion and, as Sancar indicates, challenged the Kemalist discourse of women's rights which denied inequalities between women and men (2012, 298). Kemalist women's organizations interpreted women's social, economic, and political participation which, in spite of the acquired rights, dramatically lagged behind that of men as resulting from different levels of modernization that particular social groups reached (see KASAID 1973). This influenced Kemalist women's politics in a number of ways. First of all, women discussed women's status in the family not only in terms of legal rights but also in

relation to the issues of fertility, population planning, economics, and education.<sup>94</sup> Second, the topic of violence against women was collectively politicized. For instance, the Turkish Mothers' Association (TAD) organized a march protesting violence against women in 1962. Another demonstration, this time against rape, followed in 1964 in Ankara (Sancar 2012, 297). Finally, the category of labor surfaced on Kemalist women's gender agenda. From the early-1960s on, together with wage workers' mobilization around labor rights, women workers took part in street demonstrations and raised their demands. This directed Kemalist women's attention to the problems of working women and of housewives. In 1965, Beria Önger founded the Association of Progressive Women of Turkey (*Türkiye İleri Kadınlar Derneği*) with the aim of focusing on working women's problems.<sup>95</sup> Women also started organizing on the basis of their professions in organizations such as the Zonta Working and Professional Women's Association (*Zonta İş ve Meslek Kadınları Derneği*, 1963) and the Turkish Jurist Women's Association (*Türk Hukukçu Kadınlar Derneği*, 1968). By the end of 1960s, Kemalist women's organizations had put away with the "there's no difference between women and men ideology" (Sancar 2012, 298). The need for women to take up their own cause was collectively recognized by Kemalist women's organizations. For example, the TKB, on 5 December 1969, the thirty-fifth anniversary of women's acquisition of political rights, launched the campaign "Women Want Full Equality" (*Kadınlar Tam Eşitlik İstiyor*) and asked for a number of changes in the Civil Law.

Kemalist women's recognition of the multiplicity of women's problems and their collective efforts to raise gender equality demands was accompanied by changes in the CHP's approach to its woman members. From 1961 to 1965, the CHP led three successive coalition

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<sup>94</sup> For example, during the KASAIID's conference series, especially in the second half of the 1960s, woman activists moved towards this agenda, organizing talks on family and population planning. Other important new topics were orphans and consumer rights (KASAIID 1973).

<sup>95</sup> This association closed down in 1970. Önger later became the president of the socialist Progressive Women's Association (*İlerici Kadınlar Derneği*), and ran for the senate elections in 1979, collecting some twenty-two thousand votes. See zavrak, "türkiye ileri kadınlar derneği" (the Association of Progressive Women of Turkey).

governments. In this period emerged a tension between the women's auxiliary and the party leadership regarding the status of women and the presence of a gender agenda in the CHP. At the first congress of women's auxiliary held in 1962, the party leader Ismet İnönü framed the mission of women's auxiliary within a modernization and development paradigm. He suggested that women's rights were attained in urban cities but for the vast majority of women this was not the case; in villages and smaller towns women were still veiled and they avoided (verbal) contact with men so the task of women's auxiliary was to go to villages and modernize those women (Ibid., 284). Whereas the party leadership was interested in assigning women with tasks that were in line with the Kemalist definition of women's interests, some members of the women's auxiliary were interested in bringing up other issues. For example, Muazzez Sayın, a delegate from Gaziantep, challenged İnönü by claiming that it was his failure that there was no single woman in the parliament (Kumaş 1999, 120). In addition, two hundred and thirty delegates demanded retirement for women in paid-employment in twenty years (Ibid.). This demand was based on an explicit recognition of women's unpaid labor; women had a double-shift and therefore they earned the right to retirement pension earlier than men.<sup>96</sup> This was the first instance in the CHP where a conflict between women's instrumentalization for votes and their gender-related demands became public. That women collectively challenged the party administration can be seen as the first step towards the formulation of a concrete politics of gender at the CHP.

From 1964 onwards, gender politics gained prominence in the party together with an increasing political mobilization of women in Turkish society. This was mainly thanks to the rise of left politics in general and the struggle of the social democrats in the CHP to gain the

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<sup>96</sup> This is the first time, to my knowledge, that women's unpaid labor became politicized at the CHP, almost forty years after the foundation of the party. Here I find it useful to remember Özbay's (1999) account of Turkish modernization: In the old order where gender segregation was the norm both in public and private spheres, despite the dominant position of men, women's labor was visible and important. With modernity, domestic labor lost its communal form and visibility. Domestic labor arguably lost its potential to political recognition once motherhood was celebrated in the name of nation-building, too.

party leadership in particular. In 1964, at the seventeenth congress of the CHP, a significant change to the party bylaws was made; the youth auxiliary and the women's auxiliary became autonomous units of the party. This change was proposed by Bülent Ecevit and Nermin Abadan, the future social democratic leader of the CHP and one of the founders of the party's women's auxiliary, respectively (Abadan-Unat 2007, 251–252). In the next two years, Kemalist women and social democrats joined forces for more intra-party democracy, including the struggle to send an elected member of the youth and women's auxiliaries to the Party Council (*Parti Meclisi*).<sup>97</sup> CHP's eighteenth congress in 1966 was another turning point in the party's history when Bülent Ecevit became the secretary general and Nermin Abadan entered the Party Council as the representative of women's auxiliary. At this congress, the CHP situated itself at the "left-of-centre."<sup>98</sup> Two years later, women had further gains in the party; the 1968 bylaws of the CHP defined the heads of women's auxiliaries in towns and cities as ex officio members of the Party Council of each unit, which meant that women now had a vote on every level of the party administration (CHP-KK 2004b, 11).<sup>99</sup>

CHP's left-of-center approach and the simultaneous elevation of women's auxiliary to a higher, more egalitarian status brought Kemalist women's organizations closer to the party. As many members of woman-only organizations were at the same time members of the party, there was an organic relationship between Kemalist women's organizations and the CHP,

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<sup>97</sup> Party Council is the main administrative body of the CHP at all levels; each town and city as well as the central party administration has its own Party Council.

<sup>98</sup> "Left-of-centre" was first uttered by the party leader İsmet İnönü in June 1965 and accepted as the political position of the CHP in the 1966 congress. Since then, left-of-centre has always been a matter of internal debate and a source of cliquism in the CHP. An important aspect of the left-of-centre stance was that it was anti-socialist. At the 1966 congress, where Ecevit defined the left-of-centre as "reaching the awareness of the period of social innovation in the party", İnönü assured the delegates that "the CHP is not socialist; it will not be a socialist party." See CNNTURK, "CHP'nin Kurultaylar Tarihi" (History of the CHP's Congresses).

<sup>99</sup> Güneş-Ayata underlines that the shift to social democracy produced not only ideological change but also transformed the organizational structure of the party towards a stronger auxiliary system and more inner party democracy and freedom. There was also a switch to a new form of populism, set against the populism of the 1930s, which "accepted the existence of classes and attributed social injustice to class inequalities" (1990, 161). On the other hand, according to Ciddi, success of this period was more due to the effective use of the relations of patronage and clientelism than to the implementation of the social democratic ideology (2009, 8). Nonetheless, I believe that a stronger auxiliary system has contributed to the activation and further politicization of the women's auxiliary.

which started in the 1930s and continued into the multi-party period. From the 1950s on, even though some members of Kemalist women's organizations supported, became members and sometimes even representatives of political parties other than the CHP, the political developments of the 1960s and 1970s strengthened the alliance between Kemalist women's organizations and the CHP.<sup>100</sup> These developments also led to the differentiation of women's interests in the political field, which further contributed to the cooperation between Kemalist women's organizations and the CHP (see below).

CHP's positioning in the left-of-centre was, in part, a response to the Justice Party's (*Adalet Partisi*, AP) electoral victory as a centre-right/right-Kemalist party in 1965. In Zürcher's account, the AP's leader Demirel "emphasized the Islamic character of the party and the way it stood for traditional values, ... and he kept up a constant campaign of anti-communist propaganda and of harassment of leftist movements" (2004, 251). At the same time, the late-1960s saw the emergence of Islamist, nationalist, and socialist politics, alongside right-Kemalism represented by the AP (the successor of the Democrat Party) and left-Kemalism represented by the CHP. CHP's left-of-centre approach developed also as an answer to these newly emerging political projects. Apart from being admittedly anti-socialist (see footnote 98), this approach was ambivalent in that it included land reform, the nationalization of oil supplies and fighting against *Nurculuk* (a prominent Islamist movement openly supported by the AP), but it did not seek an inter-class alliance that would make

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<sup>100</sup> For example, in 1962, CHP's leader İnönü joined an event organized by the TKB to celebrate the twenty-eighth anniversary of women's acquisition of political rights, and participated in a panel discussion together with the TKB's president Günseli Özkaya (Sancar 2012, 284). Günseli Özkaya was at the same time a member of the CHP. Özkaya also served on the board of the International Alliance of Women for nine years (dates unknown), and later became a MP of the Populist Party (*Halkçı Parti*), one of the successors of the CHP in the early 1980s. Özkaya's husband Şükran Özkaya was a member of the National Unity Committee (*Millî Birlik Komitesi*), i.e. the military government that formed following the 1960 coup. Günseli Özkaya herself was a lawyer, and she brought many issues up for discussion, such as gender egalitarian changes in the Civil Law and the Penal Law, early retirement for women in paid employment (in twenty years), etc. These issues later became formal demands of the TKB. Interview with Ümit, member of the TKB, 18 May 2011.

possible a democratic civil society and a social democratic welfare state (Emre 2013, 40).<sup>101</sup> Moreover, alongside the left-of-centre approach, laicism became a defining characteristic of the CHP's politics against the National Order Party's (*Millî Nizam Partisi*, 1970) and its successor National Salvation Party's (*Millî Selâmet Partisi*, 1972) Islamic conception of social justice (Ciddi 2009, 46). In the early-1970s, it also became clear that the CHP's political line did not necessarily overlap with the state ideology any longer. In 1971, the Turkish army issued a memorandum and imposed a right-wing technocratic government. The intervention was done in the name of Kemalism and with the purpose of ending the violent clashes between radical left-wing and militant right-wing groups but the consequence was, in Anderson's words, that "[u]nder martial law, trade unionists, intellectuals and deputies of the left were rounded up and tortured, and the liberal provisions of the constitution cancelled" (2008, 7).

In the late-1960s and 1970s, the presence of competing political projects reflected on women's activism in Turkey and led to a corresponding differentiation of women's interests in the political field. In 1967, women who supported Turkish nationalism founded the Association of Turkish Nationalist Women (*Milliyetçi Türk Kadınlar Derneği*). In the meantime, religious women organized under the Association of Housewives of Turkey (*Türkiye Ev Kadınları Derneği*, 1966), which then became the Cultural Association of Turkish Women (*Türk Kadınları Kültür Derneği*, 1971). On the side of socialist women, the Association of Revolutionary Women of Turkey (*Türkiye Devrimci Kadınlar Derneği*) was founded in 1970. Throughout the 1970s, socialist women organized in great numbers in woman-only organizations as well as in mixed-sex socialist parties and movements. The Progressive Women's Association (*Ilerici Kadınlar Derneği*, IKD), founded in 1975, reached

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<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, social democrats in the CHP were also divided among themselves. So even though women's gains in the party was thanks to the left-of-centre approach, Nermin Abadan, together with a number of social democrats, resigned from the Party Council because they were against the amnesty of the convicted Democrat Party members following the 1960 coup (Abadan-Unat 2007, 253–254).

a number of fifteen thousand members in the late-1970s. Socialist women raised gender-based demands without framing them as feminist demands. For example, the IKD focused on the problems of women workers and peasants, ran a campaign for universal daycare, and became the first women's organization to celebrate the International Women's Day on 8 March 1975. In the 1970s, parallel to the differentiation of women's interests alongside nationalist, religious/Islamist, socialist, and left-of-centre/left-Kemalist political projects, Kemalist women's collective demands already were more audible and their politics more visible. In 1972, a group of Kemalist women founded the Turkish National Women's Party (*Türkiye Ulusal Kadınlar Partisi*). Organized in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, the party existed for nine years even though it never ran for the elections.<sup>102</sup> In the same year, the TÜKD organized a conference on women's problems.<sup>103</sup> By this time, women were also more explicit about the obstacles to women's political participation. In 1973, Iffet Halim Oruz stated that the obstacle to women's representation in the parliament was men (Yaraman 1999, 107). Right after, the TKB called for political parties to nominate woman candidates for elections (S. Çakır and Gülbahar 1999). Demands regarding women's labor became likewise more concrete. In 1973, the TKB demanded that women retire after 20 years of employment, and that housewifery be recognized as a profession (Ibid.).

In this period, Kemalist women's activism was greatly influenced by women's mobilization in the CHP's women's auxiliary. In 1968, at the fourth congress of the women's auxiliary which brought four hundred delegates together, Kemalist women made an explicit call for Turkish women to defend Atatürk's revolutions against "those who want to push Turkish womanhood back into the Middle Ages." Women also declared that they adopted the left-of-centre approach that was based on the notion of equal opportunity and social justice

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<sup>102</sup> For the elections in 1973 and 1977, the party was not able to organize in fifteen cities, which was necessary to participate in the elections (Çakır and Gülbahar 1999). The party closed down in 1981, after the military coup of 1980, together with all other political parties in Turkey. See F Dergi, "Tarihte Bugün" (Today in History).

<sup>103</sup> Papers presented at the conference were later published in a volume by the TÜKD (1972).

against the Justice Party's misguidance especially of women voters by means of superstition, exploitation of religious belief and separatist sectarianism (Kumaş 1999, 184). Two years later, in 1970, the declaration made at the fifth congress of the women's auxiliary was even sharper in terms of giving women a pioneering role in the "defense of democracy, which, our party, by taking its strength from progressive and revolutionary Atatürk, heavily relies upon; against imperialist forces, fascist dictatorship, far-left and anarchist movements" (Ibid., 202). In these two consecutive congresses, women formulated their gender interests within the framework of social democracy, defined by equal opportunity and social justice, which they saw as an antidote to the emergence and the rising popularity of religious, ultra-nationalist and ultra-leftist movements that openly gave women's struggle for gender equality a secondary status.

From this point until the end of 1970s, there was a much closer collaboration between the CHP and Kemalist women's organizations in terms of formulating gender equality-oriented demands. In 1974, in its sixth congress, the CHP women's auxiliary reiterated the demands raised by the TKB in 1973 for early retirement for women and for the recognition of housewifery as a profession. In addition, the women's auxiliary raised demands for the removal of the Civil Law article that subjected married women's employment to the husband's approval and for domestic workers' access to social security and pension (Kumaş 1999, 240).<sup>104</sup> In 1976, CHP's women's auxiliary in Ankara co-organized the march "End the Grief of Child Loss" (*Evlât Acısına Son*), together with the socialist IKD, against the death of many young people due to the political clashes along the right vs. left polarization. This march further strengthened the relationship between the CHP and women's organizations.

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<sup>104</sup> Women's early retirement (after twenty years of employment) passed into law in 1976. At the same time, issues of sexual citizenship were also appearing on women's political agenda. In 1979, a group of MPs from CHP (including men) gave a motion to the parliament to lift the ban on abortion, while Nermin Abadan-Unat, Sevil Korum and Çağlayan Ege organized a press conference demanding women's right to free abortion (Çakır and Gülbahar, 1999).

1970s was arguably the heyday of the collaboration between Kemalist women who were organized in the CHP and in woman-only organizations. In this period, Kemalist women's gender agenda overlapped with social democratic, social welfare-oriented politics of the CHP. At the same time, for women who saw the preservation of laicism as of primary importance for women's interests, CHP was the party where they could pursue politics against the rise of religious/Islamist and far-right movements. Thanks to this conjuncture, CHP's women's auxiliary became the most organized and most politically active in its entire history.<sup>105</sup>

In the second half of 1970s, Kemalist women's politics was closest to that of socialist women. Socialist women, unlike Kemalist women, focused more on working women's, peasant women's and poor women's problems. However, socialist and Kemalist women had overlapping demands. For instance, socialist women's journal *Kadınların Sesi* (Women's voice) demanded equal pay for equal work in 1977, around the same time as Kemalist women's organizations (Yaraman 1999, 109). Among the five thousand women who attended the 1976 march "End the Grief of Child Loss," there were many woman members of workers' unions and left-socialist organizations. The word feminism was not yet used by either group of women, but both groups incorporated a number of demands that were later politicized by feminist activists in the post-1980 period. Yet, As Sancar indicates, feminists who were previously organized in Kemalist and socialist organizations had different views on women's emancipation (2012, 300). In the post-1980 period, these different views, as I discuss in detail in the next chapter, evolved into in the post-80 period egalitarian (including Kemalist) and anti-system feminisms.

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<sup>105</sup> In Ayata's view, the women's auxiliary became a safe space for women to develop themselves as politicians, free from the competition-pressure of mixed-sex politics, in an era where women and men held very different positions in the political field. Yet, it also limited women's political activism to "feminine activities"; outside the party administration, main forms of activism remained to be visiting homes for propaganda purposes and organizing activities for fundraising for the party (1998, 238).

The late 1970s also saw the beginning of Kurdish women's political mobilization. Starting with the Democrat Party in the 1950s, the state's assimilationist policies towards the Kurdish population had softened and political parties, including the CHP, had incorporated the local—often religious—leaders into the state system (Gündoğan 2012, 114). Since the late 1950s, groups of Kurdish intellectuals had organized—and subsequently been suppressed by the state—in big cities such as Ankara and Istanbul. But the mass mobilization of Kurds happened only after the mid-1960s when they organized, together and/or in cooperation with Turkish leftists, in parties and clubs such as the Workers Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*) or the Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths (*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları*) (Alış 2012, 60–61). Kurdish nationalists, similar to Kemalists and Turkish leftists, had an anti-traditionalist, modernist outlook (van Bruinessen 1992, 311). Yet, until the end of the 1970s, Kurdish women did not take part in political parties and organizations. Only in 1978 they organized in the Association of Democratic Revolutionary Women (*Devrimci Demokrat Kadınlar Derneği*), which functioned as the women's auxiliary of the Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Association (*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Derneği*) (Alış 2012, 85). Yet, in this period, it is not possible to talk about an existing relationship between Kemalist and Kurdish women. In fact, the Kurdish question remained a major taboo in the Turkish political field up until the 1990s (Taspınar 2005, 204); it was discussed, at best, as a problem of regional underdevelopment (Yeğen 2009).

#### **4.3. International connections and the UN International Women's Year (1950s–1975)**

In the post-World War II era, Turkey-West relations became warmer. On the Turkish side, the concern was Turkey's incorporation into the capitalist world system both economically and in terms of foreign politics (Zürcher 2004, 234). Moreover, in the Cold War context, Turkey's geopolitical positioning as a front-line country with the USSR made its ideological and

institutional alignment with the West crucial. Turkey's involvement in the Marshall Plan was an indication of such cruciality, and so was her NATO membership in 1952 (Anderson 2008, 3).<sup>106</sup> Turkey's identification with the Western world was also in line with the incorporation of Islam into the Turkish national identity. Indeed, in Brockett's analysis, "[a]s Turks imagined their country in the wider global context, they very much cast it as a Muslim nation combating Soviet communism" (2011, 22).

In the multi-party period, the relationship between women's organizations in Turkey and Western/international women's networks was a crucial dimension of Kemalist women's activism. Women's movements in the Ottoman/Turkish land had been, since late-nineteenth century, informed and influenced by women's movements in the West. The dissolution of the TKB in 1935 interrupted Turkish women's exchange with international women's organizations (see Chapter 3). Right after the introduction of multi-party politics in Turkey, however, this relationship resumed. Turkey's post-World War II alliance with the First world was conducive for women's organizations to re-affiliate with Western/international women's networks. For instance, the TKB re-opened in collaboration with the International Alliance of Women (IAW), and participated in an IAW congress in Amsterdam three months after its re-opening (Davaz 2014, 770–773; 787). The Turkish University Women Association (TÜKD), for example, was founded in 1949 upon Sara Akdik's incidental acquaintance with members of the International Federation of University Women (IFUW), of which the TÜKD became a member in 1953. Similarly, the Association of Turkish Women's Council (TKKD), founded in 1959, was inspired by the International Council of Women (ICW). The TKKD became a member of the ICW in 1973 and adopted its organizational structure (TKKD 1999, 22).<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Turkey was, together with Greece, the first country to receive Marshall Aid. As Anderson states, American money was used, "to supply cheap credit and assure high prices to farmers, building roads to expand cultivation, importing machinery to modernize cash-crop production, and relaxing controls on industry" (Anderson 2008, 3).

<sup>107</sup> See also TKKD, "Biz Kimiz" (Who We Are). Among other women's organizations with membership in transnational networks, there were Istanbul Soroptimist Club (*Istanbul Soroptimist Kulübü*, 1948), Turkish Federation of Soroptimist Clubs (*Türkiye Soroptimist Kulüpleri Federasyonu*, 1953), Zonta Business and

KASAIID's publications serve as sources for tracing Kemalist women's awareness of and involvement in international women's activism. An important example of this is Meliha Torkak's lecture "Women's Movements abroad in the Last 50 Years" as part of KASAIID's Monthly Conferences. The transcript of Torkak's speech was published as a pamphlet by KASAIID in 1956. KASAIID's president Hamide Topçuoğlu, in the preface she wrote for the pamphlet, claimed that although women's status differed from country to country, it evolved in a common direction everywhere; women everywhere were struggling for higher social status (1956, 3). Similarly, Torkak in her lecture emphasized the importance of the meetings of the IAW where women, in her view, created a common gender agenda by influencing each other. According to her, women's struggle for rights was not limited to suffrage but also served their intellectual evolution. Therefore, women's independent organizing was of crucial importance, and every women's organization, even if it did very little in terms of activism, contributed to the contemporary woman revolution. That the woman revolution was a worldwide phenomenon, Torkak asserted, was the answer to the wrong accusations that women were involved in trivial issues (Ibid., 24). Kemalist women like Torkak saw themselves not only as constituents of Kemalist modernization but also as part of a worldwide women's movement that sought women's emancipation beyond national borders. They also shared with each other what they saw as best practice in other countries. For example, at another monthly conference of the KASAIID, Semin Inanç, a member of the TKB, shared her observations from a meeting she attended in Denmark, organized jointly by the IAW and the

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Professional Women's Association (*Zonta İş ve Meslek Kadınları Derneği*, 1963), and Turkish Jurist Women's Association (*Türk Hukukçu Kadınlar Derneği*, 1968). These organizations still exist today. In her chronology of the women's movement in Turkey, Tekeli (1998) states that women's organizations were founded in 1948 mainly as branches of international associations. There's no account, however, of the formation of women's organizations as "branches of international associations." To the contrary, civil society organizations in Turkey had to have cabinet approval in order to become members of international organizations. The brief history of the TÜKD, as provided in the organization's official website, says: "Prof. Sara Akdik, one of the founding members [of the TÜKD], during a business trip to London, met some members of the International Federation of University Women (IFUW) by coincidence, and gathered information about the association. After she returned to Istanbul ... she founded the University Women Association on 19 December 1949. Our association was accepted as a member of the IFUW upon receiving permission from the Cabinet for international activity on 3 December 1953." See TÜKD, "Tarihçe" (History).

Danish Women's Organization (*Dansk Kvindesamfund*). Informing the audience on women's status in Denmark, she underlined the importance of not only women's participation in employment and the public provision of childcare but also men's sharing of responsibility in housework and childcare (KASAID 1967, 48).

For Kemalist women, the alliance with Western women's organizations also meant (or overlapped with) adopting an anti-communist agenda. In 1964, Nüzhet Mengü gave a presentation at the KASAID on her attendance to the seventeenth conference of the ICW.<sup>108</sup> While she celebrated the ICW for being a member of the UN Economic and Social Commission that was "independent of social, political or religious ideologies," she criticized the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) for focusing on political purposes in their activism instead of adopting peace as their primary agenda like other international women's organizations (Ibid., 167–169). By disapproving women's involvement in politics, Mengü distanced herself from socialist-leaning women and aligned with women's activism that did not, according to her, necessarily see a relationship between the issue of women's rights and the different political systems in which women live. A decade later, in 1975, Kemalist women's first-time nationwide organization took place thanks to UN's declaration of 1975 as the International Women's Year (IWY). It is worth noting that IWY was an idea initially brought up by the WIDF (de Haan 2010).

Indeed, IWY was a turning point for Kemalist women's activism. Its importance lied in that it was what gathered women's organizations together for the first time in republican history and enabled them to adopt a common agenda. In 1975, 500 delegates from 27 women's organizations gathered and organized a nation-wide Woman's Year Congress (*Kadın Yılı Kongresi*) where they evaluated the developments in gender equality in Turkey and prepared a National Action Plan (*Ulusal Eylem Planı*) for further improvements in women's

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<sup>108</sup> The sixteenth conference of the ICW was held in Istanbul in 1960.

economic, political and social status. The conference was held deliberately on December 5–8, celebrating women's acquisition of political rights on its forty-first anniversary. At the same time, Kemalist women's aim was to align Turkey with the new global gender agenda set by the UN. At the opening speech of the congress, Belkıs Balkaş, member of the TÜKD and the head of the organizing committee, claimed that 5th of December and IWY were complimentary to each other because the revolutions of the Republic had never discriminated between men and women (TÜKD 1978, 27).

In many of the talks given at the congress, Atatürk was praised; Kemalist women expressed their admiration and gratitude towards him and the Kemalist reforms. Women also repeatedly stated their discipleship of Atatürk, and emphasized their pride in being enlightened Turkish women and mothers (Ibid.). However, this did not keep them from discussing women's issues in length and breadth, and women's adherence to Kemalism went hand in hand with a critical assessment of the current state of women in Turkish society. Perihan Arıburun, for instance, complained that women had no say in the family and in society because of their economic dependence on men. A more radical presentation was delivered by Hamide Topçuoğlu, who claimed that it was no more enough to be proud of the number of woman jurists or doctors there were in Turkey because that was anyway how it's supposed to be. It was time to ask how many women actually benefited from the Kemalist reforms. After fifty years of republican rule, women's task was to pay attention to a much higher number of women including young women, girls, mothers, woman workers, agricultural workers, craftswomen, and housewives. Topçuoğlu said, "[I]n short, we need to pay attention to women as a social group, as a whole. ... [F]or us, elitism in the woman question is over" (Ibid., 57).

Topçuoğlu's call for looking at women as a social group had two implications, both of which she stressed in her talk. First was to leave aside the "generalizing approach" to women's

problems which, according to her, did not go any further than reproducing the existing prejudices and superficial explanations about women's condition. Instead, there was a pressing need for looking at the differential problems women faced and finding possible commonalities between them. A list of problems Topçuoğlu juxtaposed were indicative of her materialist perspective on gender relations with an underlying focus on women's labor: Women's economic dependency on men, women's position as unpaid family workers and housewives, unpaid domestic labor being considered as unproductive in the economy, housewives having no leisure time to improve themselves intellectually, urgent need for public regulation and provision of housework and care work, double burden of working women, men taking no responsibility in housework, women's oppression in patriarchal, extended families, gender-based discrimination at work, and the low representation of women in politics due to all of the above. The second implication of the search for a common agenda to build women as a social group was the need for the adoption of a gender perspective by women. Topçuoğlu argued:

Problematization of a situation is possible only when those who are troubled by it realize their distress, believe that they might as well live without suffering [from this situation], and start looking for ways to realize this thinking. ... As long as women regard the conditions of their oppression all-natural, unavoidable, and endurable, there is no such thing as the woman question. (Ibid., 100)

While calling for women's consciousness, Topçuoğlu refrained from characterizing it as feminist and asserted that questions related to women's status were not "artificial problems which Turkish women borrowed from feminist movements that were alien to them" (Ibid.). Nonetheless, her closing remarks sounded like the vindication of the upcoming feminist movement; that women's struggle was not be seen as an egotistic search for rights (i.e. Western feminism in the eyes of the Turkish public) but as the cause of all women and of their daughters, too (Ibid., 110).

Following the keynote talks, women divided into five thematic commissions on education, culture, art, law, economics and health. The reports prepared by these commissions were reflective of the current state of Kemalist women's gender agenda. The law commission concluded that men being the head of the household and women's subjection to men's approval for employment should be abolished. While these amendments in the Civil Law have long been on Kemalist women's agenda, a number of new demands were also raised by the law commission such as the banning of dowry, the realization of compulsory legal marriage (in cases where couples had only religious marriage which did not have any official status), the revision of the Labor Law according to women's needs, and access to social security for prostitutes. The commission also called for the state's active involvement in ensuring gender equality by establishing the mechanisms and institutions to realize the National Action Plan and by involving woman jurists and sociologists in processes of legal change. The economy commission focused on women's entrapment between paid and unpaid labor, and suggested policy changes to ensure women's economic independence such as public childcare and day care, parental leave, part time jobs for women with children, and the inclusion of unpaid family workers (majority of them being women) in the formal economy. The report of the commission on health raised demands to provide health education for women, family planning, gender equality education for men, sex education for children starting from primary school, and free and accessible abortion.<sup>109</sup>

While all these demands were taken up by (Kemalist and other) feminists in the late-1980s and early-1990s, the report of the education commission evidenced what made Kemalist women unique in their struggle for women's rights. Having a strong Kemalist intonation, the report, apart from all-inclusive demands such as the mainstreaming of compulsory education or sex education for all children, underlined the need to follow

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<sup>109</sup> A draft law for free and accessible abortion was given to the parliament by Nermin Abadan-Unat and a number of other MPs from the CHP in 1979 (Arat 1998, 266). Abortion was legalized in 1983 by the military regime.

Atatürk's principles in education, the importance of loyalty to the dress revolution—against the increasing popularity of headscarf-wearing in the urban population—, and the urgency of teaching Turkish to non-Turkish speaking population, meaning the Kurdish population.

Clearly, IWY was a turning point in Kemalist women's activism in that it served as a legitimate framework within which Kemalist women pressed their struggle for women's rights. At the same time, it familiarized Kemalist women's gender politics with the newly emerging global gender equality agenda. This synchronization remained a crucial element in Kemalist women's gender agenda. Furthermore, the UN emphasis on the importance of women's active involvement in civil society activism gave legitimacy to the political content of Kemalist women's activism. Together with the collective acknowledgement that women who benefited from the Kemalist reforms were a "happy minority," the new direction for Kemalist women's activism would be to tackle the issues of those women who didn't benefit from the Kemalist gender reforms, and to build a women's front in the field of civil society to collectively press on the state for gender egalitarian legal change. This new perspective, although it wasn't defined as "feminist" at the time, constituted the very kernel of Kemalist feminism a decade later.

In 1976, mobilized by the Woman's Year Congress, a number of Kemalist women's organizations gathered under the Federation of Turkish Women's Associations (*Türkiye Kadın Dernekleri Federasyonu*, TKDF) in order to pursue the policy agenda which was set by the commissions at the IWY congress. The activities of this umbrella organization, as well as of its constituent organizations, were documented in the quarterly journal *KaDeFe* which was published by the TKDF from 1977 until 1992. *KaDeFe* also informed the reader on the activities of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and called for the adoption of the UN Decade for Women, 1975–1985. Indeed, with the aim of synchronizing with the UN gender equality agenda, member organizations of the TKDF also mobilized for the UN's

proclamation of 1979 as the International Year of the Child, and *KaDeFe* started publishing articles on children's problems.<sup>110</sup> Along the lines of the UN Decade for Women, the issue of "women in development" became a popular topic of discussion in *KaDeFe*. In a number of articles, authors suggested strategies to increase women's participation in employment, and underlined the need for men's sharing of household responsibilities to alleviate women's double burden.

After IWY, Kemalist women continued to attend the meetings organized by international women's networks. For instance, in 1978, the TKKD participated in a conference on women and development organized by the ICW in Oslo. Yet, member organizations of the TKDF remained mostly focused on domestic affairs. Until 1980, they proposed a number of draft laws to the Turkish Parliament on issues that ranged from changes in the Labor Law regarding working women's parental leave and universal access to day care, to the elimination of gender inequalities in the Civil Law and changes in the Social Security Law regarding widow and orphan women's access to social security. The TKDF also tackled the issue of women's political participation. In an article published in *KaDeFe*, Emel Dođramacı listed the obstacles to women's political participation as follows: Men excluding women from politics, women's economic dependency on men and their inability to invest in politics, electoral system being discriminatory against women, conservative norms preventing women from taking part, and, women's lack of experience in politics given their housework and care work responsibilities (KaDeFe September-December 1977, 7).

#### **4.4. The emergence of women's studies in Turkey (1975–1982)**

The last development in Turkey that had a significant impact on Kemalist women's activism was the emergence of women's studies as a field within Turkish social science which, in fact,

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<sup>110</sup> Motherhood, children and mother-child relationship had always been popular topics in Kemalist women's activism. What was new about the articles in *KaDeFe* was the problematization of childhood through a transnational/UN perspective.

went in parallel with the nation-wide mobilization around IWY. In Özbay's account, the rise of Islamism and the 1971 military intervention led to an increase in the number of Kemalist publications. Especially in 1973, the fiftieth anniversary of the Republic, the state encouraged the publication of studies on women. Kemalist publications of the 1970s were different than those in the previous decades in that they took the early-republican era, rather than the prevailing late-Ottoman period, as the basis for comparison. This way, they were able to present improvements on the status of women in a quantitative manner (Özbay 1990, 6). However, Özbay claims that these studies have been defensive in the evaluation of Kemalist reforms (Ibid.). Similarly, Arat argues that these studies had "respectable but only ideological concerns" in that they constructed idealized images of the past and the present, in order to elevate Kemalist reforms by marking "what the earlier periods lacked in relation to what the Kemalist period offered" (Y. Arat 1993, 121). In this vein, they displayed "how the reforms that uph[e]ld women also help reinforce[d] secularism, democracy and nationalism" (Ibid.).

A widely cited example among these publications is Tezer Taşkıran's *Cumhuriyetin 50. Yılında Türk Kadın Hakları* (Turkish Women's Rights in the 50th Year of the Republic). This book was published by the Prime Ministry in the honor of the 1973 celebrations.<sup>111</sup> In her book, Taşkıran went beyond the state discourse on the woman question, and acknowledged the Ottoman and early-republican women's struggle for emancipation and equal rights. In fact, she spared a long section for the significant women's journals and the people who defended women's rights in the late-Ottoman period. Yet, Taşkıran also claimed that women's demands for gender equality in this period did not influence public opinion as much as women hoped because "no one was brave enough to change the bigoted and narrow-minded system" that was based on gender segregation (1973, 63). That was to mean that without an audacious leader such as Mustafa Kemal to realize the reforms, women's demands

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<sup>111</sup> In 1976, Taşkıran's book was also translated to and published in English.

were doomed to remain inefficacious. In the final analysis of her piece, Taşkıran evaluated the current state of the woman revolution in terms of the Kemalist discourse of women's rights: Women had gained all their rights in the republican period, but the realization of these rights had not spread throughout the country. Even though women's equal citizenship rights were secured by the law, gender relations were still, to a great extent, shaped by old traditions, and the woman revolution was not internalized by the masses. According to Taşkıran, those old traditions included not sending girls to school, religious marriage and polygamy, and veiling (Ibid., 167). In her assessment of the gender reforms, Taşkıran remained in the original Kemalist paradigm that saw the "woman question" mainly as a matter of laicism, education, and women's public inclusion. Moreover, remaining loyal to the corporatist understanding of women's interests, she held the "enlightened Turkish woman" responsible for elevating the rest of womanhood to her level, because "[b]efore anyone else, it [wa]s the Turkish woman to guard her rights, which were given to her very easily in comparison to other countries" (Ibid.). Yet, Taşkıran also acknowledged the responsibility of men in guarding women's rights. In fact, she stated: "If we could make the Turkish man internalize [the woman revolution] and try to awaken the woman together with him, we would probably encounter another [better] state of affairs than that of today" (Ibid., 172).

Like Taşkıran, many Kemalist women who wrote on the status of women, even when they acknowledged men's responsibility in furthering gender equality, were hesitant to adopt a more critical stance towards the Kemalist gender reforms; their evaluation was limited to suggesting that the reforms should reach further into all sections of Turkish society. On the other hand, as Özbay suggests, Kemalist publications by the early-1970s had "shifted their focus from laicism and nationalism to Westernization. Kemalist [women did] not seem to complain about their own status, but comparing it with Western women, they demand[ed] more rights for the majority of Turkish women. Thus, they [were] quite close to liberal

feminists [in the West] in their approach" (1990, 6). The emergence of women's studies fostered this shift towards evaluating the disadvantaged position of women as a social group in Turkey and making demands for improving their condition. Although it is possible to trace the origins of women's studies in Turkey to the early texts that took women as a category of analysis (see above), it is the conference "Woman in Turkish Society" (*Türk Toplumunda Kadın*) organized by Nermin Abadan-Unat in 1978 that is considered to be a turning point in academic research on women's issues. Abadan-Unat, later a self-identified Kemalist feminist, was one of the first scholars to conduct research on women in Turkey.<sup>112</sup> In her autobiography, Abadan-Unat recounted her interest in women's studies as follows: In 1973, Helvi Sipilä, the Assistant-Secretary-General of the United Nations, organized a seminar on family planning and the status of women in Istanbul. Influenced by the discussions that took place at the seminar, Abadan-Unat started questioning whether it was only middle and upper-class urban women who benefited from the legal framework that ensured gender equality in Turkey. With this question in mind, she attended the "Woman and Development" conference in 1977 at Wellsley College, Massachusetts, U.S., where she presented a paper on the "Liberation and pseudo-liberation of migrant women workers." Abadan-Unat also knew about the 1975 UN International Women's Year and that a delegation of professional women represented Turkey at the World Conference on Women in Mexico City. Upset by the fact that the Turkish delegation had not enlightened the public on the targets and strategies of the UN International Women's Decade (1975–1985), upon her return from the conference at Wellsley College, she decided to inform the Turkish public on the international developments on women's status and rights which were, in her view, becoming more and more

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<sup>112</sup> Abadan-Unat's first work on women, *Social Change and Turkish Women*, was published in 1963.

important. The conference "Woman in Turkish Society" was the result of this decision (2007, 230–232).<sup>113</sup>

Presentations delivered at the conference were gathered in an edited volume. Abadan-Unat's introduction to the volume staged Kemalist women's changing approach to the "woman question" in a way that was very similar to the arguments raised at the Woman's Year Congress in 1975. Indeed, Abadan-Unat's framing was embraced by many Kemalist feminists in the post-1980 period:

The purpose of the book is to present a comprehensive analysis of the achievements and problems of Turkish women in the late 1970s. In this regard, the pioneering role of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic, is obvious. Nevertheless, it is equally important to understand the reasons for his actions. Women in Turkey have come to some degree of revolutionary consciousness primarily by way of the ideas, the actions and the organizations initiated by Atatürk, his closest friends and colleagues. Yet, these men were the product of a Muslim society. They internalized their basic values in a sex-segregated society. This relevant observation might perhaps give a clue to some of the ambivalences inherent in the results obtained so far, and eventually furnish some theoretical explanations with regard to change in sex role distribution and sex segregation. (1981, 1–2)

In a way, Abadan-Unat was reproducing the Kemalist discourse on women's rights by depicting the source of women's oppression as Islam and its sex-segregation principle. She also explained women's low engagement in gender struggle by claiming that "the rights were bestowed upon them and not fought for" (Ibid., 26). On the other hand, Abadan-Unat saw the founding Kemalist cadre, including Mustafa Kemal himself, equally guided by discriminatory values. Seeming to accept Tekeli's assessment that Mustafa Kemal provided Turkish women with political rights without setting up a system to ensure that they would be able to make full use of them, Abadan-Unat characterized Mustafa Kemal's laicist reforms by his concern for presenting Turkey to the world as a modern country (Ibid., 12).

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<sup>113</sup> Moroccan sociologist and the author of *Beyond the Veil* Fatima Mernissi and the head of Women's Problems Research Center in New Delhi Vina Mazumdar were also present at the conference. Papers presented at the conference were gathered in a volume, published in Turkish in 1979 and in English and German in 1981.

In her assessment of women's current position in Turkish society, Abadan-Unat went beyond holding religious and traditional practices responsible for women's disadvantaged status and pointed at some of the structural dynamics of gender equality within a developmentalist paradigm. According to her even though women's rights in Turkey were ahead of those in Europe, Turkish women were nonetheless seriously handicapped in realizing their rights because of Turkey's status as a developing country as well as because of women's weak class consciousness and their lack of interest in public issues and politics (Ibid., 26). Among the obstacles to women's awareness of their rights, Abadan-Unat noted: Cultural and traditional values, limitations of legally bestowed rights, economic realities, the consumption-oriented bourgeois ideology based on the practice of sex-segregation, and political organizations which mobilized women to devote themselves to religious practices (Ibid., 28). At the same time, Abadan-Unat acknowledged women's rising awareness of their "subservient role as unpaid household labor force," alongside an awakening political interest, class consciousness, awareness of social and economic rights, and the need for self-fulfillment (Ibid., 27–28).

Another focus in women's studies in the second half of the 1970s was on sex roles and socialization theories which sought to explain the dynamics of unequal gender relations on a more inter-personal level (Y. Arat 1993). In 1982, another Kemalist feminist, Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı, edited the volume *Sex Roles, Family, & Community in Turkey*. This book marked the shift from ideological to sociological concerns in understanding gender relations in Turkey on two grounds: First, it acknowledged the ethnic, cultural, and religious differences in Turkish society (Kağıtçıbaşı 1982, 1). Second, even though it celebrated urbanization from a Kemalist perspective for weakening religiosity and sex-segregation, and for replacing them with secular values, it also acknowledged the dominance of the Islamic framework which shaped the worldviews of both the republican elite and the masses (Ibid., 10). This

disenchanted the idea that those who benefited from Atatürk's reforms had eluded themselves from the impact of religion on gender relations.

These two early collections on women's studies shared a number of characteristics that inform us on the state of Kemalist women's activism in the late 1970s. These characteristics also became the basis of Kemalist feminism in the following decades. First of all, these collections are proof that Kemalist women's organizations were organizing conferences and doing research on women's status so as to increase women's social, economic and political participation; the academic references provided in these volumes show that the early-stage women's studies were built upon the knowledge produced by women's organizations as much as it did on social science research. Kemalist woman scholars and activists were closely related to each other, they drew on each other and often were present both in activism and in the academia, and they shared a similar perspective on gender politics in Turkey. Furthermore, Kemalist women were familiar with the emerging global gender agenda and its impact on the field of women's studies. The academic focus in these volumes on topics such as women's labor, violence against women, sex roles, and political participation was as much a result of women's mobilization around IWY as it was an outcome of the parallel developments in Turkish social science. Yet, in these early works, the status of women was addressed within a paradigm where the aim was to integrate remote areas and social groups into the center without touching upon the nationalist, authoritarian and militarist aspects of Turkish modernization (Sancar and Akşit 2011, 188). Finally, the contributors to both volumes were scholars who later identified as feminists in the post-1980 period, which reveals an early alliance between Kemalist and feminist scholars that would last in the academia roughly for another decade and a half. The next chapter investigates this alliance and maps out the dynamics that made it possible as well as the reasons for its termination.

## 4.5. Conclusion

The first generation of feminist scholars who researched the history of women's activism in Turkey did not consider Kemalist women's activism as of particular significance or relevance for the historiography of feminist struggle. For example, according to Yorgun (1984), feminists of the early-republican period had become by the 1950s "more Kemalists than feminists" because they fully relied on the state in realizing gender-related reforms. In Yorgun's account, Kemalist women who were organized in classical [sic.] women's organizations thought that Kemalism's gender project had failed because the DP had made undue concessions to religion and traditional values, and this had resulted in setbacks in women's emancipation. Yorgun found this view not only short sighted but fundamentally wrong; for her, Kemalism was bound to bring failure to women's emancipation because it only brought legal change and did not attempt to change the actually existing oppressive gender relations, and it furthermore discouraged women from searching for their own emancipation (Ibid.).<sup>114</sup> According to Tekeli, Kemalist women were gender-blind because of their class position and their relationship with the Turkish state; they constituted a privileged group and considered feminism irrelevant (1990, 152).

Indeed, from the perspective of feminist scholarship of the 1980s and early-1990s, feminist activism and the Kemalist discourse of women's rights stood in utter conflict with each other. It is also true that Kemalist women, if and when they had to choose, took sides with the Kemalist discourse of women's rights rather than with the political perspective of the 1980s' and early-1990s' feminist activism. I discuss this point in detail in the next chapter. Yet, the analyses I presented in this chapter raise a number of challenges to the earlier feminist evaluation of Kemalist women's activism in the pre-1980 period. First of all, it seems quite clear that Kemalist women raised political demands to achieve gender equality while

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<sup>114</sup> Bilge Firat (2002) claims that Pembenez Yorgun was the pseudonym of Şirin Tekeli, which she used for a period in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup.

keeping to the official myth that Turkey was ahead of the West in gender equality thanks to the Kemalist reforms. They knew that this was not the case, and they attempted to challenge the patriarchal social structures in Turkish society. That is to say, neither their discourse nor their activism was a simple reproduction or continuation of the Kemalist discourse of women's rights according to which gender equality was fully achieved in Turkey. Similarly, their politics were constrained by Kemalism but not defined by Kemalist men. Kemalist women were dissatisfied by the insufficient realization of the gender reforms, and even if they didn't formulate it as "patriarchy," they repeatedly pointed to the selfishness of men and the indifference of male politicians to women's issues as an obstacle to gender equality.

Second, the aim of preserving the acquired rights and Kemalist women's adherence to the laicism principle have marked their activism since the beginning of the multi-party era. This, unlike what some feminists have argued, was not a simple blind adherence to Kemalism but a reaction to the changing status of the "woman question" from the beginning of the multi-party period. In fact, from the mid-1940s on, "defending Atatürk's woman revolution" became the very way of doing gender politics for Kemalist women since, first, the reforms themselves were challenged by right-wing and more religious interpretations of Kemalism, and second, Kemalism was still the official ideology, and therefore a legitimate framework within which women could raise their demands.

Related to this is the issue of Kemalist women being thankful to the Kemalist state. It is true that Kemalist women's organic relationship with and their active involvement in the Turkish state have shaped their views on the role of the state in women's emancipation and prevented them from publicly challenging the state. Many of the leading figures of Kemalist women's activism such as Tezer Taşkıran, Afet Inan, Günseli Özkaya, and Nermin Abadan-Unat were academics, bureaucrats and/or MPs themselves or had their closest relatives in high-rank positions in the state. On the other hand, it does not follow that these women had a

smooth relationship with the state. For example, Abadan-Unat talks about her experience as a senator and resentfully remembers that a man senator refused to shake her hand because she was a woman (2007, 259), which suggests that a closer look into this relationship might show Kemalist women's struggle against male dominance within the state structures, too. In fact, "being thankful to the state" might be also a strategic choice for women rather than or alongside a sincere gratitude. A comparison between the publications of independent women's organizations and the speeches given by Kemalist women in the presence of high-rank state officials shows that women expressed their indebtedness to the state mostly in the latter case and, in their internal meetings, they criticized the state for not improving women's social, economic, and political status. Similarly, praising Atatürk was a state tradition that women's organizations could not easily escape. For them, it was a way of being recognized and respected. It was a way of saying that they were a part of the state and they had a say over the politics of gender. It seems reasonable to argue that women were indeed thankful, but also that they wouldn't feel the need to repeatedly say this had it not been at the same time a discursive political strategy.

It is also useful to keep in mind that Kemalist women were thankful to the Kemalist state, a state that was run by a class of people who—although not always—acted in their interests. In fact, as I discuss in Chapter 7, the 2000s showed that there was nothing inherent about Kemalist women's thankfulness to the state. Kemalist women supported the state so long as they were convinced that the state embraced and protected a laicist, Turkish, and modernist/westernist definition of women's interests. What was inherent in Kemalist women's activism, on the other hand, was to recognize the state as one of the main actors of gender politics. Therefore, Kemalist women, even when they were no more thankful to the state, strived to influence its gender policies as one of their main forms of activism.

Finally, there is the argument that Kemalist women did not embrace feminism because of their class position. Kemalist women's activism has certainly not been a grassroots movement that mobilized working-class or rural women for women's rights. However, Kemalist women knew that they were privileged. If they found feminism irrelevant, this seems to be rather because they were operating within a modernist, developmentalist paradigm in which they, as urban, professional women, felt both entitled and obliged to modernize and educate the lower-class, traditional women. Moreover, since the subsumption of early-republican feminism into Kemalism in the 1930s, the argument had been that there was no need for feminism when there was Kemalism. In other words, for women who adhered to the Kemalist discourse of women's rights, feminism made sense only within Kemalism anyway. In a context where Kemalism and feminism came to be synonymous (Saktanber 2003, see Chapter 3), the absence of a feminist terminology in Kemalist women's pre-1980 discourse did not mean that they were unable to formulate demands which protected women's gender interests. In fact, most of the demands raised by Kemalist women in the pre-1980 period, as I show in the next chapter, were taken up by feminist activists in the late-1980s and early-1990s.

These points suggest that an inquiry into the relationship between Kemalism and feminism that goes beyond seeing them as simply incompatible and/or antithetical allows a more comprehensive scholarly discussion on the history of women's activism in Turkey. Such inquiry is in line with Çakır's reflections on the main goal of feminist historical writing which is "to ensure the visibility of women's experiences as well as their practices in struggling for their rights and freedom within the historical context, to discuss the reasons for the invisibility of women in history, and to uncover the ways that the power and agency of women have been obstructed" (2007, 73). According to Çakır, "[t]he most important reason for women's invisibility and the denial of their subjectivity in the Turkish context is how they have been

used symbolically in the processes of modernization and development ... Women's history-writing should therefore be liberated from the discourses of modernization and nationalism and the invented myths and images belonging to this period" (Ibid., 73–74). We should, then, also move beyond the idea that, before the re-emergence of feminist activism in the 1980s, woman activists were passive reproducers of the Kemalist discourse of women's rights, and explore instead the ways in which they challenged, transgressed and transformed—but also reproduced—this discourse.

With this perspective in mind, in this chapter I explored the formation of Kemalist women's gender agenda in the multi-party period. I showed that Kemalist women's politics in this period was shaped by the conservative turn in Turkish politics in the 1950s, the rise of the left and the subsequent differentiation of women's interests in the 1960s and 1970s, and the emergence of a global gender equality agenda and of women's studies as a disciplinary field in Turkey in the second half of the 1970s. The gender agenda that Kemalist women came to pursue by the end of the 1970s remained a constitutive part of their gender politics in the following decades. In other words, it is not possible to fully account for Kemalist feminism of the post-1980 period without including Kemalist women's pre-1980 activism in its analysis. Therefore, my inquiry into the formation of Kemalist feminism, which is the topic of the next chapter, builds on the findings of this chapter.

## 5. The formation of Kemalist feminism (1980–2002)

The previous chapter investigated Kemalist women's activism in the multi-party period (from 1946 to 1980) and focused on the gradual development of their gender agenda in relation to the political developments of the period. It showed that the rise of the left and the subsequent differentiation of women's interests, the emergence of the UN-led global gender equality agenda and that of women's studies in Turkey, were the three main dynamics that shaped Kemalist women's participation in the politics of gender. Following the 1980 military coup, the courses of both Kemalism and of women's activism took on new directions. With the decline of class-based politics, political Islam and Kurdish nationalism—previously contained in right-wing and left-wing movements, respectively (Taspinar 2005, 204)—developed into projects of belonging that posed serious challenges to Kemalism. At the same time, the rise of feminist politics in general, and feminists' critical evaluation of Kemalist gender reforms in particular, unsettled the hegemony of the Kemalist discourse of women's rights within women's activism. These developments, together with Turkey's adoption of the global gender equality agenda (Chapter 6), paved the way for the formation of Kemalist feminism.

In the 1980s, in the face of the increasing popularity of Islamism and the accompanying politicization of the headscarf, laicism became the dominant theme in Kemalist women's politics. Concurrently, feminist activism encouraged Kemalist women to include new issues in their gender agenda and to adopt new forms of activism. At this juncture, some prominent figures of Kemalist women's activism identified simultaneously as feminists or simply as Kemalist feminists. From the late-1980s on, Kemalist feminists organized joint events and campaigns with feminist scholars and activists, and thereby developed an understanding of feminism that incorporated the Kemalist definition of women's interests. Differentiating themselves from other—especially anti-system—feminists, Kemalist feminists defined their version of feminism as one that was oriented towards state policies, close to

Western liberal feminism, and based on a notion of rights as undifferentiated by class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious inequalities. Throughout the 1990s, Kemalist feminists founded new woman-only organizations and took over the leadership of the ones that were founded in the pre-1980 period. By the end of the decade, Kemalist women's gender politics was defined for the most part by Kemalist feminists. In the second half of the 1990s, Kemalist feminism also influenced the politics of the post-1980 CHP's newly founded women's auxiliary. In the meantime, Kemalist feminists differed among themselves with regards to their approach to the category of women's labor.

This chapter provides a detailed examination of the formation of Kemalist feminism. It focuses on the development of Kemalist feminist ideas in relation to those of anti-system and egalitarian feminists, and analyzes the intellectual exchange between Kemalist and other feminists against the background of the post-1980 political conjuncture in Turkey.<sup>115</sup> In so doing, the chapter maps out the main characteristics of Kemalist feminism as follows: A laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist understanding of women's rights, a self-demarcation from anti-system feminism and a strategic alliance with egalitarian feminism, a solidaristic approach to the relationship between upper- and lower-class women, simultaneous membership in woman-only and mixed-sex organizations, and an orientation towards influencing, challenging and/or complementing state policies. These characteristics, I show in the following chapters, have informed Kemalist women's activism in the 1990s and 2000s. In this chapter, I limit my analysis of Kemalist feminism to the period until 2002. This is because, in the 2000s, while the main characteristics of Kemalist feminism remained the same, the dynamics of the politics of gender in Turkey have dramatically changed thanks to Turkey's European Union accession process and the Justice and Development Party's (AKP)

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<sup>115</sup> Islamist and Kurdish feminisms are not the subject of this chapter, and therefore these brands of feminism are excluded from my analysis. Kemalist feminists' relationship with Islamist and Kurdish women's activisms are examined in Chapter 7.

rise to power as a single-party government in 2002. I discuss the repercussion of these developments on Kemalist feminist activism in detail in the next two chapters.

This chapter is organized in seven sections. In the first two sections, I briefly introduce the post-1980 political conjuncture in Turkey against which laicism became the dominant theme in Kemalist women's activism, and the emergence and development of feminist activism, respectively. These two sections provide the politico-historical background for the formation of Kemalist feminism. In the third section, I focus on the early interaction and alliance between Kemalist and feminist women, mainly in the academic field, as a result of which some Kemalist women simultaneously identified as feminists. I show how these women (Kemalist feminists) synthesized feminism with the Kemalist definition of women's interests and introduced their own version of feminism so as to utilize it in their struggle *for* gender equality and *against* political Islam. In the next section, I compare Kemalist and anti-system feminists conflicting views on women's liberation by focusing on each group's attitude towards the headscarf issue and the Kurdish conflict. I also discuss the differential status each group attributed to patriarchy in their analysis of women's oppression and how it influenced their politics of the private sphere and their relationship with the state. Following Arat's (1994) argument, I show that, whereas feminists singled out patriarchy as the root cause of women's gender-based oppression, and therefore its elimination as key to women's liberation, Kemalist feminists argued that modernity, laicism, education, and economic development were more powerful tools to end women's oppression. In the fifth section, I turn to Kemalist feminists and focus on their criticism of feminism, especially in relation to feminists' critical evaluation of the Kemalist gender reforms and of Kemalist women's politics. In the sixth section, I look at the gender politics of the CHP's women's auxiliary from its re-formation in 1996 until the general elections in 2002. I discuss both how the gender agenda of the CHP's women's auxiliary differed from that of Kemalist women's organizations, and how Kemalist

feminism gradually influenced the politics sought by the women's auxiliary. I base my examination of the formation of Kemalist feminism on journals published by Kemalist women's organizations, books and edited volumes by Kemalist feminists, as well as feminist journals, with the aim of placing the two bodies of academic and activist literature in a dialogical relationship with each other. In the sixth section, I examine the reports, documents, and booklets prepared by the CHP's women's auxiliary. In the concluding section, I come back to Kemalist feminism's main characteristics as I outlined above and discuss them in the light of the research material I present and analyze throughout the chapter.

### **5.1. The post-1980 conjuncture: Laicism against political Islam**

The 1980 military coup and the three-year military regime that followed redefined the parameters of Turkish politics in a radical way. The military regime banned all forms of activism and shut down all the political parties, worker's unions and civil society organizations.<sup>116</sup> The coup was an attempt of Kemalist restoration of the state institutions which were seen as threatened by the instability of the governments of the 1970s (Yalman 2002). It was, at the same time, a strategic move to eliminate the state cadres who upheld leftist interpretations of Kemalism, which was an ongoing process since the 1971 military memorandum, and to replace them with right-Kemalist ones (Taşkın 2006). The army officials and the state elite supportive of the coup redefined Turkish nationalism so as to further incorporate in it a Muslim ethos, with the expectation that a state-regulated, true Islam would unite Turkish society against leftist, Kurdish-separatist or radical Islamist ideologies (Atasoy 2011, 110).<sup>117</sup> This redefinition was adopted in the 1982 constitution as "Atatürk

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<sup>116</sup> As a result of the coup, thirty thousand people lost their jobs and/or were forced to exile, fourteen thousand people were denaturalized, three hundred people died in unsolved murders, fifty people were hanged, a hundred and seventy-one people died during torture, two hundred ninety-nine died while in jail, and ninety-five people died while confronting the police. See Karabağlı, "CHP'li milletvekili Şenal Sarihan: İktidar ülkeyi kan gölüne çevirdi" (CHP's MP Şenal Sarihan: The government turned the country into a blood bath).

<sup>117</sup> In Taspinar's account, the joint organizing of Turks and Kurds on the left in the 1970s exacerbated the Turkish military's fear of communism and encouraged it to use religion as an antidote to simultaneously suppress the leftist and Kurdish political mobilizations (2005, 204–205).

nationalism."<sup>118</sup> In fact, Atatürk nationalism was the constitutional counterpart of what was widely known as the "Turk-Islam Synthesis" (*Türk-Islam Sentezi*). This approach was developed as an ideological formula in the late-1960s and early-1970s by the Intellectuals' Hearth (*Aydınlar Ocağı*), a club of intellectuals whose political stance ranged from centre-right to far-right, to counter the leftist intellectuals against the alleged communist threat they posed (Copeaux 2014; Brockett 2011, 222–223). The 1982 constitution radically restricted the citizenship rights of individuals and collectivities before the state. In Akça's account, it undermined all basic political rights and freedoms in the name of a strong state positioned against the individual and the society (2014, 17). This made, in return, the struggle for hegemony in the state the ultimate goal of political projects, for the state was given arbitrary power to define the terms of citizenship. In the meantime, the state's concern for the surveillance of the field of cultural production brought strict control over education. The Turk-Islam Synthesis became the dominant narrative of all school books in the form of Atatürk nationalism; religion became a mandatory course in primary and secondary education, and new subjects were added to textbooks under the title "subjects pertaining to Atatürkism" with a strong emphasis on Turkishness (Keyman and Kancı 2011, 328).

The new framework of Turkish politics incorporated religious and ethnic identities and opened up the political sphere for identity politics in which cultural belongings formed the basis of discourses (Erdoğan and Üstüner 2002, 199). The now legitimate public presence of Islamist ideology and politicized religion was a fundamental challenge to Kemalism in the political sphere since Islamism openly criticized Western modernity and Kemalism as its Turkish embodiment.<sup>119</sup> Islamists embraced the image of the educated, enlightened, covered Muslim woman as a symbol of the cultural alternative Islamism posed against Kemalism (R. Çakır 2000). Islamism's challenge was reinforced by the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*,

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<sup>118</sup> See 1982 Constitution.

<sup>119</sup> For an analysis of Islamism from the perspectives of social movements and political process model, see Eligür (2010).

ANAP) governments' (1983–1991) initiation of a neoliberal economic restructuring which would assist Turkey's intensified integration into global markets. The newly rising classes, especially in urban areas, became the target and the electoral base of Islamist politics (Yalman 2009; Tuğal 2009), carrying the Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP) to electoral victory in the mid-1990s. In the meantime, in 1984, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK) launched an armed struggle against the Turkish army in quest for administrative autonomy and greater cultural and political rights for Kurds in Turkey. This was another fundamental challenge to Kemalism since the Kemalist notion of citizenship subsumed the Kurdish ethnic identity under Turkishness. These developments effectively brought about the end of Kemalism as a unifying national identity that was based on the disregard of differential national/ethnic and cultural/religious belongings in Turkey.

Among these developments, the Kurdish conflict was recognized by the state only from the perspective of security and terrorism, but the Kurdish ethnic identity was rejected and reduced to a matter of regional underdevelopment and feudalism (Yeğen 2009) until the 2000s. The neoliberal restructuring of the Turkish economy which resulted to the disadvantage of the working class (Boratav 2005) was deliberately rendered a marginal topic of public discussion by state policies that put an end to class-based politics and substituted it with identity politics (Bedirhanoglu and Yalman 2009). The rise of political Islam and the struggle for state power between Kemalists and Islamists, on the other hand, became the axis of mainstream politics vis-à-vis which other political projects positioned themselves. The political polarization along the Islamism-laicism axis also manifested itself in the field of civil society as the number of Kemalist organizations spiked with an aim to counterbalance the increasing influence of Islamic communities in the civic field. In the 1990s, assassinations of leftist/left-Kemalist journalists and intellectuals such as Muammer Aksoy, Uğur Mumcu, Çetin Emeç and Bahriye Üçok contributed to Kemalists' mobilization against political Islam

which they held responsible for these murders. In Erdoğan's (2006) analysis, "neo-Kemalism" reflected a distrust of state practices to reinforce Kemalism against religious and ethnic movements and sought to influence state policies by developing a civil Kemalist pedagogy. Neo-Kemalists agreed with Atatürk nationalism in its emphasis on the "indivisible unity" of the nation and its reduction of the Kurdish conflict to feudalism and underdevelopment. On the other hand, following the left-Kemalist tradition, they upheld a "Third worldist" view of anti-imperialism and national sovereignty against the influences of globalization and neoliberalism (Erdoğan 2006, 586–587). In the 1990s, Kemalist organizations grew into a force which, going beyond the frontiers of civil society, complemented Kemalists' struggle against political Islamism within state institutions.

The increased visibility and significance of Kemalist civil society became one of the dynamics that gave both motivation and further legitimacy to Kemalist women's organizations. As we saw in the previous two chapters, laicism, for being the prerequisite of women's emancipation in Turkey, had always been a guiding principle of Kemalist women's activism and therefore was always-already present in their political agenda before the post-1980 period. However, towards the end of the 1980s, in the face of rising Islamism and the consequent politicization of women's headscarf, laicism became the dominant theme in Kemalist women's gender agenda into which all other topics articulated.

This shift in the weight of laicism in Kemalist women's politics could be traced in *KaDeFe*, the quarterly journal of the Federation of Turkish Women's Associations (TKDF, see Section 4.4). In the post-coup atmosphere of political repression, the TKDF kept its relationship with the Turkish state intact. For example, following the transition to civilian rule, on 5 December 1984, the TKDF organized the "International Conference on the 50th Year of Turkish Woman's Acquisition of Political Rights" (*Türk Kadınına Siyasi Haklar Tanınmasının 50. Yılı Uluslararası Konferansı*) in cooperation with the Turkish Parliament.

Throughout the 1980s, the TKDF continued its pre-1980 activism and presented a number of draft laws to the parliament that included changes in the Civil Law and the Labor Law towards greater gender equality. Until 1987, *KaDeFe* published no commentaries on the developments in Turkish politics. In 1987, however, the Higher Education Council's (*Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu*, YÖK) decision to ban the headscarf in higher education and covered women's mass protests in front of public universities that followed,<sup>120</sup> led the TKDF to include the issue of laicism in its gender agenda. On 5 December 1988, the TKDF organized the panel "Woman in the Turkish Legal Revolution" (*Türk Hukuk Devriminde Kadın*) with a special focus on laicism. The TKDF's president Sevinç Karol opened the panel by stating that the violation of the laicism principle in Turkey expanded the scope of women's struggle. Karol said: "We understand that, if we do not protect our rights, they will be taken away from us one by one. As Turkish women, we have to remain in unity and in solidarity" (KaDeFe December 1988, 3). Ülker Gürkan, one of the speakers at the panel and a professor of law, addressed the issue more straightforwardly:

The religious-reactionary ideology that flared up in [some] underdeveloped countries in the 1980s has [also] infiltrated our country. This insidious and cunning ideology is different than its older version. It does not any longer object to education, to women's education; on the contrary it supports it. It organizes young girls by means of threatening, conviction, and money, in order to utilize them later [in its own interest]. Soldiers of this new jihad army will dress in a certain way and embrace the headscarf

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<sup>120</sup> The ban on the headscarf was implemented by the YÖK with a dress code circular which, alongside the headscarf, covered many other "inconvenient" types of dresses and outlooks. However, the public protests in opposition to the ban forced the ANAP government of the period to look for solutions in order to allow covered women in the universities. In 1984, covered women were told that they could enter the institutions of higher learning if they covered their hair in a modern style (*türban*) and so they did. However, in 1987, the YÖK included "wearing a headscarf" in its list of disciplinary issues, defining it as a "reactionary threat"; the headscarf was banned again. In 1988, an additional clause to the YÖK Law attempted at lifting the ban, but the attempt was deemed to be a "violation of laicism" by the Constitutional Court and was annulled in 1989. In 1990, the additional clause 17 that was added to the YÖK Law lifted the ban and this article remained in effect. The electoral success of the Islamist RP, however, triggered pro-coup dynamics within the military and, in 1997, the Turkish army submitted a memorandum to the government in which they asked for several structural changes against the "reactionary threat," to be executed immediately. Following the memorandum, the YÖK president Kemal Gürüz issued a brief to the universities, asking them not to accept covered women in the campuses. The headscarf was once again banned, this time not even legally. The ban turned into a legal crisis and covered women demonstrated at university gates for months. Many cases were brought to the court but none of them won, arguably because of the judiciary's reluctance to challenge the memorandum from the TSK. In time, the ban was normalized and accepted as legitimate and even as legal. It was lifted again only in 2008. For the history of the headscarf ban, see M. Aksoy (2005) and Özkan (2005).

as their flag. These innocent Muslim women are pawns in the realization of the political plan of the [fundamentalist] religious ideology that has nothing to do with Islam. ... There's certainly a need to fight against this dark creed that presents [the headscarf] as the sixth pillar of Islam. This is a threat not only to women's acquired rights but also to all revolutions of Atatürk; to the law revolution in the first place. (Ibid., 17–18)

From this point on, Kemalist women launched an all-out struggle against political Islam and what they perceived as its manifestation, the headscarf. *KaDeFe's* decade-long emphasis on the "modern" Turkish woman gave way to the "laic" Turkish woman. The TKDF also carried its efforts of mobilization against political Islam on to the international level. Its president Karol, at the general assembly of the European Union of Women in September 1989, announced that Turkey was under a sweeping religious influence coming from the neighboring countries that went against women's laicist achievements (KaDeFe December 1989, 16).

In the following years, *KaDeFe* focused more and more not only on laicism but also on other issues such as women's political representation, women's paid labor, and women's participation in worker's unions. In 1990, the TKDF, now representing some thirty Kemalist women's organizations, celebrated the 8th of March for the first time. Two years later, on 8 March 1992, it issued a set of demands that ranged from equal opportunity in education to equal participation in paid employment and equal representation in politics. This wide range of demands showed that the shift in the TKDF's political discourse in a five-year period (1987–1992) was as much a product of the feminist intervention in Turkish politics as it was a response to the rise of political Islam.

## **5.2. Feminist intervention in Turkish politics**

On the side of women's activism, the novelty in the 1980s was the emergence of “feminist politics.” Throughout the 1980s, a young generation of self-identified feminists organized consciousness raising, reading, and translation groups; demonstrations and campaigns; and

founded independent feminist organizations. Already a year after the military coup, in 1981, a number of feminists gathered in Istanbul, and soon they started to organize public meetings in order to recruit new members to their group. In 1983, the socialist journal *Somut* spared a page for feminists who put forward their ideas about women's condition. These ideas subsequently formed the backbone of the "new feminism." In 1984, the same group of women founded the publishing house *Kadın Çevresi* (Women's Circle) with the aim of introducing Western feminist literature to the Turkish audience.<sup>121</sup> In the same year, feminists gathered in Ankara in a number of small groups (Kadınlar Dünyası May 2002).

Feminist activism politicized the hitherto "private" matters such as harassment, rape, sexuality and the gendered division of labor in the domestic sphere. Feminists also challenged the Turkish state by criticizing its legal framework for restricting the realization of women's rights by maintaining their subordination in the private sphere. In so doing, they brought the notion of gendered citizenship into public discussion (Y. Arat 1996). In March 1986, feminists wrote the "Women's Petition" (*Kadınlar Dilekçesi*), demanding that Turkey implements CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) agreement which she ratified in 1985. The petition was signed by seven thousand women and submitted to the Turkish Parliament. It received wide media coverage (Sirman 1989; Ovadia 1994). In 1987, feminists in Istanbul organized a march protesting violence against women, attended by some three thousand women, and launched the "Solidarity Campaign against Battering" (*Dayağa Karşı Dayanışma Kampanyası*). In the same year, *Kadın Çevresi* started publishing the monthly journal *Feminist*. A year later, in 1988, a group of socialist feminists started publishing another monthly journal, *Kaktüs*. In 1989, feminists in Ankara organized the First Feminist Weekend (*Birinci Feminist Hafta Sonu*), bringing together women from Ankara, Istanbul, Adana and Izmir. This gathering resulted in the

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<sup>121</sup> The first feminist works published by *Kadın Çevresi* were, Andree Michel's *Feminism*, Lee Comer's *Wedlocked Women*, and Juliet Mitchell's *Women's Estate*. Prior to this, books by Kate Millet, Shulamith Firestone and Simone de Beauvoir were translated to Turkish in 1978 (Tekeli 1998).

Declaration of Women's Liberation (*Kadınların Kurtuluşu Bildirgesi*)<sup>122</sup> and in the campaign "Our Body Belongs to Us, End Sexual Harassment" (*Bedenimiz Bizim, Cinsel Tacize Son*). Shortly after, the Women's Solidarity Association (*Kadın Dayanışma Derneği*) was founded in Ankara.

The first generation of feminist activists were predominantly young, well-educated, middle-class, urban women. As many of them had firsthand experience in Western countries (mainly France and the UK) and were familiar with or took part in feminist activism in these countries, Western feminisms impacted these groups significantly: Small, non-hierarchical, issue-based, informal organizing; consciousness raising groups, etc. (Sirman 1989, 7). Most of these feminists had a background in left-socialist intellectual circles and movements. They argued that the male-dominant leftist circles and movements hindered the simultaneous emergence of Turkish feminism with Western feminisms, and that feminist activism could only materialize once the military intervention ruled out the possibility of a legitimate left politics (Sirman 1989; Tekeli 1992; Düzkan and Ahıska 1994).<sup>123</sup> Hence, in the 1980s, feminists discussed their relationship with left politics in length and breadth. They tried to transform feminism from being perceived as a "bourgeois ideology" and a "betrayal to the working class" to a liberationist movement (Aytaç 2005). Therefore, in this period, feminists addressed and remained in touch mainly with socialist women.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> The declaration stated that, "We women are oppressed and exploited [based on our] gender... We feminist women want to shape our own destiny and reclaim our bodies, our labor, our identity, our history, [and] our future... We call all women to realize our oppression, to stand up against oppression, to be in solidarity, [and] to organize and struggle for our cause" (Kaktüs April 1989, 6).

<sup>123</sup> In relation to this, Tekeli indicates that, whereas feminism was in fact the first democratic opposition to the military rule, Turkish leftists blamed it for being a pro-coup ideology and feminists for being opportunistic bourgeois women (1988, 13).

<sup>124</sup> In the meantime, socialist women, some of whom were closely in touch with feminists, started to organize in woman-only organizations. The Women's Association against Discrimination (*Ayrımcılığa Karşı Kadın Derneği*) was founded in Istanbul in 1987 by women who belonged to the socialist Illuminous (*Aydınlık*) group. The Women's Cultural Center (*Kadın Kültür Evi*) followed in 1989, founded by a group of women from the Turkish United Communist Party (*Türkiye Birleşik Komünist Partisi*). In the late 1980s, socialist women took part in many of the feminist events as well as organizing their own meetings and demonstrations.

In the early 1990s, feminist activism lost its initial enthusiasm. This was both because of the political disagreements among feminists themselves (see below) and because Turkey had entered a period where the social opposition was not powerful enough to influence the mainstream political agenda (Bora and Günel 2002, 8). The right-wing ANAP governments that ruled from 1983 to 1991 had a strong claim as to how the "woman question" should be tackled. In 1986, Semra Özal, the wife of Prime Minister Turgut Özal, founded the Foundation for the Advancement and Recognition of Turkish Women (*Türk Kadınına Güçlendirme ve Tanıtma Vakfı*). Where the Political Parties Law (1983) had prohibited political parties from forming women's auxiliaries, this organization operated as ANAP's informal women's auxiliary (Tekeli 1992, 141). In 1989, Cemil Çiçek, the State Minister Responsible for the Family, founded the Institute for Family Research (*Aile Araştırma Kurumu*) as well as state-led centers for family counseling (see Chapter 6). Upon these developments, feminists endeavored to maintain their gains: The Women's Library and Information Center Foundation (*Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı*) and the Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation (*Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı*), founded in 1989 and 1990 respectively, were the results of this endeavor.<sup>125</sup>

The 1990s were also the years when feminists sought to propagate feminist ideas to a larger audience of women. In 1995, a group of feminists founded the Women's Culture and Communication Foundation (*Kadın Kültür ve İletişim Vakfı*) and started publishing the monthly journal *Pazartesi*. Reaching the highest circulation among feminist journals, *Pazartesi* covered a wide range of topics, from abortion, motherhood, sexuality, and porn to women's labor, women workers and the Turkish left; from globalization, NATO and the IMF to nationalism, the Kurdish conflict, political Islam and the headscarf; from violence against women, women's shelters, and Turkish law to art and popular culture (Şeran 2009, 10).

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<sup>125</sup> Yaprak Zihnioğlu, personal correspondence via email, 15 December 2014.

Moreover, issues politicized by feminists made their way into popular women's magazines such as *Kadınca* and *Kim*, and feminism became a source that nourished women's popular culture (Düzkan and Ahıska 1994, 158). Feminists also organized to increase women's participation in decision-making processes, especially in party politics. Founded in 1997, the Association for the Support and Training of Women Candidates (*Kadın Adayları Destekleme ve Eğitim Derneği*, Ka-Der) was the first women's association in Turkey that stated openly, in its bylaws, its investment in women's equal representation in politics. Ka-Der also became the first truly supra-political women's organization in that its educational trainings involved women from all parties regardless of their political orientation. By the end of the 1990s, feminism was seen as a "legitimate if marginal position in public life" (Y. Arat 2004, 283). The contribution of feminist activism to women's lives was, as Düzkan suggests, to "make women realize that a different way of life was possible. It made them realize that one could look at everything from a woman's perspective, that certain [gender] attitudes in the Turkish everyday life were actually bitter pills to swallow, and most importantly, that men were inimical to women" (Düzkan and Ahıska 1994, 166).

In the meantime, the already existing differences between anti-system and egalitarian feminists became bolder. The institutionalization of feminism and, as I discuss in the next chapter, Turkey's adoption of the UN-led global gender equality agenda created conditions which made the state-oriented egalitarian feminism, which was less critical of the establishment, more visible and popular than the anti-system feminist activism with its confrontational and anti-state political line. The two main groups within feminism stood together in their campaigns for gender egalitarian legal change and shared common sites of activism but they had visibly different strategies for seeking women's liberation. Unlike anti-system feminists, egalitarian feminists did not necessarily politicize the cultural/religious discrimination faced by covered women or the ethnic discrimination faced by Kurdish

women, nor did they openly criticize Kemalism or challenge Kemalist women's activism (see also Section 1.3). In this sense, egalitarian feminists were suitable allies for Kemalist women in their struggle for women's rights. Indeed, both Kemalist women and egalitarian feminists were primarily concerned with the rise of conservative gender politics under the rubric of Islamism. This common concern contributed greatly to the formation of Kemalist feminism.

### **5.3. Kemalist women meet feminists: The formation of Kemalist feminism**

In the late 1980s, a new generation of Kemalist women became acquainted with feminism. Being mostly academics themselves, they were especially influenced by the newly emergent feminist scholarship. The common origins of women's studies as influenced by Kemalist and feminist women rendered Kemalist women in the social sciences more receptive to feminist perspectives on women's unequal status in Turkish society. As we have seen above, these Kemalist women were already organizing in the field of civil society against political Islam and the headscarf as its symbol. With the aim of discussing how to counter Islamism's gender politics, Kemalist women organized a number of public conferences where they invited feminist academics/activists to share their analyses of women's problems in Turkey. As a result of numerous encounters between Kemalist and feminist women, some Kemalist women started to identify simultaneously as feminists (hereafter Kemalist feminists).

For Kemalist feminists, it was clear from the very beginning that feminism was applicable to the Turkish context only insofar as it resembled Western liberal feminism. In 1989, Necla Arat, a professor of philosophy and one of the first proponents of Kemalist feminism, invited Kemalist women to feminism by equating it to the campaign that was already launched against political Islam; that is, defending the rights of women as they were defined by Kemalism. In a newspaper column, she said:

In line with the developments in the West, we [in Turkey] have bourgeois (or liberal) feminists, socialist feminists, radical feminists; in addition to these, and in spite of the

West, we have feminists in *türban*.<sup>126</sup> Our bourgeois feminists are being timid about the word feminism, and they don't want to be identified as feminists; but if feminism is a doctrine that seeks to improve women's rights and their status in society, and a set of actions to reach this goal, all members of those women's organizations that defend, protect, and assume the role of furthering the rights given to our women by Atatürk's revolution are, even if they don't accept it, bourgeois (or liberal) feminists. (N. Arat 1997, 71)

Insofar as Arat confirmed the legitimacy of liberal feminism, however, she demarcated it from the anti-system feminist activism in Turkey which she perceived as equally Western yet too radical to speak to the needs of Turkish women:

Coming to radical feminism: the followers of this movement are degenerating the newly emerging feminism in Turkey and making it look less serious by their extreme demands that are not compatible with the realities of the country. For instance, today, before the problem of sexual freedom, there's the problem of sex education and a healthy sexuality in our country. ... A notion of sexual freedom inspired by the radicals in the West ... is alien to our society. ... The multi-dimensional oppression of the women in our country is real. Those who [are able to] detect this reality, no matter their inclination (bourgeois, socialist, radical or *türbanlı*), are only those women who benefited from good educational opportunities and who are not oppressed. ... [T]he actual awareness and responsibility lies with those who benefited from educational opportunities. ... Opposing women's oppression should be conducted through, instead of the sexist approach [of the radical feminists], a humanist approach that aims to eliminate all forms of inequality and differentiation in the society. (Ibid., 73)

By sparing a group of women who were immune to oppression due to their well-educatedness, Arat denied the all-pervasiveness of patriarchy as a system of oppression as feminists argued. At the same time, she synthesized Kemalism and feminism in a way that perpetuated the Kemalist definition of women's interests where urban, middle-class, professional women were responsible for educating and modernizing the traditional, lower-class women; feminism was equal to defending women's rights, but since feminists

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<sup>126</sup> *Türban* is the name given to the modern way of wearing the headscarf. It differs from the traditional headscarf by its tighter binding and colorful patterns. Although initially coined by the then YÖK president İhsan Doğramacı to allow covered women in higher education by "modernizing" their headscarf (see footnote 118), *türban* was very quickly given a negative attribute thanks to the Kemalists who rejected any kind connotation between veiling and modernity. Kemalist women, therefore, always differentiated between the *türban* and the headscarf, embracing the latter for being the symbol of tradition while they demonized the former for being the flag of politicized Islam (see Chapter 7).

themselves were not oppressed, their primary concern had to be the rights of those women who were not aware of them.

Starting from the late 1980s, more and more Kemalist women adopted a definition of feminism that was, as outlined by Arat, in accordance with the Kemalist definition of women's interests. These women started gathering to found new organizations. The Association for the Support of Modern Life (*Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği*, ÇYDD), founded in February 1989, became one of the most significant of these new organizations. The very first event that the ÇYDD organized was the panel "The Importance of Transition to Laic Education in Turkey" (*Türkiye'de Laik Öğretime Geçişin Önemi*). This was followed by a petition sent to the President of the Republic, signed by three thousand seven hundred women, stating their concern that laicism in Turkey was under threat. A month later, in April 1989, the ÇYDD organized the march "In Tribute to Laicism" (*Laikliğe Saygı*) that was attended by some two thousand women from different Kemalist women's organizations.<sup>127</sup> For many Kemalist feminists, feminism meant, first and foremost, defending laicism against political Islam. For example, on 8 March 1989, Meriç Velidedeoğlu in a newspaper column celebrated the women's day by emphasizing the importance of "Atatürk's laicism revolution" and the legal equality between women and men (Velidedeoğlu 2008, 59).

The international conference "Women and Political Life: Equal Rights-Equal Participation" (*Kadınlar ve Siyasal Yaşam: Eşit Hak-Eşit Katılım*), organized by the ÇYDD on 5 December 1989, became a seminal public encounter between Kemalist women and feminists from Turkey and abroad. This conference refined the political project of Kemalist feminism further. In their talks, feminist scholars from Turkey accounted for women's exclusion from politics (Şirin Tekeli) and the Ottoman and early-republican feminists' struggles for political rights (Serpil Çakır). While both presentations were illuminating as well

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<sup>127</sup> See ÇYDD Tarihi (History of the ÇYDD).

as disillusioning for Kemalist women, the purpose of the organizers was by no means to recruit women into a feminism that would challenge the basic tenets of Kemalism. Another speaker at the conference was Nermin Abadan-Unat, a professor of political science, one of the founders of women's studies in Turkey and a self-identified Kemalist feminist. In her talk, Abadan-Unat introduced the notions of egalitarian feminism, such as positive action, and gave examples of state feminism from member countries of the European Council with the aim of underlining the primacy of state responsibility in ensuring gender equality. In fact, her persuasion was that women's organizations had no power to change the existing gender policies (see Chapter 6). Abadan-Unat also gave examples from post-revolutionary Iran and warned the audience against "difference feminism" (ÇYDD 1991, 71). In so doing, she defined the Kemalist feminist agenda as targeting state policies and adopting a Western liberal feminist perspective based on the equality—and not difference—between the sexes.

In her evaluation of ÇYDD's conference, Abadan-Unat furthermore criticized the current state of feminist activism on two grounds. First, contrary to the radical feminists' idea that individual liberation came first, "more fundamental initiatives that would also involve all institutions of mass education" were necessary for unequal relations of power to change (Ibid., 268). Second, even though feminists were raising the awareness of society about women, their "method of discussion" excluded not only some women but also all men, reducing the possibility of dialogue to a limited domain (Ibid.). According to Abadan-Unat, the "woman question" was an inseparable constituent of the "political question"; without dealing with it, there was no way of building a pluralist democracy. Her logic was as follows: There was an ongoing counter-revolution in Turkey. The state budget spared for religious education and the consolidation of Islamist economic circles were signs that the laic Republic was under threat. Since this was the political question, the woman question had to be understood in this context (Ibid., 270). Abadan-Unat's version of feminism, which became the

mainstream of Kemalist feminism, very much resembled the feminism of the early-republican period in that it located women's struggle at the heart of Kemalists' struggle for hegemony over the state. At the same time, Abadan-Unat saw a unidirectional relationship between the woman question and the political question; Islamism was not a product of patriarchy as feminists saw it but if Islamists came to power and took over the state, this would aggravate women's oppression. Similarly, there was no necessary connection between individual women's liberation and political change; women could be liberated only collectively, by means of political change.

In 1990, a group of Kemalist, Kemalist feminist, and feminist academics, most of whom were present at the ÇYDD conference, founded the Women's Research and Education Center at Istanbul University. Feminists who participated in Turkey's first women's studies program were mostly egalitarian feminists who held less critical views on Kemalism. Their scholarly interest on topics such as women and religion, modernization and development, overlapped with Kemalist feminists' scholarly and political agenda. These feminists contributed to the formation of Kemalist feminism without fundamentally challenging the laicist, modernist/westernist, and Turkish nationalist dynamics of Kemalism. A volume of articles edited by Necla Arat in 1992 based on the "Wednesday Conferences" organized at the research center was an important example of feminists' contribution to the making of Kemalist feminism in that it brought together feminist (Şirin Tekeli, Yeşim Arat, Şahika Yüksel, Serpil Üşür, Ferhunde Özbay, Serpil Çakır, Meryem Koray) and Kemalist feminist (Necla Arat, Nermin Abadan-Unat, Aysel Çelikel, Türkan Saylan) scholars' perspectives on women's status in Turkey. In fact, in this volume, Yeşim Arat had defined feminist activism as the "radical outcome of liberal Kemalism," suggesting that the two shared the same roots and the difference between them was rather generational (Y. Arat 1992, 76).

The early collaboration between Kemalist, feminist, and Kemalist feminist women in the academia resulted in a number of joint initiatives as well as commonly adopted forms of activism such as sending petitions to the government and organizing public demonstrations. Kemalist feminists collaborated with feminist activists in their campaigns for legal change. In 1990, the article in the Civil Law that subjected the woman's employment to the husband's approval and the Penal Law article that reduced the sentencing in rape cases by two-thirds when the victim was a prostitute were deleted. In 1993, a joint petition by feminist and Kemalist women's organizations asking for further changes in the Civil Law, especially for the equal share of marital property, was signed by more than a hundred thousand women and sent to the Turkish Parliament. In 1997, women's right to maintain their surname in marriage alongside their husbands' surname was recognized. Finally, in 1998, the Law on the Protection of Family (*Ailenin Korunmasına Dair Kanun*) passed from the parliament, which allowed courts to take certain measures against the perpetrator in cases of domestic violence (see Chapter 6).

Feminists' (including Kemalist feminists) thrust for gender egalitarian legislation was supplemented by Turkey's official engagement with the global gender equality regime, which started with the ratification of CEDAW in 1985, following the UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi. Kemalist feminists were almost unanimously (see below) supportive of the UN-led global gender equality agenda because it helped them frame their politics as the natural extension of Western modernity. In other words, adopting the global gender equality agenda helped Kemalist feminists both to press the Turkish state to take steps towards eliminating gender inequality and to use modernism/westernism as a trump card when challenging Islamist gender politics. The General Directorate for the Status and Problems of Women (*Kadının Statüsü ve Sorunları Genel Müdürlüğü*), founded four months after the above-mentioned ÇYDD conference, became the main institution for lobbying for Kemalist

and egalitarian feminists, who achieved considerable success in pushing their agenda on gender equality (see Chapter 6). The strategic alliance between different groups of feminists was based on the premise that feminism was equal to "defending women's rights." The understanding of "women's rights" was, however, still in line with the Kemalist discourse of women's rights in that it was undifferentiated by class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious inequalities. In the 1990s, Kemalist women's organizations were still the majority and most visible in the field of women's activism. Throughout the 1990s, many women who wanted to be involved in gender politics organized in Kemalist women's organizations. These women were, at the same time, inspired by feminist ideas and they sought to transform those older, time-honored Kemalist women's organizations which, in the 1980s, kept their distance towards feminist activism. Organizations such as the TKB, the KHKD, the TKDF and the TÜKD, by the end of the 1990s, all had Kemalist feminist presidents and were participating in this strategic alliance for lobbying at the state and transnational levels.

On the other hand, the context in which the interaction and alliance between Kemalist and egalitarian feminists took place reinforced the diversification within each group. The very question of to what extent feminists should be autonomous or cooperating with the state in order to pursue their gender agenda became perhaps the main line of disagreement between egalitarian and anti-system feminists. Egalitarian feminists held the view that participating in government and public administration so as to transform them through an egalitarian perspective was necessary because the relations of power were determined by these institutions (Acuner 1999, 158). As opposed to this, anti-system feminists regarded a state-oriented institutionalization and women's assimilation into state structures as a betrayal to the cause of women's liberation (Koçali 1990, 53).

Similarly, but for different reasons, some Kemalist women despite being sympathetic to or involved in feminist activism stood away from the above-mentioned strategic alliance.

Among Kemalist feminists, there was a significant number of women who had pursued politics in left-socialist organizations in the pre-1980 period. In the late 1980s, many of these women became active in feminist and/or socialist women's organizations (see footnote 122). Upon the weakening of anti-system feminism as well as of left politics in the early 1990s, they took part in leftist/left-Kemalist organizations, such as the Progressive Lawyers' Association (*Çağdaş Hukukçular Derneği*) or the Workers' Party (IP). In 1997, the Women's Commission of the Progressive Lawyer's Association organized the "Women's March against Sharia" (*Şeriatı Karşı Kadın Yürüyüşü*) against the Islamist politics of the RP in power. This march, attended by some thirty-five thousand women, became a milestone in Turkish politics; in about two weeks' time, on February 28, the Turkish army issued a memorandum that resulted in the fall of the coalition government led by the RP. The march also led to the foundation of an organization which, for the first time, built on Kemalism, feminism, and socialism on an equal footing: The Republican Women's Association (*Cumhuriyet Kadınları Derneği*, CKD). Founded in 1998, the CKD quickly grew into a large, nation-wide organization under which left-Kemalist women pursued gender politics in a way that can be characterized as the "anti-system" brand of Kemalist women's activism.

In 1999, the CKD started publishing the journal *Kadınlar Dünyası* (Women's world). The journal took its name from an Ottoman feminist journal that was published from 1913 to 1921. The old *Kadınlar Dünyası* guided the women of the CKD with its "enlightenmentalist demands, patriotic and pro-independence attitude, [and] bellicose style" (*Kadınlar Dünyası* October 1999, 2). Refusing to receive any funding from foreign donor agencies, *Kadınlar Dünyası* had defined its aim as follows:

Struggles against the politics of Turkey's colonization. Defends the republican revolutions and aims to further them. Rejects being the concubine and slave of the 2000s, [which is] imposed upon women by the New World Order of imperialism under the banner "freedom for *türban*." ... Fights against the capitalist system that takes women as a cheap and reserve [army of] labor; resists the commodification of

women. ... Defends the freedom and equality of women in both private and public spheres. (Ibid.)

Compared to the discourse of other Kemalist women's organizations of the 1990s, *Kadınlar Dünyası* was more distant towards Kemalism. This was not in the form of openly criticizing Kemalism or its discourse of women's rights but by means of not praising Mustafa Kemal or Kemalism except when mentioning his/its republican revolutions. Similarly, the journal embraced the history of Ottoman and early-republican feminisms as of its own, but adopted the demands of contemporary feminists only under the banner "the woman movement." Without manifestly identifying with contemporary feminism, *Kadınlar Dünyası* invited feminist activists and scholars such as Serpil Çakır, Aslı Davaz, Filiz Kardam, and Müge Iplikçi to inform its readers on the history of feminism and contemporary feminist politics.

*Kadınlar Dünyası* was the only Kemalist women's publication which had a focus on women's labor. When Turkey's European Union accession process started in 1999, Kemalist women's organizations celebrated it for the additional pressure it would put on the Turkish state for gender egalitarian legislation. *Kadınlar Dünyası*, on the other hand, taking up an anti-imperialist stance, evaluated the EU membership from the perspective of women's labor. It warned against the transition from collective bargaining to individual work contracts and to flexible and part-time work schemes, and argued that Turkey's EU membership would increase the exploitation of women's labor (February 2000, 11). Similarly, following the 2001 economic crisis in Turkey, *Kadınlar Dünyası* was the only publication which tackled how the crisis affected women's lives, preparing one whole issue on the topic of "feminization of poverty." In *Kadınlar Dünyası's* view, in a system in which women's unpaid labor was ignored, the economic crisis increased women's poverty, reinforced their role as mothers and wives, and forced them into home-based production under insecure, low-paid, and non-union conditions (April 2001).

Apart from women's labor, *Kadınlar Dünyası* focused on a wide range of topics including: Globalization, the EU, women's movements at home and abroad, history of feminism, gender and law, sexual harassment and incest, religious orders, political Islam, and women's art. The journal also informed the reader on the activities of other Kemalist women's organizations, and published articles by Kemalist feminists who belonged to other organizations. However, as the 2000s came with new dynamics in Turkish politics, *Kadınlar Dünyası* broke ties with feminist activism (see below). In fact, a topic to be discussed in the next chapter, as Turkey adopted the dominant global gender equality regime of the 2000s, anti-system feminist formations, Kemalist or otherwise, were having a hard time to survive.

#### **5.4. Kemalist vs. anti-system feminism: Conflicting views on women's liberation**

Egalitarian feminists, notwithstanding their collaboration with Kemalist feminists, shared the same view as anti-system feminists in that the Kemalist definition of women's interests limited the horizon of women's liberation. In this sense, feminists' critique of Kemalism's gender project can be taken as a whole, since the difference between egalitarian and anti-system feminists was one of degree, not of kind: Egalitarian feminists refrained from openly challenging Kemalism, but feminists as a whole were not convinced by the Kemalist discourse of women's rights. Leading feminists of the 1980s claimed that Kemalist reforms brought women neither equality nor liberation; even though women were invited in the political and economic realms, their participation was curtailed by the endorsement of the patriarchal organization of society (Y. Arat 1994, 102). For example, Tekeli argued that the single-party regime gave political rights to women, as a marker of democracy, in order not to liberate women but to demarcate itself from the fascist single-party regimes in Europe (1988, 292–293). Similarly, Kandiyoti stated that women in modern Turkey were "emancipated but unliberated" (1987), and that they were included in the nation-building process on the

condition that they hid their sexuality, becoming the "comrade-woman"; an "asexual sister-in-arms" (Kandiyoti 1989).

Anti-system feminists have been systematically louder in their disagreement with Kemalist women's politics. Tekeli, in her article where she discussed the women's movement in Turkey, distinguished feminist activism from the rest of the women's movement on the grounds that feminism was "a mass movement built by women, around the problems they experience because they are women, targeting various objectives such as solidarity, gaining and raising awareness, exhorting the public and [those holding] political power" (1988, 133). According to Zihnioğlu (2014), Tekeli's thesis (1977) shifted the more than half-century old dominant paradigm on women's rights by emphasizing the symbolic, instrumentalist nature of the Kemalist reforms. In Zihnioğlu's view, the first radical critique of Kemalism came from feminists:

Because of this ... left-Kemalists called us "Eylülists; a fascist movement." ... Feminists were critical towards the Kemalist women's movement from day one. ... At the beginning of the 1990s, the oppression of the Kurds surfaced on the agenda. ... At the Purple Roof [Foundation, one of the first feminist institutions, some feminists'] suggestion to announce the name [of the foundation] both in Turkish and in Kurdish led to harsh disputes and resentments, but the suggestion got accepted. In mid-1990s, the [feminist] movement went through another crisis when [some feminists] stood up against the Armenian "Great Disaster" and for the rights of all minoritized non-Muslim peoples. During the same years, [feminists] objected to the injustices done to covered women and the public violence of the Kemalists. All these built up an anti-thesis to the Kemalist theses, both intellectually and in practice.<sup>128</sup>

Even though feminists were critical of Kemalism and Kemalist women's politics on many accounts, the main point of disagreement between Kemalist and other feminists surfaced over the headscarf issue. Islamist women had organized in the late 1980s, mainly against the headscarf ban in higher education. Excluded from full access to the public sphere, they were most welcome in Islamist political parties which embraced their religious identity (Y. Arat 2005). Islamist women's active involvement in politics transformed the meaning of

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<sup>128</sup> Yaprak Zihnioğlu, personal correspondence via email, 15 December 2014.

the headscarf from the marker of traditional and/or rural culture to the symbol of modern, urban, elite women (Acar and Altunok 2012, 40). Islamist women did not necessarily identify as feminists, but they were influenced by feminist ideas in their critical evaluation of religion and tradition, as well as of Islamist men who did not take the issue of women's oppression seriously (Güç 2008; Aslan-Akman 2011). Yet, the mainstream Islamist politics drew on an anti-feminist, sex-segregationist understanding of gender politics (R. Çakır 2000). Regarding the headscarf issue and Islamist women's activism, feminists differed from Kemalists in two significant ways. First, they saw nothing in women's inferior status in Islam that was special or different than in any other religion or patriarchal institution. For example, Kandiyoti argued that even the principle of sex-segregation was not necessarily more oppressive of women than other mechanisms of oppression in mixed-sex cultures (1988). Second, and more importantly, feminists recognized covered women's agency, and argued for their right to cover their hair, just like themselves having the right to not cover (Tekeli 1988). While on the one hand they were against the Islamist ideology, on the other hand they tried to understand the motivations of women's participation in the Islamist movement (Acar 1991; Y. Arat 1991). This is not to say that feminists' attitudes on the headscarf issue were uniform. Whereas some feminists saw no problem in joining forces with Islamist women against the patriarchal society and its state apparatus, others contended that an alliance between feminist and Islamist women would be "carrying anti-statism too far" (Sirman 1989, 8). There were yet others who thought that Muslim women could not be feminists: "In my opinion, every struggle women give for their freedom is meaningful and important, but not every struggle is a feminist one! ... Even if some of them identify as feminists, I don't think we can come together with our fellow Muslim [sisters] while doing gender politics" (gül 1988, 19).<sup>129</sup> Still, even when they saw no possibility of dialogue with Islamist women, feminists agreed on the unacceptability of state

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<sup>129</sup> "gül" was the pseudonym of the author.

intervention in women's clothing: "Our laic-but-Muslim state, while oscillating between its Kemalist tradition and the Islamist ideology, banned the *türban* in universities. ... I am against the state's interfering with citizens' dress. ... [Therefore] I defend their right [to cover their head, but] not the fact that they wear the *türban*" (Öztürk 1988, 40).

Kemalist feminists, on the other hand, were strictly against the framing of headscarf-wearing as a "right." Necla Arat, for example, commenting in 1990 in a newspaper column on the discussions around the headscarf ban in higher education, claimed that the problem had nothing to do with freedom or human rights:

[O]n the contrary, it is a problem of escape from freedom and voluntarily renunciation of acquired rights, a voluntarily choice for slavery. ... Laic and modern-minded women who have self-confidence do not reduce their honor to a one-and-a-half-meter piece of cloth. Because they don't humiliate themselves by identifying as a sex object. They are respectable and honorable citizens of this society who have equal rights, and who want to remain so. (N. Arat 1997, 98)

Because of the uncompromising attitude of Kemalist feminists, anti-system feminists were also skeptical about their presence in the academia. The Women's Studies Research and Education Center at Istanbul University, for instance, was interpreted as the "last resort of Kemalist feminism" (Ovadia 1994, 57). Indeed, in the 1990s, the center partially functioned as a hub for anti-Islamist knowledge production. *Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi* (Women's studies journal), which was the first in its field (1993), published articles written by Kemalist feminists including those without an academic career but an activist background. In this journal, Kemalist feminists discussed extensively women's secondary position in Islam, but did not focus on how Islam was embedded in other patriarchal mechanisms of women's oppression. Their accounts were also ahistorical in that they did not differentiate between the Quranic verses and contemporary Islamic practices in terms of their approach to gender relations. Thus, in these articles, Kemalist feminists problematized the Islamist gender politics by quoting excerpts from the Quran, with the aim of proving that the Islamists in Turkey

wanted to deprive women of their secular rights. Moreover, Kemalist feminists drew on the feminist literature in Turkey quite selectively. For example, they frequently referred to Marxist-feminist Fatmagül Berktaş's historico-philosophical analysis of Islam and gender, but not to contemporary feminist research on modernity, political Islam, and covered women's activism. In so doing, Kemalist feminists strengthened their argument that the contemporary patriarchal practices in Islamic communities originated in the Quran. For Kemalist feminists, it naturally followed that laicism was less patriarchal.<sup>130</sup>

In later years, feminists developed a perspective on the headscarf issue with which they supported covered women's participation in public life without compromising on their critique of Islamist gender politics. Unlike Kemalist feminists who reproached political Islam and the politicization of the headscarf as a whole, feminists focused more on concrete patriarchal attitudes within Islamist circles. *Pazartesi* journal, for instance, watched closely the Welfare Party's discriminatory practices towards women and saw political Islam as a serious threat to women's liberation (Şeran 2009, 12). At the same time, it published an interview with the head of RP's women's commission, Sibel Eraslan, who identified as "a feminist with religious convictions" and, in so doing, became the first secular women's publication to make room for Islamist women (Y. Arat 2004, 287). Following the 1997 military intervention in politics (see above) which polarized women further into laicists and Islamists, feminists who gathered around the journal *Pazartesi* "did not fall for the official ideology, Kemalism and state repression. [They] opposed women's exclusion [from public life] on the basis of their headscarf and their confinement to home, while arguing [at the same time] against the Islamist ideology. [They] criticized that civil marriage and 'modernity' were being presented as paths to liberation for women" (Koçali 2002, 78–79). These feminists also

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<sup>130</sup> Kemalist feminists' effort to counter political Islam likewise continued outside the academia; Women's Research Association (*Kadın Araştırmaları Derneği*), founded in 1990 by the same Kemalist feminists as in the Women's Studies Research Center, aimed at "conducting scientific research on women in the fields of education, culture, law and health." See Uçan Süpürge, *Türkiye Kadın Örgütleri Rehberi* (Guidebook of Women's Organizations in Turkey).

criticized Kemalist women's exclusionary attitude towards covered women, such as in the Women's March against Sharia (see above), for targeting religious women instead of Islamist men and for remaining blind to the oppression of secular women (Savran 1997, 10).

The left-Kemalist CKD's publication *Kadınlar Dünyası*, on the other hand, also tackled political Islam but from yet another perspective; its focus was on religious orders and how they took advantage of women who were going through economic and—therefore—psychological hardship. Whereas the journal did not problematize the headscarf except for its political instrumentalization, it published a number of issues on how religious orders functioned as economic networks, and called for their closure and prohibition (see, for example, the June 2000 issue). Women who wrote in *Kadınlar Dünyası* likewise had a less dismissive view of covered women compared to other Kemalist feminists. For example, they recognized Islamist women's problematization of womanhood and their discomfort with male dominance within the Islamist circles (Tankut 2001, 20). Yet, the journal also criticized that women who belonged to the Islamist circles were not involved in any kind of women's rights activism (Kalan 2002, 18).

When it comes to the Kurdish question, feminists and Kemalist feminists had even less in common. Kurdish women had mobilized mainly within the Kurdish nationalist movement and in Kurdish political parties, but there were exceptions. In 1990, a group of Kurdish feminists founded the Independent Kurdish Women's Group (*Bağımsız Kürt Kadın Grubu*) in Istanbul.<sup>131</sup> Throughout the 1990s Kurdish feminists developed a perspective within which they addressed both Kurdish men and Turkish feminists, situating themselves at the intersection of their ethnic and gender identities (Çağlayan 2009; Kutluata 2002). In their journals *Roza* and *Jujin*, Kurdish feminists challenged the patriarchal relations of gender in the Kurdish liberation movement as well as the exclusionary attitude of Turkish feminists

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<sup>131</sup> For a short history of this group see Kayhan, "ROZA'nın Arkaplanı" (ROZA's Background).

(Açık 2002, 281; see also Osmanağaoğlu 2015). Initially, Turkish feminists were reluctant to support Kurdish women's cause openly albeit they criticized the repressive attitude of the Turkish state towards the Kurdish population. This initial reluctance had to do with Kurdish women's emphasis on motherhood. In addition, feminists suspected that Kurdish women's autonomous demands would be assimilated into Kurdish nationalism (Savran 2005, 124). Still, as early as in 1990, the socialist feminist *Kaktüs* journal adopted an anti-militarist stance by supporting the campaign "No to Compulsory Military Service" (*Zorunlu Askerliğe Hayır*) (February 1990). In the same issue, *Kaktüs* also introduced to its readers a Kurdish women's journal, *Roza*. In the following years, feminists increasingly stood up for Kurdish women's struggle. In 1995, feminists from *Pazartesi* journal attended the Democracy Congress (*Demokrasi Kurultayı*) organized in Diyarbakır to show solidarity with Kurdish women. From then on, *Pazartesi* called for the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish conflict and widely publicized the cases of rape committed by Turkish soldiers and village guards (*korucu*) in the Kurdish region, the rape and sexual harassment of Kurdish women under custody, and the assimilationist politics of the Turkish state in the Kurdish region (Y. Arat 2004; Şeran 2009).

Kemalist feminists, on the other hand, almost unanimously passed over the issue. Necla Arat, for example, until the late-1990s, referred to the problems in the Kurdish region only in relation to girls' education. Only as late as in 1997, she addressed the Kurdish guerilla as "racist terrorists" and "traitors" and, without any mentioning of the state violence in the Kurdish region, suggested that the problems of the region would be solved through education and economic improvement (2001, 13–14). Similarly, Nermin Abadan-Unat, in her autobiography where she assessed the political developments of her lifetime, acknowledged the armed conflict only once, as a "dirty war" (2007, 275). The left-Kemalist feminist *Kadınlar Dünyası* also remained silent about the Kurdish conflict, or referred to it only in relation to political Islam: "The dominant powers, in the 1980s and 1990s, parallel to their

politics of solving the Kurdish question through violence, enhanced [the institutions of] *ağalık*, sheikhdom, clan leadership [*aşiret reisliği*] to the greatest extent possible" (Soysü Koper 2000, 5). In none of the Kemalist feminist accounts of the Kurdish conflict there was any recognition of Kurdish women's activism.

The disagreement between feminists and Kemalist feminists over the headscarf issue and the Kurdish conflict overlapped with the different analyses the two groups had of the source of women's oppression and their differential views on women's liberation. Whereas feminists singled out patriarchy as the root cause of women's gender-based oppression, and therefore its elimination as key to women's liberation, Kemalist feminists argued that modernity, laicism, education, and economic development were more powerful tools to end women's oppression (Y. Arat, 1994). Regarding the differences between women, Kemalist feminists remained loyal to the Kemalist discourse of women's rights; they resisted the categories of covered and Kurdish women and aimed, instead, "to struggle for the formation of legal and political conditions of a [social] order in which religious and racial differences perish" (Abadan-Unat 2007, 335).

The differential status of patriarchy in feminist and Kemalist feminist politics had repercussions not only on how the two groups reacted to the headscarf issue and the Kurdish conflict but also on how they approached the issues of sexuality and women's position in the family. For example, feminists' slogan "our body, our labor, our identity belong to us"<sup>132</sup> was not embraced by Kemalist feminists. Just like they avoided using the word patriarchy in their political discourse, Kemalist feminists sidestepped certain issues pertaining to the politics of the private sphere. While feminists, from day one, problematized and politicized the topics of abortion, orgasm, heterosexuality, incest, harassment and rape, Kemalist feminists "argued that sexuality was a taboo that could not or should not be tackled in the Turkish context. The

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<sup>132</sup> See footnote 122.

taboo, they claimed, was part of culture and the people were not ready to challenge it. These Kemalist feminists believed that the Turkish context with its Muslim population and conservative values did not lend itself to public expressions of women's sexuality that radical feminists were ready to discuss" (Y. Arat 2004, 284). Similarly, Kemalist feminists' take on the institution of marriage and the family did not pose a serious challenge to traditional gender roles, especially the significance of motherhood, but aimed to empower women within the existing patriarchal structures. By the same token, during the campaign for changes in the Civil Law (1990), where feminists demanded the deletion of the article (152) which stated that the husband was the head of the family, Kemalist feminists only asked for the annulment of the article (159) which stated that the woman requires the husband's permission in order to participate in paid employment outside home (Tekeli 1992, 140–141). The question of women's unpaid labor, on the other hand, found itself room within the Kemalist feminist agenda depending on women's proximity to left politics. Whereas the left-Kemalist CKD and, as I discuss below, the social democratic CHP's women's auxiliary problematized women's unpaid labor, other Kemalist woman-only organizations overlooked the issue, usually together with the category of labor as a whole.

Finally, patriarchy's differential status in feminists' and Kemalist feminists' political perspectives reflected on their relationship with the state. Feminists, even when they collaborated with the state, had a critical distance towards it because it was first and foremost a patriarchal institution. More importantly, feminists did not condition their struggle for women's liberation by the struggle against political Islam and for the preservation of the Kemalist state; they wouldn't mind the disregard of Kemalism's principles had they been in conflict with what they defined as the principles of women's liberation. In this sense, feminists' support for the Islamist women's struggle was not only defending covered women's right to education but also a challenge to the paternalist state that regulated women's attire in

line with male-dominant political projects such as Kemalism. While Kemalist feminists argued for the essentiality of the Kemalist notion of laicism for women's rights, feminists attributed the primary importance to women's access to citizenship rights (Tekeli 1992; Y. Arat 1994).

### **5.5. In defense of Kemalism: Kemalist feminists criticize feminism**

In the second half of the 1990s, anti-system feminists' critique of Kemalism's gender project and Kemalist women's politics became widely known within the political and intellectual circles of the social opposition. This went hand in hand with a more mainstream, post-modern critique of Turkish modernization of which Kemalism was held responsible for (see Section 1.1). As the rift between anti-system and Kemalist feminist politics became increasingly visible, Kemalist feminists started reproaching feminism and responding to feminists' contestation of Kemalist women's politics. By this time, the academic collaboration between feminists and Kemalist feminists had also weakened. For instance, in the two edited volumes on women's studies by Necla Arat in 1996 and 1997, feminists' contribution was hardly visible, with the exception of one article by Fatmagül Berktaş on women in Islam. Instead, these volumes comprised articles written by a new generation of Kemalist feminists such as Nazan Moroğlu and Nilüfer Narlı. In a similar vein, feminists such as Filiz Kardam and Serpil Üşür were invited to the 1998 symposium "Women and the Republic" (*Cumhuriyet ve Kadın*) organized by the CKD, but not a single feminist activist or academic presented at the CKD's international conference "Women, Fundamentalism and the New World Order" (*Yeni Dünya Düzeni, Kadın ve İrtica*) that took place in 2000.

Among those Kemalist feminists who engaged with feminists' criticism to Kemalism, Nermin Abadan-Unat provided the most insightful responses both in her academic accounts of the women's movement and in her autobiography. Abadan-Unat had a number of counter-criticisms to what she referred to interchangeably as neo-feminism and radical feminism. First

of these had to do with feminists' reduction of the history of the feminist movement in Turkey to that of their own activism. In Abadan-Unat's view, feminism had emanated out of the international women's agenda and had already resonated in the politics and the media of the 1970s (1998, 331). For Abadan-Unat, the thesis held by some feminists that feminist activism emerged only after 1980 and thanks to women's awareness of their oppression due to the depoliticized post-coup atmosphere was simply unacceptable:

No social phenomenon can start at one point in history, for example on 12 September 1980 ... When seen from a sociological perspective, the 60s and the 70s, during which Turkey went through a great transformation, carried an increasing number of young women, who had higher education and entered into professional life. These women would of course discuss their legal and practical conditions. (2007, 234–235)

Secondly, Abadan-Unat challenged feminists' accounts of Kemalism's gender project, how it shaped women's lives, and how it influenced the evolution of women's activism in Turkey. According to her, Tekeli's argument that early-republican women had to suppress their individual desires and Kandiyoti's assessment that the Kemalist reforms had rendered women asexual were farfetched: "Each one of us, with the self-confidence and carelessness brought by our youth and femininity, had adopted a positive approach to life. We had no intention to spend our lives only in the public sphere as virtuous citizens. Each of us wished a prince charming in our private lives" (Ibid., 96). Similarly, Abadan-Unat went against feminists' critique of the Kemalist state. She found Tekeli's 1977 thesis (Tekeli 1982) that women's acquisition of political rights were part of the foreign policy of the new Republic unappealing, and disagreed with the argument that women would obtain political rights more easily had their autonomous organizing not been suppressed (1998, 329). Instead, she claimed that the socio-economic fabric of Turkish society could not accommodate the demands of women's organizations had it not been Atatürk's uncompromising ideas on westernization and democratization (Ibid.). This was because Turkey in the 1920s had neither a strong civil

society in which democratic demands could be raised, nor a group of middle-class women who had reached a collective awareness of their secondary status:

Civil society ... in the history of the Western civilization ... was developed by the bourgeoisie which was itself the product of capitalism. ... [I]n more primitive stages of development, "civil society" cannot be built. Considering the level of education in Turkey in the foundational years of the Republic, one should evaluate the criticism that the women's movement was hampered by [Kemalists'] inhibition of the development of women's associations by more objective criteria. Hence, condemning "state feminism" in Turkey altogether is a view that shoves aside the socioeconomic conditions, [and] denies the significance of historical progress. (Ibid., 330)

In Abadan-Unat's view, the incorrect analysis of the early-republican period had led feminists to misleading conclusions, including those regarding Kemalist women. Feminists' preference for covered women's right to public inclusion over Kemalist feminists' concern for laicism was what she criticized the harshest:

According to them [radical feminists], the Kemalist reforms were realized "in the name of women" through from-above reformist sanctions. In order for genuine democracy to take root, women's individual choices should be prioritized; individualism should be preferred over communitarianism. For this reason, radical feminists adopted an irreconcilable attitude towards those associations founded against the spread of Islamist women, [including] the Association for the Support of Modern Life. In their view, Kemalist women [were] determined to identify with the state and maintain their hegemony as "educated elite women." (Ibid., 332)

For Abadan-Unat, radical feminists did not aim for gender equality in the public sphere but, in the name of liberation, questioned the Kemalist legacy and its notion of equality. The result was, however, the violation of "a sacred value": The rejection of Atatürkism. What radical feminists were doing in reality was to remain in the confines of a domestic political agenda; tackling mostly the issues of violence against women in public and private spheres and the imposed character of the Kemalist revolution; and not undertaking the matters which were discussed at international platforms, such as the issue of peace. This meant, in Abadan-Unat's perspective, "to endorse the restricted framework of conscientious freedom and act in

solidarity with the Islamist women's movement, instead of upholding a wider [notion of] freedom" (Abadan-Unat 2007, 235).

The final problematic aspect of feminists' contemporary politics was their insistence on institutional autonomy. Abadan-Unat held the opinion that neither feminists were as independent from men or the state as they thought they were, nor this was something plausible anyway. For her, feminists could not really afford remaining autonomous: "[T]he practices which at first sight seemed very individualistic and the activism that followed ... shortly turned into demands for legal change and institutionalization" (1998, 331). Feminists' continuous criticism of the patriarchal character of the family had somehow brought them together with Kemalist women, whom they opposed, for it had translated into demands for changes in the Civil Law. The two institutions, the Women's Library and Information Center Foundation and the Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation, with which feminists were proud of having built on their own initiative, were unable to survive without the financial and personnel support they received from the state. Similarly, Ka-Der's campaign for the introduction of a women's quota in the Turkish Parliament had required the feminists in Ka-Der to ask for support from male-dominant political parties (Ibid., 331–332).

Ka-Der's campaign for a ten percent women's quota, in fact, had caused indignation among Kemalist feminists. Before the foundation of Ka-Der, Kemalist feminists were already mobilized around the issue of women's political representation. In 1995, the umbrella organization Istanbul Union of Women's Organizations (*Istanbul Kadın Kuruluşları Birliği*) had issued a press release stating that women would not support political parties that did not nominate women candidates, and that they demanded candidates who would "unify republicanism and laicism with a democratic and populist content" (N. Arat 1997, 213). In 1997, the Association of Women Politicians (*Kadın Siyasetçiler Derneği*, KASIDE) was founded with an aim to enable women to have an active role on all levels of government, to

support women working in political parties, and to improve the status of modern Turkish women.<sup>133</sup> The founding of Ka-Der in the same year was rather upsetting for Kemalist feminists. Women's task, Necla Arat argued, was to "decide on the common grounds, historical values, and the democratic ideals that they share in order to have a genuine women electoral base on their side," instead of discussing in what percentage women should comprise the parliament (2001, 129). According to her, whereas KASIDE supported "all women who pursued politics and who were loyal to the Republic[an values]," Ka-Der, instead of mobilizing women en masse, appealed to the party leaders and party administrations, which was a rather cowardly strategy (Ibid., 131).

A final criticism to feminist activism came from the left-Kemalist feminist *Kadınlar Dünyası*. In March 2002, the journal bid farewell to its readership with the dossier "The Last 20 Years of the Women's Movement. Two Peaks: Marches against Battering and Sharia." Claiming continuity between these two marches, the journal appropriated the legacy of the late-1980s' feminist activism. Indeed, the issue as a whole focused on the experiences of women who participated in the feminist movement of the late-1980s. It admitted feminism's unique contribution to the women's movement but also criticized the current state of feminist politics in Turkey. Accordingly, feminism had both politicized the woman question and became itself an obstacle to women's mass mobilization. This was because of both, feminism's self-demarcation from other political issues, especially—with the exception of socialist feminists—from class struggle, and its presentation of the relationship between men and women, in opposition to left-politics, as the founding antagonism of social relations:

As a consequence, the society perceived the women's movement as a "men-hating" movement. This perception was perpetrated by the [leftist] circles that were against the women's movement. ... The sexist approach [of the new feminism] reached its peak with the slogan "freedom for *türban*." ... [B]y calling for freedom for Sharia in the name of women's liberation, the new feminism supported a social formation which aimed at women's enslavement. This strategy was accompanied by the slogans

<sup>133</sup> See Uçan Süpürge, *Türkiye Kadın Örgütleri Rehberi* (Guidebook of Women's Organizations in Turkey).

"women's standpoint" and "the personal is political." Both of these [slogans] were approaches which ripped women off of class struggle, pushed them out of politics, made them withdrawn, and postponed the solution [to the woman question] forever. (Perinçek 2002, 9)

In this account, feminists' support for covered women's struggle and their move away from class politics were presented as two dimensions of the same process. In line with this criticism, another article in *Kadınlar Dünyası* criticized feminists for not emphasizing sufficiently the relationship between women's condition and issues such as the increasing level of poverty, privatizations and the policies of the IMF, and for not scrutinizing enough Turkey's EU accession process in terms of its consequences for women (Atasü 2002, 12).

In fact, many Kemalist feminists shared the view that not being engaged with general politics—whether class-based or not—and having a man-hating image were what made feminism unattractive in the eyes of Turkish society. In other words, prioritizing gender oppression over the rise of Islamism in their politics and pointing at men as the social group benefiting from patriarchy were the two grounds on which Kemalist feminists contested feminists. In this vein, Kemalist feminists emphasized that for them, feminism was egalitarian, not man-hating, and always-already a part of either human rights and/or class politics. This emphasis was also due to Kemalist feminists' simultaneous pursuit of gender politics in mixed-sex organizations. Like in the pre-1980 period, many women organized in Kemalist women's organizations were at the same time doing politics in the CHP, which is the focus of the next section.

## **5.6. Kemalist feminism in the CHP: Gender politics of the woman's auxiliary (1996–2002)**

Following the 1980 coup, the military regime had shut down all political parties and banned their leaders from pursuing politics. Upon CHP's closure, the party cadres divided into three political parties, each corresponding to the already existing factions in the pre-1980 CHP

(Ciddi, 2009). The People's Party (*Halkçı Parti*) and the Social Democracy Party (*Sosyal Demokrasi Partisi*), both founded in 1983, united under the Social Democratic Populist Party (*Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti*, SHP) in 1985. CHP's ex-leader Bülent Ecevit took over the leadership of the third party, the Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Parti*, DSP), in 1987.<sup>134</sup> The 1983 Political Parties Law was amended in 1992 so as to allow the reopening of the political parties that were closed down in 1980. The CHP was re-founded in 1992 under the leadership of its ex-secretary general Deniz Baykal. The three parties of the centre-left entered the 1994 local elections separately, losing many major cities—previously won by the SHP in 1989—to the centre-right True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*) and the Islamist RP. After this failure, the hitherto failed attempts to form a unified centre-left somewhat bore fruit and the SHP merged with the CHP in 1995. The DSP, however, chose to go solo.<sup>135</sup>

Until the mid-1990s, the turmoil within the Kemalist movement regarding which political party was to carry out the mission of the old CHP<sup>136</sup> brushed aside the significance of having a gender perspective for successful social democratic politics which was recognized, albeit to a limited extent, in the 1970s. Moreover, the 1982 constitution did not allow separate organizing of women's and youth auxiliaries in political parties; woman-only organizing was possible only in special commissions. In 1989, the SHP had introduced a gender quota of twenty-five percent for women in the central party administration. The CHP inherited this principle, but since the quota was limited to the central party administration, it did not ensure women's representation on other levels of the party, including in the Parliament. At the same time, the rising women's movement with different, competing female identities had brought

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<sup>134</sup> The DSP was founded in 1985 by Raşan Ecevit, Bülent Ecevit's wife, who was the leader of the party until Bülent Ecevit's political ban imposed by the military rule was lifted in 1987.

<sup>135</sup> Until Ecevit's withdrawal from politics in 2004, social democratic votes in Turkey remained divided mainly between Baykal's CHP and Ecevit's DSP. After 2004, the DSP's share of the electorate became trivial, and the centre-left votes united under the CHP.

<sup>136</sup> There were also discussions on whether to include the "six arrows" in the party program. While some said that the arrows stood for the needs of Turkish society of the 1930s and not of today, others thought that it was not the right time to discuss their role. Laicism (because of rising Islamism) and nationalism (because of the Kurdish conflict) were the two principles over which party members entered into long debates (Ciddi 2009, 77–78).

the "woman question" back on Turkey's political agenda. In Ayata's view, women's political participation became once again a marker of democratization in the 1990s and, in return, the fact that women's issues were a matter of public debate and an item on the state agenda (abortion, violence, civil law, employment, etc.) facilitated women's active involvement in politics (1998, 241). In this context, gender politics reappeared on CHP's agenda, but now the pre-1980 collaboration between Kemalist women's organizations and the party had for the most part vanished. After the 1995 general elections, the CHP adopted the "New Left" approach under Baykal's leadership. This approach held liberal democratic principles such as participatory politics, strengthening local governance and placing the individual at the center of politics. It also included taking a stance against the military's influence over politics and recognizing the Kurdish question beyond the framework of terrorism (Ciddi 2008, 445). At the same time, it opened a new window of opportunity for women who wanted to pursue gender politics in the CHP. The 1996 amendment to the 1982 Constitution allowed political parties to form women's and youth auxiliaries. The CHP reorganized its women's auxiliary right after. This time, however, the organizational structure of the party was not to grant autonomy to the women's auxiliary.<sup>137</sup>

The new CHP's women's auxiliary held its first—chronologically ninth—congress in 1996. After a break of 16 years, there was enthusiasm about reforming the auxiliary. The congress booklet reflected the articulation of gender and social democracy in the new CHP; the "woman question" was framed as not primarily a question of gender but one of democracy, laicism and social justice (CHP-KK 1996, 3). In his opening speech, Baykal set the CHP as the resisting force against the rise of political Islam. He acknowledged women's

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<sup>137</sup> As Ciddi indicates, the Political Parties Law prepared by the military regime promoted strong party leaders and weak party organizations in order to "prevent political parties from becoming sources of political and social instability" (2009,108). According to the law, granting autonomy to the auxiliaries was left to the initiative of the party leaderships, which was never realized in the CHP. Indeed, many of my interviewees who were CHP members stated that the Political Parties Law has to be changed in order to maintain gender equality in political parties. See *Siyasi Partiler Kanunu* (Political Parties Law).

disadvantaged position in society by referring to the 1975 UN data according to which women, globally, owned only one percent of the wealth and ten percent of the income even though they did two thirds of the work. Yet, he based his call for women's mobilization not on their material oppression but on the threat that Islamism posed for women: "[I]f we don't want to see our women, our daughters ... as one in four wives of a man, we have to keep our women at the forefront of the struggle for a laic and democratic regime" (Ibid., 11). Baykal's speech also suffered from women's essentialization for populist purposes:

Turkey needs the sensibility of women. She needs the softness of a woman's hand. Turkey needs woman's compassion, warmth and love. ... A woman not only whose sex is female but also whose heart beats in a womanly manner, whose mind works like a woman, who experiences and shares female sensitivities, a real woman in that sense. ... We don't want to [focus on] women's hair or headscarf; we want to see women's pureness, compassion, transparency, virtue; we want to see her pride, her honor, her self-reliance. ... [O]ur struggle is therefore not gender struggle. The struggle, therefore, goes beyond gender. (Ibid., 24–25)

Notwithstanding the ambiguity of what Baykal meant by gender struggle and going beyond it, there was an obvious call for women to contribute to politics not with their own demands but with their "innate" womanly traits and appease the political polarization in Turkey in favor of laicism. By referring to stereotypical, conventional, passive and male-dominant notions of womanhood, Baykal delineated the CHP's gender politics from that of feminists operating outside the party, including Kemalist feminists.

Similarly, the congress declaration written by the women's auxiliary adhered to the Kemalist definition of women's interests where urban, upper-class women educated and modernized the traditional, lower-class women. For example, the declaration suggested that women should reclaim their part in politics not for their own cause but because of the "problems in the East and Southeast," "practices of reactionary ideologies," and "attacks against Atatürk's principles and our revolutions" (Ibid., 32–33). In this way, the declaration reduced the Kurdish conflict to a problem of regional underdevelopment, interpreted political

Islam as an attempt of counter-revolution and associated it with reactionism. The declaration did not explicate why these problems are of particular concern for women, or why women should necessarily organize in the women's auxiliary in order to take part in politics. Nonetheless, the reports prepared by the commissions formed during the congress, focusing on education, politics, and laicism, linked these concerns to gender and formulated concrete demands. The commission on politics, for instance, blended essentialist views on women with progressive claims on behalf of women. Its report, while demanding the same status for the women's auxiliary as in the pre-1980 period (see Chapter 4) and the twenty-five percent gender quota to apply to all levels of party organization, concluded that women should take part in politics because of their "attitude that, coming from their maternal instinct, cherishes human life and happiness" (Ibid., 37). The report of the laicism commission, on the other hand, mostly emphasized women's fear of Sharia and *türban*, and held right-wing governments responsible for the religious oppression of women (Ibid., 38–39).

These commission reports and the overall tone of the congress booklet showed that, even though women's unequal status in Turkish society was recognized by the women's auxiliary, the New Left approach did not adopt gender equality as one of its primary aims. Rather, it conditioned women's struggle for gender equality by their engagement in anti-Islamist politics. Laicism was set primarily as of women's concern; men were neither seen as under the threat of political Islam nor given any responsibility in defending laicism. The reorganization of the women's auxiliary, therefore, did not automatically mobilize women into a gender equality struggle. Moreover, neither the conference booklet nor the initial texts produced by the women's auxiliary gave reference to the global gender equality frameworks such as CEDAW, or to feminists' struggle for gender equality legislation in Turkey. The exclusion of the field of women's activism in this first congress booklet indicated that the newly founded women's auxiliary was uninformed about, if not deliberately ignored, the

activism of Kemalist women's organizations, at a time when Kemalist feminists were involved in intense lobbying activity and had gained significant publicity.

At the same time, both the New Left approach and the party's nation-wide organizational level, including the cities and towns where Kemalist women's organizations were not present, became means for the women's auxiliary to adopt a nuanced perspective on women's problems in Turkey. The nuance was that the CHP's women's auxiliary was more informed by women's material condition, especially when it came to the Kurdish question and the headscarf issue. In 1998, the women's auxiliary organized regional congresses in the seven geographical regions of Turkey so as to develop region-specific political strategies for organizing women and addressing their issues. Only one of the congress reports, on the southeast region of Turkey populated by Kurds, got published. The title of the report showed that the women's auxiliary considered Kurdish women as the most oppressed in Turkey: "Being a Woman in the Southeast: Oppressed through generations, one after another" (*Güneydoğu'da Kadın Olmak: Peşpeşe, kuşaklar halinde ezilip gitmek*). The report focused on southeastern women's problems in the realms of family and marriage, education, health, and employment, and offered welfare state-oriented policy suggestions to improve women's lives. It acknowledged the state oppression in the region but put the stress on terrorism; it emphasized the need for peace but made no policy suggestions to end the armed conflict. In this way, the report avoided challenging the state and Turkish nationalist sentiments, and reduced the Kurdish question to a problem of modernization and development. Nonetheless, when it came to the issue of women's illiteracy in the region, the report reluctantly acknowledged the presence of a Kurdish ethnic identity: "It is seen that those who don't speak [the] language are mostly women. There live tens of thousands of women who speak Kurdish and not Turkish. ... Education programs, especially for adult women and young girls, should take into account the problem of language and solutions should be part of the planning [of

education]. The fact that people of the region wish to use their mother tongue should also not be ignored" (CHP-KK 1998, 47). With these words, the women's auxiliary approached the issue of ethnic inequality from a nationalist paradigm where the Kurds' use of their mother tongue instead of "the language" (i.e. Turkish) was defined as a problem that could be solved through education. Yet, unlike woman-only organizations, the women's auxiliary recognized that there were problems specific to Kurdish women. Another difference between the women's auxiliary and woman-only organizations was the former's recognition of the category of labor. For example, the report identified Kurdish women's exploitation in the informal economy as a cheap labor source and as unpaid family workers (Ibid., 76–78).

As for the rise of political Islam, the women's auxiliary prepared two reports with the aim of informing its members on the issue.<sup>138</sup> The first of these reports, presented on 30 November 1999, the seventy-fourth anniversary of the closing down of religious covenants and dervish lodges, provided extensive information on religious orders and congregations in Turkey with a special focus on their economic activities and propaganda efforts. In the preface of the report, the women's auxiliary claimed that the laic Republic was the result of a thousand-year process of secularization in Anatolia under the Turkish rule, while the final chapter gave examples of the religious oppression of women in Islamic countries. The report thereby posited the idea of "laic Anatolian Islam" against that of "oppressive Islam" of religious orders and congregations. While the former was represented by the CHP, the latter was supported by "counter-revolutionary" right-wing parties and governments in the name of "vote-hunting" (CHP-KK 1999a). The next report, presented on 3 March 2000, the seventy-sixth anniversary of the Law on the Unification of Education, complemented the first one by giving information on how right-wing governments and religious orders and congregations politicized Islam and violated laicism by investing in religious education (CHP-KK 2000).

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<sup>138</sup> These two reports were later published together under the title *Neden?* (Why?, no date, presumably 2000).

Yet, in these reports, there was no mentioning of the woman members of religious orders and congregations, nor was the presented data evaluated specifically from the perspective of the consequences it brought to women.

Even though these initial reports do not imply any relationship between CHP's women's auxiliary and Kemalist feminists, such relationship was actually present as some members of the women's auxiliary were simultaneously members of Kemalist women's organizations. Thus, Kemalist feminist ideas eventually penetrated the women's auxiliary. In Ayata's account, throughout the 1990s, the CHP was in dialogue with Kemalist women's organizations and it "frequently invited feminists from the movement to its platforms, committees, and public meetings" (2002, 114). The exchange of ideas between the CHP and Kemalist feminists reflected on the gender agenda of the women's auxiliary towards the end of the 1990s. One example of this was the "Woman Project" (*Kadın Projesi*) launched by the women's auxiliary prior to the 1999 general elections, where the authors of the project thanked women academics, journalists, and members of women's organizations for their contribution in the project (CHP-KK 1999b, 2). The bibliography section of the project booklet made references to feminist academics from Turkey such as Nazan Moroğlu, Şirin Tekeli, Meryem Koray, Deniz Kandiyoti, Yıldız Ecevit and Yakın Ertürk, as well as those from abroad such as Anne Phillips and Valentine M. Moghadam.

The Woman Project tackled women's problems under specific themes such as politics, education, economy, health, violence, and law, and it sought to develop strategies for mobilizing women such as women's school of politics, women's centers, women's councils, care centers for the sick and the elderly, and a women's radio. The project description stressed the need for women's participation in social democratic politics, for social democracy was the ideology that defended women's interests as it supported women in eliminating the inequalities caused by gender-based discrimination. Unlike the 1999 report on the activities of

religious orders and congregations, it also pointed to the presence of a religious women's movement: "A significant mass of women in our country played a role in rendering political Islam visible, which is based on women's secondary position [in society], their invisibility and the confinement of their lives to the private sphere. Indeed, they have taken the lead in this process and became the most rigid, most radical kernel of the Islamist movement" (Ibid., 8). The Woman Project claimed that education was the crucial tool with which to counter this unwelcome development: "Undoubtedly, fighting against religious movements to strengthen the laic regime requires a thorough approach with political, sociological, and economic dimensions. The accurate comprehension of the 'Atatürk Revolutions' as an enlightenment revolution, a holistic model of development and an ideological program through educational programs is of great importance for our women" (Ibid., 20). This way, the women's auxiliary projected the laicism vs. political Islam binary onto the struggle between social democracy and right-wing opportunism, in the spirit of the 1970s (see Chapter 4). At the same time, the project had an explicitly feminist tone and it incorporated many of the demands raised by feminists since the late 1980s, especially those by Kemalist feminists. These included, for example, establishing an autonomous National Women's Council within the State Ministry Responsible for Women and Family Affairs that would comprise of the representatives of political parties, women's organizations, workers' unions and professional chambers; implementing a gender quota at the parliament and local government; providing free and universal child, sick and elderly care and encouraging men to take on equal share of household responsibilities; making sex education part of primary education; educating the health personnel in gender equality and ensuring access to free abortion; making shelters available and accessible to all women subjected to violence; and making amendments in the Penal Law, the Labor Law and the Civil Law in accordance with CEDAW.

On the other hand, the Woman Project did not mention any need to improve the mechanisms of gender equality inside the CHP and did not propose any strategies to empower women within the party structures. Rather, it celebrated that the CHP was the only political party that had a gender focus in its program and bylaws, and that the twenty-five percent gender quota for women, limited only to the central administration of the party, was CHP's "particular political preference" (Ibid., 70). Women's appreciation of the CHP for paying attention the "woman question," where other political parties of the establishment totally ignored it, did have a point. The party program dealt with gender equality under the section "Equality" and claimed to transform the Turkish society from a male-dominant one to one of free individuals. It recognized women's paid and unpaid labor, and promised social security for all women, daycare and childcare facilities for working women, equal share in marital property, shelters for women subjected to violence, and legal amendments that would harmonize the Turkish law with CEDAW (CHP-KK 2004b, 57–60). However, the regulations of women's auxiliary was a very short, four-page document that defined the auxiliary mainly as a propaganda tool without autonomy and a budget of its own.<sup>139</sup> The Woman Project's preference for not bringing this issue up was, perhaps, a strategy of its authors to render their project acceptable in the eyes of the party administration.

Before the 2002 general elections, CHP's women's auxiliary launched the "Woman Program" (*Kadın Programı*) which was essentially an improved version of the Woman Project of 1999. The Woman Program, presented intentionally on the 8th of March, put more stress on women's unpaid and paid but insecure, home-based, flexible labor. A new section on housewifery read:

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<sup>139</sup> Article 2 of the CHP's bylaws defined the purpose of women's auxiliary as follows: "The aim of forming the Women's Auxiliary is to ensure that the CHP is supported by different sections of society, especially by women, to a greater extent; to propagate among women the principles and policies determined by the CHP's Bylaws, Program, Election Bulletin, Party Congress, Party Council; to contribute to women's participation, as free and equal individuals, in education, family, work life, politics, Turkey's representation abroad, [and in] all fields of social life" (CHP-KK 2004, 61).

Every woman spends most of her time outside work or all her time as a "housewife." ... Men help with housework whenever they like and to the extent they want. Housework is not economically considered as work; therefore, women are economically dependent on men. ... In Turkey, housewives are not recognized as part of the labor force. However, in our country, 73.5% of those outside the labor force are women, 72.5% of whom are housewives. ... Every woman in our society, whether she is in paid employment or not, has the responsibility and burden of housework. Therefore, housewifery and the problems related to it are of concern to all women. (CHP-KK 2002, 75–76)

This statement significantly differentiated the CHP's women's auxiliary from Kemalist women's organizations with regards to their approach to women's labor. Yet, the women's auxiliary also synchronized with the gender agenda sought by Kemalist feminists who were involved in institutional lobbying. The Woman Program included extensive statistical data on each woman's issue it tackled and suggested amendments in the Turkish law not only according to the requirements of CEDAW but also of Turkey's European Union accession process. On the other hand, the program was no different than the Woman Project in celebrating the CHP's adoption of a gender egalitarian discourse; it uncritically presented the twenty-five percent gender quota as a best-practice and did not mention the absence of further gender equality measures in the party.<sup>140</sup>

CHP's women's auxiliary's increasing emphasis on women's labor from 1999 to 2002 had no counterpart in the party administration. This indicated on the side of the latter a lack of engagement with the gender politics of the former. In the 1999 general elections, the CHP did not enter the parliament because it remained under the ten percent threshold. Upon this failure, Deniz Baykal resigned from party leadership but only to be re-elected at the CHP's eleventh extraordinary congress in 2002. Upon resuming leadership, Baykal modified the

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<sup>140</sup> There is no detailed account of to what extent the projects sought in the Woman Project and the Woman Program were realized. The only written evaluation seems to be the booklet published for the 2004 congress of the women's auxiliary which pointed out three examples of successful implementation: The foundation of women's information centers (to provide services such as education, consultancy, and litigation), the "open microphone" project for listening to the problems of women in urban areas, especially in shanty towns, in order to report them to headquarters for strategy-development, and the "fellow family" project to form a network of families where the rich could financially support the poor.

New Left approach into the “Anatolian Left” approach. This approach differed from that of the New Left in that it aimed, according to Ciddi, at constructing a native Turkish leftism in order to offer an alternative to the electoral base of the Islamist parties (2008, 445). As Ayata suggests, “[w]hile the notion of Anatolian left aimed to break the ice between the leftist elite and the people, ironically, this new discourse did not mention any socio-economic inequalities from which the people suffered” (2002, 112–113). The discrepancy between the women's auxiliary's increased emphasis on the category of labor and the party's incorporation of ethno-religious elements in its discourse was a sign of the lack of dialogue between the party leadership and the women's auxiliary. The women's auxiliary was put aside in the turmoil of the CHP's adaptation to the conservative-Islamist shift in Turkish politics; whereas the regulations of the women's auxiliary sought a women's congress every year, since 1996, there hadn't been any following congresses and the president of the women's auxiliary, Güldal Okducu, had not changed. As I explore in the next chapter, with the start of the Anatolian Left era, the progressive gender agenda of the CHP's women's auxiliary was also put aside, leading to the withdrawal of many Kemalist feminists from doing gender politics in the CHP. In the early-2000s, woman-only organizations, Kemalist or feminist, became by far more attractive for Kemalist feminists who wanted to pursue gender politics.

## **5.7. Conclusion**

In this chapter I studied the formation of Kemalist feminism in the post-1980 Turkey until 2002. Based on an examination of Kemalist women's and feminists' publications as well as the documents provided by the CHP's women's auxiliary, I traced the emergence and development of Kemalist feminism in its relation to anti-system and egalitarian feminisms and against the background of greater political developments in Turkey. In so doing, I showed how the leading figures of Kemalist women's activism synthesized feminism with the Kemalist definition of women's interests so as to utilize it in their struggle to further gender

equality in Turkey as well as against the political developments that challenged Kemalism's hegemony in Turkish politics. In this concluding section, I return to and summarize the main characteristics of Kemalist feminism that I mapped out throughout the chapter.

The immediate result of feminism's synthesis with the Kemalist definition of women's interests was a laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist interpretation of women's rights. Such an interpretation enabled Kemalist feminists to formulate their struggle for women's rights and against political Islam as mutually dependent on each other. Against Islamism's sex-segregationist and anti-feminist gender politics, Kemalist feminists favored Western liberal feminism which, in their eyes, stood for modernity and laicism and thus functioned as a counter-argument to headscarf-wearing. Thus, defending laicism in relation to women's rights became the primary imperative of Kemalist feminism. This was not just a simple preference for laic womanhood over its religious alternative but part of the all-out struggle that Kemalists had launched against Islamists within the state and civil society. Kemalist feminists' emphasis on laicism as the precondition of women's rights reflected their insistence to adopt Kemalism as the framework of their gender activism and thereby to resist its loss of hegemony.

While Kemalist feminists embraced laicism and modernism/westernism as crucial for gender equality, their adherence to Turkish nationalism revealed itself in their deliberate disregard of the Kurdish conflict. Although in the early-1990s the "Kurdish question" was recognized by the Turkish state, until the 2000s, Kurds pursuing politics based on their ethnic identity were systematically excluded from the political sphere by any means. The armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army went through its harshest period in the mid-1990's, caused the death of tens of thousands and the internal displacement of some 3 million Kurdish citizens. Throughout this time, Kemalist feminists remained silent about the state oppression of the Kurdish ethnic identity. In fact, the very existence of this identity and

therefore Kurdish women's differential problems were not acknowledged by Kemalist feminists except those in the left-Kemalist CKD or the social democratic CHP. Even then, Kurdish women were recognized only as victims of tradition, reactionism, and regional underdevelopment, who were in need of modernization and Turkification as solutions to their problems. As this chapter shows, Kemalist feminists were familiar and did engage in intellectual debates with anti-system feminists who politicized the state violence towards Kurds in general and Kurdish women in particular. Kemalist feminists criticized harshly anti-system feminists' support for Islamist women's struggle for gender equality but not their support for the Kurdish women's cause. This indicates that Kemalist feminists intentionally avoided including this taboo topic, the Kurdish conflict, in their gender agenda. Their silence on the issue was, in return, a sign of their approval of the state oppression of the Kurdish ethnic identity.

The headscarf issue and the Kurdish conflict were the two main lines of disagreement between Kemalist and anti-system feminists. Kemalist feminists also found anti-system feminists' approach to sexuality too radical and their anti-state stance unrealistic. Thus Kemalist feminists clearly demarcated their feminism from that of anti-system feminists. Kemalist feminists differed from both anti-system and egalitarian feminists in that they saw the root cause of women's oppression in tradition, religion, lack of education and economic resources as opposed to feminists' identifying patriarchy, and together with it Kemalism as a patriarchal political project, as the main source of women's oppression in Turkey. Based on this difference, Kemalist feminists criticized both anti-system and egalitarian feminists for not paying due respect to Kemalist gender reforms and being biased about the early-republican era, as well as for not prioritizing Kemalist principles when they were in conflict with feminists' formulation of women's liberation. Notwithstanding this, Kemalist feminists could form a strategic alliance with egalitarian feminists in their struggle for gender equality. This

was because egalitarian feminists were not as vocal as anti-system feminists about their criticism of Kemalism and Kemalist women's politics and because, compared to anti-system feminists, they showed less support for covered and Kurdish women's struggles.

Two other characteristics of Kemalist feminism facilitated the strategic alliance between Kemalist and egalitarian feminists. First, both groups had an orientation towards influencing, challenging and/or complementing state policies. Egalitarian feminists aimed to transform the patriarchal organization of society by influencing the policy-making processes. Kemalist feminists shared this aim and combined it with their struggle against Islamism within the state and civil society. The next chapter focuses on this dual struggle of Kemalist feminists as well as their alliance with egalitarian feminists in detail. The second characteristic was that Kemalist feminists, in line with the Kemalist definition of women's interests, held a solidaristic view of the relationship between women of different classes where urban, educated, professional middle-class women educated and modernized those who were lower-class, traditional, and uneducated. They saw feminism as appealing to well-educated, not-oppressed women who would then raise the lower class women's awareness of their rights and teach them how to use those rights, and thereby further gender equality in Turkey. In this vein, Kemalist feminists did not see the elimination of class differences between women as a necessary means to end gender-based oppression. The only exceptions to this were the left-Kemalist CKD, which indeed linked women's oppression to class inequalities, and the CHP's women's auxiliaries, which focused on women's paid and unpaid labor, but these organizations were hardly influential in determining the dominant agenda of women's rights activism to which many Kemalist feminists subscribed. This dominant agenda united Kemalist and egalitarian feminists in its disregard of the category of class. Similar to egalitarian feminists, anti-system feminists—with the exception of socialist feminists—did not necessarily tackle class inequalities between women, either. In fact, except for the CKD

which broke ties with feminism because it didn't tackle class issues, the weakness of a class perspective within feminism was what made feminism attractive to many Kemalist women.

The final characteristic of Kemalist feminism is women's simultaneous membership in woman-only and mixed-sex organizations. As I discussed in the previous chapters, Kemalist women's activism, since its emergence in the early-republican period, was never strictly woman-only; even woman-only organizations had man members. Kemalist women pursued gender politics in women's as well as in mixed-sex organizations, most visibly in the CHP, and they often held membership in both woman-only and mixed-sex organizations. In the post-1980 period, the dialogue between Kemalist women's organizations and women who were involved in gender politics in the CHP lessened but continued. The turmoil within the Kemalist movement regarding which party inherited the legacy of the 1970s made the CHP assign to its gender politics a secondary status. By the time the CHP's women's auxiliary reformed in 1996, Kemalist feminists had already built their independent gender agenda in collaboration with egalitarian feminists. Yet, CHP's women's auxiliary quickly adopted Kemalist feminists' agenda in its program and improved it further by including perspectives on women's labor.<sup>141</sup> Given this relationship between woman-only and mixed-sex organizations, Kemalist feminists were also critical of feminists' insistence on woman-only organizing. While for feminists organizing independently of men was a result of their analysis of patriarchy, Kemalist feminists interpreted it as a sign of men-hating, non-humanist ideology.

Like simultaneous membership in woman-only and mixed-sex organizations, most of the main characteristics of Kemalist feminism were present in Kemalist women's activism before 1980. Kemalist women's activism was built upon a laicist, nationalist,

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<sup>141</sup> It is also important to note that in the post-1980 period, the CHP's reputation for defending women's rights continued to appeal to educated and urban women; throughout the 1990s, the number of working women who voted for the CHP doubled in comparison to housewives and more than tripled in comparison to peasant women (Ayata 2002, 109).

modernist/westernist understanding of women's rights, and laicism was always of primary importance, although not the dominant theme, in their gender agenda. Similarly, a solidaristic approach to the relationship between women of different classes has been a defining element of Kemalist women's activism since the early-republican period. Likewise, Kemalist women's activism was oriented towards complementing (since the early-republican era), influencing (since the multi-party period), and challenging (since the 1970s) state policies towards women. Indeed, by the end of the 1970s, Kemalist women had already developed a set of demands and a gender equality agenda with which they pressed on the state to take steps to improve women's status in Turkish society. The political developments of the post-1980 period transitioned this agenda into a Kemalist feminist one. That is to say, Kemalist women's identification with feminism was not the result of a dramatic change in their vision of gender equality from the 1970s to the 1980s. Rather, feminism provided Kemalist women with additional discursive and strategic tools with which to pursue their already-present gender agenda. In the meantime, Kemalist feminists continued to frame their notion of women's rights with reference to Kemalist principles, among which laicism had now a central status. The next chapter investigates how Kemalist feminists pursued their gender equality agenda in the 1990s and 2000s by focusing on their relationship with the state, civil society, and transnational governance.

## 6. Kemalist feminists defining women's interests: Relations with the state, civil society, and transnational governance (1985–2000s)

Since Turkey's adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985, the politics of gender in Turkey has been shaped by the interplay between the state, civil society, and the institutions of transnational governance such as the United Nations and the European Union. Kemalist feminists, individually and collectively, have been among the most influential figures in this tripartite cooperation. Adopting and drawing on the UN-led global gender equality agenda and the language of women's human rights, they allied with egalitarian feminists and collaborated with state and transnational governance structures for furthering gender equality in Turkey. At the same time, Kemalist feminists worked to mobilize the Kemalist civil society, especially Kemalist women, to defend the laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist values of the Republic within which they defined women's interests. This chapter investigates the relationship between Kemalist feminist activism and the politics of gender in Turkey through the lens of state-civil society and transnational governance relations. It analyzes how Kemalist feminists employed the dual strategy of engaging in the tripartite cooperation and mobilizing the Kemalist civil society in order to *both* seek women's interests *and* to maintain the Kemalist, that is, laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist framing of these interests.

Starting with the International Women's Year in 1975, the United Nations introduced a framework for the global "gender equality regime" (Kardam 2005, see Section 2.4). This introduction was followed by the UN Women's Decade (1976–1985), CEDAW (1979), the Third World Conference on Women Nairobi (1985), and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). In 1993, the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna defined women's human rights as inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of universal human rights. The "universality" of human rights implied that the rights went beyond the nation-state level, as the nation-state was

seen as insufficient in grasping the notion of human rights (Grewal 2005). In 1994, reproductive rights were defined as part of women's human rights at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. The Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 led to the mainstreaming of women's rights as human rights by adopting the human rights of women in its entire agenda (Bunch and Frost 2000). This enabled the adoption of a common global framework in which different groups of women could share their agendas and build solidarity. The global gender equality agenda was adopted also by the European governance, especially since the European Commission committed itself to gender mainstreaming in 1996 (Abels and Mushaben 2012).

As Caglar, Prügl, and Zwingel (2013, 2) indicate, transnational governance is "a realm not only entailing intergovernmental arenas, but also social and political change in domestic contexts influenced by international discourses and policies." In Turkey, the global gender equality regime from the early-1990s on became an influential actor that mediated the relationship between women's organizations and the state as well as the relationship between women with differential gender agendas. Kemalist feminists, in their quest to define the terms of gender politics in Turkey, drew extensively on the global gender equality regime, synchronized their demands with the global gender equality agenda, and adopted the forms of organizing that were encouraged by this regime. In the 1990s, when the Kemalist forces in the state were still dominant and able to resist and/or suppress the Islamist challenge (see Chapter 5), Kemalist feminists participated in the women's policy agency<sup>142</sup> and worked together with bureaucrats to define women's interests and make policy reforms. This was, at the same time, a strategy to counter the rising popularity of Islamism and its influence on gender politics.

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<sup>142</sup> McBride and Mazur define "women's policy agency" as, "a structure that meets both of the following criteria: (1) any agency or governmental body formally established by government statute or decree; and (2) any agency or governmental body formally charged with furthering women's status and rights or promoting sex-based equality" (2010, 29).

In the 2000s, the dual processes of Europeanization and Islamization changed the nature of Kemalist women's relationship with the state and—therefore—their engagement with gender politics. Turkey's candidacy for membership in the European Union in 1999 perpetuated the influence of the global gender equality regime on Turkey's gender politics. The positive impact of this process on gender equality reforms is widely acknowledged by feminist scholars (Kardam 2005; Ertürk 2006; Aldıkaçtı Marshall 2009; 2013). However, the successive Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) governments were not willing to include Kemalist and egalitarian feminists in decision-making processes. In this period, Kemalist feminists relied more on the mechanisms of transnational governance so as to still engage in the politics of gender at a time when they were excluded by the AKP-led state. At the same time, associating themselves with the "global" helped Kemalist women to secure their political status at home.

In the 2000s, during Turkey's EU-oriented gender equality legislation process, Kemalist and egalitarian feminist organizations formed issue-based platforms and participated in policy making actively, if not directly. By this time, unlike in the 1990s, Islamist and Kurdish women's organizations also had a claim to participate in the tripartite cooperation through institutional lobbying (and through NGOization, see Chapter 7). The presence of Islamist and, to a lesser extent, Kurdish women, because of the different agendas that those groups were bringing, has challenged the smooth operation of the issue-based platforms. Furthermore, the lack of a common stance regarding women's interests between different groups of women led some Kemalist feminist to question whether to take part in the issue-based platforms and engage with the tripartite cooperation. This question, in turn, led to various forms of conflicts and divisions between Kemalist women themselves. Some of them stayed in these platforms at the expense of softening their tone on the laicist and nationalist framing of women's rights; others chose not to take part in them, sometimes with, and

sometimes without losing the grip on the global gender equality agenda. In any case, Kemalist feminists' quest for defining the parameters of gender equality in Turkey was not limited to the tripartite cooperation. Kemalist feminists equally sought to mobilize the Kemalist civil society, especially Kemalist women, to promote women's gender interests as defined by the laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist tenets of Kemalism. Both inside and outside the tripartite cooperation, Kemalist feminists primarily aimed to counter the Islamist politics of gender, making in their agenda little room for the Kurdish conflict and the issues of social and economic justice.

The main argument of this chapter is that women's activism should be understood as a struggle both for women's rights and for a definition of "women's interests" (Molyneux 1985, see Section 2.2) in terms of which these rights are framed. This is because different conceptualizations of women's interests with their peculiar class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious dimensions draw on, construct, and reproduce different formulations of women's rights. In the case of Kemalist feminists, the global gender equality regime and participation in the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society, and transnational governance helped them to become influential actors in Turkey's gender politics. Yet, Kemalist feminists utilized the global gender equality agenda also to frame the definition of women's interests in Kemalist terms, both by equating laicism, nationalism, and modernism/westernism with the "universality" of women's rights and by investing their efforts in mobilizing the Kemalist civil society in defense of these rights. Kemalist feminists' dual strategy of (1.) adhering to the global gender equality regime and (2.) mobilizing the Kemalist civil society has two implications for the analysis of the relationship between women's activism and gender politics. First, it confirms the necessity of analyzing women's gender activism in woman-only and mixed-sex organizations as complementary instead of incompatible or in conflict with each other. As I already suggested in the previous chapters,

an exclusive focus on women's woman-only activism allows only a partial account of their gender politics. Second, the relationship between women's activism and the various levels of governance should be scrutinized with its complexity and historical specificity rather than seen only within the framework of autonomy vs. assimilation paradigm. The case of Turkey provides an example of this need for a more comprehensive approach. Analysis of the 1990s and 2000s shows that Kemalist feminists were pro-state only as long as the state embraced their definition of women's interests, just like they were pro-tripartite cooperation only to the extent that they could utilize the global gender equality regime to support the Kemalist framing of women's interests.

The chapter is organized in five sections. The first section focuses on Kemalist feminists' adoption of the global gender equality agenda and their participation and lobbying in the women's policy agency, the General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women (*Kadının Statüsü ve Sorunları Genel Müdürlüğü*, KGSSM). The second section examines the processes of Europeanization and Islamization, and their implications for Kemalist feminist activism. The third section looks at Kemalist feminists' involvement in the EU and UN-oriented issue-based platforms, and the differentiation of Kemalist feminists in relation to taking part in these platforms. The fourth section analyzes Kemalist feminists' efforts to mobilize the Kemalist civil society in defense of women's interests. The concluding section presents an overall assessment of Kemalist feminists' relationship with the state, civil society, and transnational governance, and discusses its significance for the analysis of the relationship between women's activism and gender politics. The final section reflects also on the minor status of the Kurdish conflict and the issues of social and economic justice in the Kemalist feminist agenda.

## 6.1. Global gender equality regime and Kemalist feminists' collaboration with the state (1985–1990s)

As Chapters 3 and 4 showed, Kemalist women's interactions with international women's networks had started as early as in the 1930s. Yet, it wasn't until the 1970s that Kemalist women, as members of "voluntary women's organizations" (*gönüllü kadın kuruluşları*), claimed expertise on women's issues and demanded to collectively participate in policy-making processes. The UN's proclamation of the year 1975 as International Women's Year (IWY) was a key event in the making of Kemalist feminism as it aligned Kemalist women's organizations with the emerging global gender equality agenda. The events organized around IWY in Turkey gave Kemalist women's organizations the opportunity to take a position in gender politics vis-à-vis the state by drawing on IWY agenda and adapting it to their own. This was also the precursor of the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society, and transnational governance, which, starting from the 1990s, became the backbone of Kemalist feminist activism. An important dimension of the tripartite cooperation was the celebration of civil society as a democratic force against the state that took place alongside globalization. In the post-1980 period, transnational actors as well as civil society organizations gained significance in terms of mediating the relationship between individuals, collectivities and the state (Keyman and İçduygu 2003). Civil society came to be considered as crucial in further modernization and democratic development, as well as a "stabilizing factor" between Turkey and Europe (Ibid.). This development provided the civil society with legitimate political power, and strengthened the hand of feminists in Turkey in having a claim over the politics of gender.

Turkey's official engagement with the global gender equality regime started in 1985 with signing and ratification of CEDAW, which followed the UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi. In 1987, a separate unit for gender equality, the Advisory Board for Policies Regarding Women (*Kadına Yönelik Politikalar Danışma Kurulu*), was created in the

public sector under the Ministry of Labor. The board was founded by Imren Aykut, the only woman member of the center-right Motherland Party (ANAP) cabinet. Its aim was to increase gender awareness in public policies. In 1990 the board was turned into the General Directorate of Women's Status and Problems (KSSGM) and moved under the Prime Ministry. Selma Acuner, who served as the director of the KSSGM from 1993 to 1998, argues (1999) that the foundation of the women's policy agency was already thanks to Kemalist feminists who had raised a demand for the creation of a Ministry of Women's Rights. This indeed seems to be the case. On 5 December 1989, Imren Aykut attended the international seminar titled "Women's Participation in Political Life and Decision-Making Mechanisms" (*Kadının Siyasi Yaşama ve Karar Mekanizmalarına Katılımı*), which was organized by the newly founded Association for the Support of Modern Life (*Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği*, ÇYDD). At this seminar Nermin Abadan-Unat, a notable Kemalist feminist scholar (see Chapter 5), stated: "The issue of gender equality is not the task of voluntary associations. It is not the task of foundations. It is not the task of people who take the streets and demonstrate. These can support and help to raise public awareness. But this is eventually the task of the state" (ÇYDD 1991, 149–150). The KSSGM was founded four months after this seminar. Throughout the 1990s, the KSSGM was the main institution for lobbying for egalitarian and Kemalist feminists, who achieved considerable success in pushing their agenda on gender equality.<sup>143</sup>

As I discussed in the previous chapter, whether to comply with this form of state-civil society initiative or not had separated egalitarian and anti-system feminists from each other. Egalitarian feminists opted for participating in governance structures in order to transform them from within (Acuner 1999, 158), while anti-system feminists saw women's assimilation into state structures as a betrayal to the cause of women's liberation (Koçali 1990, 53).

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<sup>143</sup> Apart from the KSSGM, central state institutions have rarely opened their doors to women's activism. Yet, individual women participated in various advisory committees to the parliament and to some other institutions due to their professional orientations (Ecevit 2007, 197–199).

Henceforth, the issue of collaborating with the state or not became a line of demarcation between feminists in Turkey. Nazik Işık, a Kemalist feminist scholar and activist, recalled the disagreement between feminists over the formation of the KSSGM as follows:

[T]here were some disagreements between the classical [i.e. older Kemalist] women's organizations and the women's liberation movement. ... Classical organizations did not really question the formation of the KSSGM. Some of them discovered, even before feminists, that such agency was a new opportunity for them. Perhaps this was due to [their] conformism. Organizations like TKB and KASAIID thought like, "The state will support us." ... Besides this, there were two groups within the women's liberation movement. One group—the one in Istanbul—was against state intervention in women's issues. I belonged to the second group. We thought that the state needed national ... mechanisms, that this was necessary and important in raising awareness on women's issues in all state agencies, with the reservation that this should not grow so far as to suck up and swallow the independent women's movement. (Quoted in Acuner 1999, 156)

After the foundation of the KSSGM, the "second group" in the women's liberation movement, that is, Kemalist and egalitarian feminists, including the feminists in what Işık called "classical women's organizations," formed a strategic alliance in drawing on the UN framework (CEDAW) and lobbying at the women's policy agency for legal change. An important dimension of this alliance was the common adoption of the notion of women's human rights. The emphasis on women's rights as part of universal human rights enabled the recognition of women's cause as legitimate in Turkey (Y. Arat 2001). In 1993, following the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, a group of egalitarian feminists founded the Women for Women's Human Rights-New Ways (*Kadının İnsan Hakları-Yeni Çözümler*, KIH-YÇ) with the aim of doing advocacy work and lobbying in the national and international arenas for women's human rights.<sup>144</sup> Kemalist feminists, both individually and collectively, worked with egalitarian feminist organizations on women's rights projects. For example, in 1992, Istanbul University Women's Research and Education Center and the Women's Research Association (*Kadın Araştırmaları Derneği*) led the petition campaign "Violating

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<sup>144</sup> See KIH-YÇ, "About Us."

Women's Rights is Violating Human Rights." As part of a world-wide campaign against domestic violence, sexual harassment, and trafficking in women, thirty thousand signatures were presented to the Turkish Parliament (Y. Arat 2001, 30–31).

In spite of Kemalist and egalitarian feminists' eagerness to work with the state on creating a women's policy agency, in 1991 the Ministry of Labor prepared the draft statutory decree of the KSSGM without any consultation with women's organizations, although with reference to CEDAW. The draft decree outraged feminists as it authorized the Directorate to monitor, guide and supervise the activities of women's organizations in line with the National View (*Milli Görüş*), a conservative-Islamist political program formulated in 1969 by Necmettin Erbakan. The program was a blending of Islam and capitalism with an emphasis on a strong state that would lead national economic development and cultivate Islamic moral principles (Atasoy 2009, 7). The adherents of this view were in the ruling ANAP government of the time. Kemalist women's organizations sent a joint letter to the members of the parliament protesting the draft decree and asking for the revision of the decree in accordance with "Atatürk's principles and reforms" (Acuner 1999, 164).<sup>145</sup> In a letter sent individually to Imren Aykut, Türkan Saylan, the president of ÇYDD, explained that the draft decree was against the law (Higher Education Law, Associations Law, and CEDAW). Saylan finished her letter by saying, "We hope that you will show the sensitivity and not pass this law which is against the principles of our Atatürkist and laic Republic" (quoted in Ibid., 164). Saylan's reference to the "Atatürkist and laic Republic" implied that Kemalism was the correct way to approach the issue of women's rights and the monitoring of women's organizations according to the National View would violate Kemalism and—therefore—women's rights. Indeed, Saylan's and other Kemalist feminists' concern was less about women's organizations being

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<sup>145</sup> The protest letter was signed by the Turkish Jurists Women's Association, the Association for the Support of Modern Life, Istanbul University Women's Research and Education Center, the Turkish Women's Union, the Soroptimist Clubs Federation, and the Turkish Women's Council (Kardam and Ertürk 1999, 178).

monitored, guided and supervised by the state and more about the fact that it was the dominant conservative-Islamist faction in the government that would do the monitoring.

In 1989, Cemil Çiçek, the State Minister Responsible for the Family, a leading figure in the conservative-Islamist wing of ANAP and a proponent of the "Turk-Islam Synthesis" (see Section 5.1), had founded the Institute for Family Research (*Aile Araştırma Kurumu*) with the aim of strengthening the family institution. Such a move was in line with the conservative perspective in accordance to which women were supposed to belong to the private sphere (Ibid., 140).<sup>146</sup> Hence, in the 1990s, Kemalist feminists' collaboration with the Turkish state was at the same time marked by a struggle against the Islamist forces inside it. The polarization between Kemalism and Islamism, which dominated the institutional field of politics as such, was equally present in the politics of gender.<sup>147</sup> Kemalist feminists' relationship with the state was informed by both, seeking allies with those who could press for gender equality in accordance with the UN framework, and countering the conservative attacks on women's rights. In this sense, their stress on "Atatürk's principles and revolutions" in framing their demands for gender equality was a strategic choice that aimed at getting the support of the Kemalist and pro-Kemalist state factions.

The existence of the social democratic parties in the coalition governments of the 1990s allowed Kemalist and egalitarian feminists to make allies in state bureaucracy with people who considered their policy suggestions positively. Thanks to that the article in the Penal Law which reduced the sentencing in rape cases by two thirds when the victim was a prostitute was deleted in 1990 and the article in the Civil Law which subjected woman's employment to her husband's approval was deleted in 1992. When Imren Aykut, the founder of KGSSM under the Ministry of Labor, became a State Minister, she moved the Directorate

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<sup>146</sup> In that time, Çiçek had also declared that flirting prior to marriage was unfavorable and that feminism was the biggest obstacle to the formation of the "Turk-Islam" family (Acuner 1999, 140).

<sup>147</sup> For instance, the ban on the headscarf in higher education was lifted in the same parliamentary session where the KSSGM's revised statutory decree was passed, and the decree was aired as the "*Türban Law*" in the Turkish media (Acuner 1999, 192).

under the Prime Ministry to ensure that gender equality legislation would proceed. In 1991, the True Path Party-Social Democrat People's Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi-Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti*, DYP-SHP) coalition formed the State Ministry for Woman, Family and Social Services under which the KSSGM operated until 2011.<sup>148</sup> In 1991 Türkan Akyol (SHP) became its Minister and, during her term of office, cooperation between the KSSGM and women's organizations grew. As Acuner recounts, during Akyol's period, the KSSGM supported the foundation of women's studies research centers at various state universities, generated a gender statistics database at the State Statistical Institute, built relationships with representatives of the women's organizations and feminist academics, and strengthened ties with transnational institutions such as the UN and the European Council. These developments facilitated the preparation of Turkey's country report for the 1995 UN Conference in Beijing in collaboration with women's rights organizations (Acuner 1999, 213–125).<sup>149</sup>

In 1995, the Turkish government signed the Beijing Declaration of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women and committed itself to its Action Plan. Işıl Saygın, the State Minister for Woman, Family, and Social Services, who served from 1996 to 1999, supported the KSSGM in establishing the mechanisms by which the Action Plan could be realized, even though she belonged to centre-right parties (DYP and ANAP) and therefore had limited room for maneuver. As the Action Plan required, four commissions were formed by women's organizations, focusing on law, education, employment and health, with the aim of preparing policy proposals in these areas (Kardam and Ertürk 1999, 180).<sup>150</sup> Kemalist feminists were especially present in the law and education commissions since many of them were jurists and

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<sup>148</sup> In June 2011, the KSSGM (then KSGM, see footnote 162) was moved under the newly founded Ministry of Family and Social Politics.

<sup>149</sup> Such partnership between women's organizations and the KSSGM continued during the terms of office of the next two ministers, Önay Alpago and Aysel Baykal, who also belonged to the social democratic SHP. On the other hand, the budget spared for the KSSGM was so little that the Directorate relied almost wholly on external funding by donors like UNDP, FAO, World Bank, UNICEF, UNFPA and ILO (Kardam and Ertürk 1999, 185).

<sup>150</sup> During this time Kemalist feminists also founded women's commissions in Bars Associations in 28 cities of Turkey. These commissions in 1999 united under Turkish Bars Women's Commissions Network (*Türkiye Barolar Birliği Kadın Hukuku Komisyonu*, TÜBAKKOM) (Kardam 2005, 127).

academics themselves. Nerma, member of the Turkish University Women's Association (TÜKD), recalled this period of close collaboration as follows:

We [as women's organizations] worked together since the foundation of the KSSGM. We mutually supported each other. As the Union of Istanbul Women's Organizations and the Turkish Women Jurists Association, we were immediately informed about what the state did and gave all the support we could. Later we took part in the preparations for the new Civil Law as the Women's Commission of the Turkish Bar Association. There was a male-dominant perspective in the parliament but no conservatism or women's exclusion like today. Therefore, we could work with the KSSGM very closely. For instance, they would receive funding from the UNDP and support us; we ran many of our projects thanks to the funds given to the KSSGM.<sup>151</sup>

Nerma's words indicate that Kemalist feminists were active participants in the KSSGM-led policy-making processes. Yet, they were not always successful in making their policy suggestions into the law. For example, the CEDAW Committee in 1997 pointed at violence against women as a top priority issue in Turkey. Işıl Saygın, having attended the committee meeting, initiated the process of preparing a draft law. As a result, the Law on the Protection of Family passed in 1998. This was the highlight accomplishment of the decade for egalitarian and Kemalist feminists. Yet, they were not always successful in making their policy suggestions into the law. As the Republican Women's Association (CKD) member Handan explained, feminists' status in the KSSGM was fragile even in this "golden age" of women's alliance with the state. In Handan's account, Kemalist and egalitarian feminists prepared a draft law and presented it to Işıl Saygın: "We recommended it as the Law for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and it came back as the Law for the Protection of Family. And Işıl Saygın said to us, 'It's not possible for me to pass this law at the parliament under the name you suggest.'"<sup>152</sup> Handan's account is remarkable in that it shows that whether

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with Nerma, 18 August 2011.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Handan, 26 April 2011.

the policy-making efforts of feminist activists were to bear fruit or not depended, at the end of the day, on one woman's ability to convince a cabinet of men.<sup>153</sup>

Indeed, the relationship between the state and women's organizations was not meant to be a relationship of equals. From the perspective of the state, the meaning of women's collaboration with the KSSGM was not their full participation in decision-making processes but rather complementing the state's policies. In 1998, the KSSGM director Şenay Eser gave a talk on the role of women's organizations in achieving gender equality at a symposium organized by the CKD. She said:

It is known that the state is insufficient in integrating the women's perspective (*kadın yaklaşımı*) in [its] policies and plans. The activities of voluntary organizations in areas where the state falls short are greatly valued in the world in the last fifty years and increasingly in Turkey, too. I can say that all voluntary organizations are built on women's shoulders. ... We monitor with appreciation the increasing importance and resources of the voluntary organizations that work like development agencies together with the Turkish state and in a way to support the state, and we hope that their activities will multiply further. (CKD 1999, 20–21)

Eser's speech reflected the state's adoption of the global gender equality framework, which allowed women's participation in gender politics. Yet, by pointing at the role of women in compensating for the insufficiencies of the state, Eser not only assumed that the state and women had common interests, but also posited women and the state hierarchically where the "feminine" field of activism, "built on women's shoulders," was to complement the masculinist state, implicitly reproducing women's exclusion from state-making.

According to Acuner, in the 1990s, feminists' weak position vis-a-vis the KSSGM limited their capacity to maneuver. Women's organizations, without questioning the transformation of the state and its ideological repercussions for the KSSGM, functioned like the bureaucratic extension of the Directorate (Acuner 1999, 262). Nonetheless, it would be

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<sup>153</sup> Feminists' relationship with Işlay Saygın was not always smooth either. For instance, in 1997, there was a public debate on compulsory virginity tests. Saygın defended that "the tests were needed to help guide young people's behavior" (quoted in Kardam 2005, 122). Selma Acuner, then the director of the KSSGM, stated that the state had no right to control women's bodies. After her statement, she had to resign from her post (Ibid.).

difficult to argue that Kemalist feminists in the 1990s were fully co-opted by the state since their activism was not only limited to their relationship with the state. The 1990s was a time when Kemalist and Islamist forces within the state and civil society struggled against each other for hegemony, and Kemalist feminists were part of this struggle. They pledged their support for the state as long as the state suppressed identity-based claims of Islamists (and Kurds) by adhering to the Kemalist definition of citizenship and national identity. Kemalist feminists' activism in the greater Kemalist civil society served the purpose of mobilizing women on the basis of their gender as well as national/ethnic and cultural/religious interests. Kemalist feminists, as representatives of Turkish women, thereby called for the state to protect these interests. This was especially important at a time when Islamist and Kurdish women were mobilizing and demonstrating for their identity-based claims (see Section 5.4). Kemalist women answered to these claims by marching as "laic Turkish women." The first mass demonstration of this kind was organized in 1989 "In Tribute to Laicism" (*Laikliğe Saygı*), and was attended by some two thousand women from Kemalist women's organizations.<sup>154</sup>

In the mid-1990s, the electoral success of the Islamist Welfare Party (RP) first in the local (1994) and then in the general (1995) elections deepened the laicism-Islamism dichotomy and—for Kemalist feminists—framed the discussions around women's interests and rights around this dichotomy. In 1997, the National Security Council submitted a memorandum to the RP-DYP coalition government asking for several changes to be executed immediately in order to restore laicism against the "reactionary threat." The statement of the military intervention, popularly known as the "February 28 Decisions" or the "postmodern coup," read as follows: "Our common value is secular and democratic Turkey with the framework of unitarianism and Atatürkist thought. All movements that do not meet with us on

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<sup>154</sup> See ÇYDD Tarihi (History of the ÇYDD).

this common value are the enemies of the nation and country, and must be fought against" (quoted in Cizre-Sakallioglu and Cinar 2003, 313). Unlike the 1980 coup, which incorporated Islamic elements in the Turkish national identity (see Section 5.1), the February 28 decisions reasserted a staunch understanding of laicism by bringing strict measures including changes in the school curricula that emphasized political Islam and separatist movements as new security threats, the introduction of eight-year mandatory schooling system, and the closing down of the secondary schools for prayer-leaders and preachers (Ibid., 312). In the aftermath of the February 28 decisions, the RP-led RP-DYP government fell. The Islamist cadres in universities, the judiciary and the Turkish army were expelled. University rectors were appointed among the Kemalists and the ban on the headscarf was reinforced in higher education. In 1998, the Constitutional Court closed down the RP on the basis of violation of laicism.

Right before the postmodern coup, on 15 February 1997, Kemalist feminists organized the mass demonstration "Women's March against Sharia" (*Şeriata Karşı Kadın Yürüyüşü*) in Ankara. The demonstration, attended by thirty-five thousand women (CKD 1999), became a milestone of the February 28 Process. The organizers of the demonstration were women from different Kemalist organizations and political parties who gathered under the name United Women's Platform (*Birleşik Kadın Platformu*).<sup>155</sup> Women who attended the demonstration carried placards with the image of a veiled woman with a cross on her body.<sup>156</sup> This showed that the laicism-Islamism dichotomy was encoded in women's bodies; the image of a covered woman represented the threat Islamism posed to the laic regime more vividly than the presence of Islamist men occupying high posts within the state.

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<sup>155</sup> Interview with Ayşe, 20 April 2011.

<sup>156</sup> In our interview on 26 April 2011, Handan, one of the organizers of the demonstration, said that she agreed with the criticisms that were posed against the placards used at the demonstration: "[I]t was a wrong symbol. It would even be better if we named the demonstration 'against reactionism' instead of 'against Sharia.' [The name of the march] was given by common sense; we were all responsible for this."

Kemalist feminists' activism not only went beyond the tripartite cooperation but, in the 1990s, their activism outside the tripartite cooperation also helped to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the state. Following the Women's March against Sharia the Republican Women's Association (CKD) was founded and became an outstanding Kemalist women's organization. Its president Şenal Sarihan explained the purpose of the Women's March against Sharia and the foundation of the CKD as follows:

Sharia came to power by drawing on globalization—instead of objecting to it. Imperialism and religious reactionism, by their very nature, were influential mostly on women. Shariatists [*Şariatçılar*] turned the "*tüurban*," which subjects women to servitude, into a political symbol and used it as [their] "flag." An important number of women and young girls fell into this trap. ... On 15.02.1997, 35.000 women in Ankara marched in order to say "No" to this dark course of events. ... In this context, women who [previously] took part in various democratic mass organizations and in the women's movement came together as "Republican Women." (CKD 1999, 8)

The close relationship between the CKD and the KSSGM shows that the CKD's analysis, as well as its mission, was recognized by the state. In its first anniversary, the CKD organized the symposium "Woman and the Republic" (*Cumhuriyet ve Kadın*). This symposium was attended by the KSSGM director Şenay Eser, and greeted by high-rank state figures such as the President of the Republic Süleyman Demirel and the Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz (CKD 1999). Two years later, in 2000, the CKD organized the international conference "The New World Order, Women and Reactionism on the 74th Anniversary of the Civil Law" (*Medeni Kanun'un 74. Yılında Yeni Dünya Düzeni, Kadın ve İrtica*). This symposium was funded by the UNDP, attended by bureaucrats in the KSSGM and the Ministry of Culture, and supported logistically by the CHP-led municipalities of Çankaya and Yenimahalle districts of Ankara (CKD 2000). In her greeting letter to the conference, Işıl Saygın underlined the importance of the eight-year primary education and the importance of laicism by linking it to the UN (CEDAW) framework (CKD 2000, 18). Within the three years of its existence, the CKD was embraced by the state and got involved in the Women's Development Project in collaboration

with the KSSGM and the UNDP, which showed that Kemalist feminists' efforts outside the tripartite cooperation strengthened their position within it.

Throughout the 1990s there was an organic relationship between Kemalist feminists and the Turkish state for as long as the Kemalist factions in the state were dominant, at least in the institutions with which feminists collaborated. This was also the time when Kemalist feminists were dominant figures in women's institutional lobbying given the lagged engagement of Islamist and Kurdish women with the tripartite cooperation (see Chapter 7). The global gender equality regime, combined with the efforts to mobilize the Kemalist civil society, provided a suitable framework for Kemalist feminists for maintaining the principles of Kemalism, primarily laicism, as the preconditions for defining women's interests.

## **6.2. Changing context of gender politics in the 2000s: The EU accession process and the AKP rule**

The symbiotic relationship between Kemalist feminists and the Turkish state that was fostered by the global gender equality regime changed dramatically in the 2000s thanks to the parallel processes of Turkey's European Union accession and the AKP's rise to power in 2002. Turkey became a candidate for full membership in the EU at the Helsinki Summit in December 1999. In order to start the negotiation process, Turkey had to pass a vast number of law reforms. To meet the EU criteria significant changes were made in Turkey's gender policy by means of introducing the principle of gender equality in the Constitution, the Civil Law, the Penal Law and the Labor Law. Put briefly, the legal changes were as follows: In the Constitution, gender equality within the family was recognized (2001). The article that ensured "equality before law" was reframed indicating that men and women had equal rights and the state was made responsible for taking measures to implement this principle (2004). The new Civil Law (2001) improved women's status in the family by bringing the equal share of property acquired within marriage in cases of divorce, equality of the spouses in decision making

(which replaced the husband's status as the head of the family), and equal rights of inheritance for children born inside and outside wedlock. It also raised the minimum age for marriage from seventeen for men and fifteen for women to eighteen for both sexes. The new Penal Law (2004) increased sentences for honor killings and, very importantly, defined violence against women as crime against the "individual" instead of the "family" or "social order." Marital rape was criminalized, and the discrimination between virgins and non-virgins, married and unmarried women in sexual crimes was abolished. This new law changed the role of the state as the protector of the nation's and women's morality; it replaced the notion of protection of public morality with that of the individual and his/her sexual and bodily integrity. References to traditional concepts such as morality, chastity, honor or virginity were removed from the Law. The new Labor Law (2003) took measures against gender discrimination in hiring, criminalized sexual harassment and other sexual offences at work, and improved the maternity leave conditions for women by raising the duration of the leave from twelve to sixteen weeks. In 2009, the Equal Opportunity Commission, composed of parliamentarians from different political parties, was formed in the parliament to ensure that the legal proposals and amendments prepared by the government and/or parliamentary commissions are analyzed from a gender equality perspective. The Commission also assumed the role of checking the compatibility of Turkish legislation with Turkey's international commitments such as CEDAW.<sup>157</sup> All these changes, notwithstanding the problems faced in their implementation, improved women's legal status to a significant degree.

Although this phase of Turkey's Europeanization process started before the AKP's rise to power, most of the EU reforms were implemented by the AKP. The AKP cadre belonged to the Islamist movement of the 1990s which went through deradicalization and partial secularization as its radical challenge to Western modernity was absorbed into capitalism

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<sup>157</sup> For an overview of the reforms and their repercussions, see Müftüleri-Baç (2012)

(Tuğal 2009).<sup>158</sup> Conforming to the EU norms and drawing on the discourses of globalization and democratization, the AKP secured its political status and legitimized its restructuring of public politics (Atasoy 2009, 14–15).<sup>159</sup> In return, the EU accession process was attributed the power—by the liberal circles in Turkey and abroad—to transform an Islamist party and make it embrace the norms of liberal democracy, and thereby to democratize and Europeanize the Turkish political system (Bedirhanoğlu and Yalman 2009, 121).<sup>160</sup> The AKP successfully instrumentalized the EU framework in taking measures, such as cutting down the power of the military and softening the state control over the public practice and visibility of (Sunni) Islamic belonging, which weakened the Kemalist tutelage and strengthened AKP's hegemony over the state and society.

In its party programs the AKP committed itself to gender equality and cited CEDAW as the politically correct means of approaching the EU. It is, however, difficult to argue that such commitment was a sincere attempt of furthering gender equality in Turkey. It was rather, as Kandiyoti puts it, the instrumentalization of women's rights, which was typical of governments in the post-9/11 Middle East, and had three distinct components: Compliance with gender reforms instead of implementing genuine democratic representation so as to cut corners for governments to present themselves as more democratic; the disintegration of gender justice and social justice in the global neoliberal agenda which makes gender reforms unthreatening for neoliberal states; and the discourse of gender equality which serves as a means of naked populism (2010, 171). The AKP recognized women's public visibility as a

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<sup>158</sup> Tuğal, in his study on the deradicalization of the Islamist movement during the AKP period, characterizes this process by the Gramscian notion of "passive revolution," where a new dominant class replaces the old one but, unlike in the classic revolutions, the revolutionary discourses and strategies that mobilize popular sectors serve the reinforcement of the existing patterns of domination (Tuğal 2009, 4).

<sup>159</sup> Atasoy characterizes this as "Islam's marriage with neoliberalism" (neoliberalism as framed by the EU as well as the IMF and the World Bank), that is, a socio-political mobilization that "articulates a discourse of human rights based on an ethics of justice and human dignity rooted in divine power, frequently supplemented by liberal-democratic concepts of individual freedoms and rights" (2009, 241).

<sup>160</sup> Economically, however, the EU did not do more than reinforcing the conditions of the IMF stand-by agreements. In terms of state-class relations, the AKP adjusted to and furthered the neoliberal restructuring that has been ongoing in Turkey since the 1980s (Bedirhanoğlu and Yalman 2009).

marker of its modern outlook but at the same time defined the familial sphere as the "natural locus of women" (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2011, 567). The family lied at the core of AKP's politics of gender with its primary concern being "strengthening the family institution." In practice, this meant that the family was designated as the site where the needs of less capable family members like children, disabled, and elderly people were to be met. The emphasis on the ideal woman as a home-based caregiver re-naturalized women's traditional gender roles as well as their social class position (Candas and Silier 2014, 117). It especially reinforced the socio-economic vulnerability of urban poor women and children (Yazıcı 2012). All these changes were very much against the politics of gender pursued by Kemalist and egalitarian feminists since the 1990s.

In the meantime, as A. Kılıç (2008) explains, the EU-related reforms neutralized some of the previous gendered policies of the state either by terminating those rights formerly enjoyed by women or by extending these rights to men. Yet, in the absence of sufficient policy measures for their improved capability, these reforms increased women's vulnerability (Ibid.). For example, the new welfare regime introduced in 2008 by the Social Security and General Health Insurance Law switched from the male breadwinner to the universal breadwinner model where women and men were treated the same in terms of receiving social benefits. Yet, without providing public care services and reinforcing women's responsibility in the familial sphere, the steps towards gender-neutral citizenship reinforced gender inequality by pushing women into informal, flexible, insecure jobs (Çağatay 2014). Moreover, the religious/conservative worldview promoted by the AKP influenced urban women's labor force participation negatively (Göksel 2013). Therefore, Dedeoğlu characterizes Turkey's welfare regime during the EU-accession period as "veiled Europeanization" in which "women's issues are seen as a pendulum between EU legal regulations and the conservative discourse of the AKP government" (2013, 8). Where women's issues were addressed in

relation to family and religious affairs, only a small number, upper-class women enjoyed the gender equality guaranteed by the EU legislation (Ibid.).

EU reforms also included the expansion of cultural and economic rights of minorities in accordance with the EU's framing of minority rights as group rights (see Prügl and Thiel 2009, 8). This development gave religious and ethnic identities a legal framework within which to formulate demands in terms of citizenship rights. In the 2000s, the Kurdish liberation movement benefitted from the opportunity space created by Europeanization by translating their demands—such as education in mother tongue—into equal and constitutional citizenship rights while strengthening the understanding of Kurdish identity as an ethnic identity (Keyman 2012). Whereas the Kurdish movement took steps towards Turkey-ization (*Türkiyelileşme*), the EU accession process required the state to recognize the Kurdish ethnic identity (Kavak 2012). For instance, broadcasting and language courses in Kurdish were legalized (Uçarlar 2012, 278–279). All in all, the state recognition of the sub-national aspects of citizenship beyond national membership gave civil society a formal ground from which to contribute to the "denationalization" of Turkish citizenship (Kadioğlu 2007).

Finally, during the AKP rule, the headscarf issue gained a number of new features. Almost all of the AKP's—predominantly male—elite had covered wives. Islamist women, hitherto having been excluded from the state, appeared in the upper levels of bureaucracy through the positions that their husbands held. At the same time, the visibility of covered women in the social sphere increased because of their upward class mobilization and aspiration to pursue professional careers (Jelen 2011). In the meantime, Islamist women's activism grew. With the help of local and transnational funds, Islamist women engaged in spreading an Islamic world view with an emphasis on women's societal role as mothers and wives.

All these were major blows on Kemalism. Moreover, in the AKP period, the smear campaign ran by the Islamist circles turned "Kemalism" into a negative label, a token of authoritarianism and anti-democratic rule. Part of it was the devaluation of Kemalism in state bureaucracy given the AKP's elimination of Kemalist cadres from the state as well as its "equating secularism with authoritarianism and military rule" (Kandiyoti 2012, 517). In Atasoy's words: "The twenty-first century Islamic mobilization of newly rich capitalists from the Anatolian hinterland, the growing concern of women over the headscarf ban, the emergence of Kurdish claims to cultural rights, and the rise of Islamic religious groups have all occurred largely by reference to social injustices inflicted by the Kemalist state" (2009, 241). This resulted in the translation of social antagonisms, be those based on gender, nation/ethnicity, culture/religion or class, into a Kemalism vs. Islamism/anti-Kemalism binary.

As for women's activism, the EU accession process on the one hand provided women with a stronger ground from which to participate in the politics of gender but on the other hand it deepened the divisions among women on the basis of national/ethnic and cultural/religious belongings. Women's reference to citizenship as a "multi-layered notion" (Yuval-Davis 1999, see footnote 33) increased. In the 2000s, extra-national sources of citizenship based on both ethnic and/or religious belongings, and supra-national frameworks such as the EU or the UN, greatly informed women's differential gender agendas. In their discourses Islamist women switched the emphasis from "freedom of thought and faith" to "individual rights and freedoms." They criticized the staunch laicist attitude of the state for depriving them of their citizenship rights, that is, full participation in public life.<sup>161</sup> The rising presence of Islamic women's activism, combined with the AKP's negative attitude towards feminist activism and the exclusion of Kemalists from the state, materialized the

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<sup>161</sup> See, for example, Ak-Der, "Yayınlar" (Publications).

"*türbanthreat*" in the eyes of Kemalist feminists. Kurdish women, on the other hand, belonged to a different political culture but found the EU framework equally useful for their cause. They politicized their exclusion from the public sphere based on their gender and ethnic identities, and demanded the right to education in mother tongue to counter the assimilationist policies of the state (Y. Arat 2004, 281–292). The EU accession process, together with the CEDAW framework, also provided the mechanisms for women of different political belongings to join forces for women's legal empowerment. Women formed a number of issue-based platforms by the initiative of Kemalist and egalitarian feminists and the participation of Islamist and Kurdish women's organizations. As I discuss in the next two sections, Kemalist feminists were very active in these platforms. Yet, they also continued their efforts to mobilize the Kemalist civil society so as to maintain the Kemalist framing of women's interests.

### 6.3. Negotiating women's interests in issue-based platforms

The KSGM became a rather dysfunctional institution under the AKP rule.<sup>162</sup> The above-mentioned CEDAW-related commissions on education, law, employment, and health were dissolved. After 2002, a few Kemalist and egalitarian feminists were involved in the KSGM-led initiatives but only thanks to the invitation by and on the side of transnational institutions.<sup>163</sup> AKP governments' relationship with secular (i.e. Kemalist and egalitarian feminist) women's organizations was far from being friendly. Policy proposals regarding EU-related gender reforms prepared by secular women's organizations were often ignored by the AKP. For example, women's demand to introduce the principle of gender quota for intra-party, municipal, and general elections in the constitution was rejected on the grounds that the

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<sup>162</sup> In 2004, in line with the EU requirements, the KSSGM finally had its own statue, and the institution was renamed as the General Directorate on the Status of Women (*Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü*, KGSM). For a critical assessment on the new institutional form, see Belge, "Acuner: KSGM'de Kadrolaşmaya Dikkat" (Acuner: Attention to the Staffing in the KSGM).

<sup>163</sup> Interview with Ayşe Ayata, professor of political science at the Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 19 July 2011.

quota would be an insult to women.<sup>164</sup> In 2005, secular women's organizations launched a campaign to include the principle of positive discrimination in the Article 10 of the Constitution which held the state responsible for ensuring gender equality. They also sent a petition to the Minister of State Responsible for Women and Family Affairs, Nimet Çubukçu, regarding their demand. In response to the petition, Çubukçu initiated a court case against the representatives of women's organizations on grounds of defamation.<sup>165</sup> In the same year, the KSGM excluded women's organizations from the official delegation to attend the yearly UN Commission on the Status of Women (Ilkcaracan 2012). In 2009, the AKP, with a last minute maneuver, changed the name of the parliamentary commission responsible for evaluating the legal changes in Turkey in line with gender equality perspective from Gender Equality Commission to Equal Opportunity Commission. A year later, in 2010, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan declared that he didn't believe in gender equality but in equal opportunity.<sup>166</sup>

In the 2000s, many Kemalist feminists gave up on collaborating with the central state and relied in their activism on the mechanisms provided by the EU and the UN. Some of them withdrew from the state-civil society-transnational governance triangle altogether and, as I explore in the next section, limited their efforts in mobilizing the Kemalist civil society against the rise of Islamism. Only a few Kemalist feminists insisted on keeping one foot in the KSGM. One of them was the TKB member Ümit. In the 2000s, Ümit used "the advantage of being a lawyer and being [a member] of an organization which worked for the public benefit"<sup>167</sup> to participate in policy-making at the KSGM. For her, it was possible and necessary to maintain ties with state institutions in order to influence the politics of gender:

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<sup>164</sup> See Radikal, "Erdoğan Kadın Kotası Talebine Kızdı" (Erdoğan Got Angry at the Demand for Women's Quota).

<sup>165</sup> See Durukan, "Çubukçu, Kadın Örgütlerini Şikayet Etti" (Çubukçu Complained against Women's Organizations).

<sup>166</sup> See Hürriyet, "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan Kadın ve Adalet toplantısında konuştu" (President of the Republic Erdoğan Spoke at the Woman and Justice Meeting).

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Ümit, 18 May 2011.

I am a hundred percent sure that we need to stick with [the KSGM]. ... To remain in these [state institutions] is possible only if you use the right language. It doesn't matter who is ruling Turkey; we have to be at the KSGM. What matters is to what extent we can penetrate and influence national mechanisms.<sup>168</sup>

For Kemalist feminists who collaborated with the KSGM during the AKP period, using "the right language" meant shifting the emphasis in the framing of women's interests from the Kemalist principles of laicism, nationalism, and modernism/westernism to the notion of women's human rights. In this period, Turkey's commitment to CEDAW and the EU accession process provided the ground for Kemalist feminists to reframe their definition of women's interests further in the "language of rights" (Molyneux and Razavi 2002). Indeed, the language of rights had great significance for the women's movement as a whole. In the 2000s, secular feminists in Turkey formed issue-based platforms to participate in the EU-oriented policy making and to monitor Turkey's commitment to CEDAW.<sup>169</sup> These platforms brought together feminist, Kemalist, Islamist, Kurdish, and other women's, lgbt, and human rights organizations with an aim to involve as many women's rights activists as possible to build a wide front and press for gender equality during the reform process. The first of these platforms was the Civil Law Platform (*Medeni Yasa Platformu*) which, during the preparation of the new Civil Law in 2001, brought together a hundred and twenty-four organizations.<sup>170</sup> The second was the Turkish Penal Law Women's Platform (*TCK Kadın Platformu*), founded in 2002 by twenty-seven women's organizations who engaged with the making of the new Penal Law that related to women's sexual and bodily rights (KIH-YÇ 2008, 26). Later, in 2007, secular feminists founded the Constitutional Platform of Women (*Anayasa Kadın*

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<sup>168</sup> Interview with Ümit, 18 May 2011.

<sup>169</sup> Issue-based platforms functioned similarly to what Holli calls "women's co-operative constellations," which she defines as: "[A]ny kind of actual co-operation initiated or accomplished by one or several groups of women in a policy process to further their aims or achieve goals perceived as important to them" (2008, 169).

<sup>170</sup> For the list of participant organizations, see Bianet, "Medeni Yasa Anayasaya Aykırı" (The Civil Law is against the Constitution).

*Platformu*) that aimed to introduce in the constitution the notion of positive discrimination and the principle of gender quotas.

In the 2000s, the issue-based platforms functioned in a way similar to "women's advocacy networks" in the EU context, where "different constellations of feminist actors from inside and outside EU institutions joined forces to achieve policy goals" (Lang 2014). Also in Turkey the platforms allied with bureaucrats and MPs from the opposition parties to press their demands on the EU-oriented reforms (cf. A. Aksoy 2015). The EU framework also helped women's organizations in Turkey to participate in women's advocacy networks on the EU level. In 2004, the European Women's Lobby Turkish Coordination (*Avrupa Kadın Lobisi Türkiye Koordinasyonu*, AKL-TK) was founded with an aim to utilize the EU accession process for the cause of gender equality in Turkey.<sup>171</sup> The issue-based platforms were also a strategy to counter AKP's attacks on women's rights. For example, in 2004, the AKP attempted to criminalize adultery in the name of "protecting women" during the discussions on the new Penal Law. Secular feminists protested the attempt, yet the AKP stepped back only when the EU expressed its strong objection to the AKP's attempt (Acar and Altunok 2012). Thus, feminists in the issue-based platforms found it useful to "play the European card" (Kandiyoti 2011, 11) against the AKP's exclusionary attitude towards secular women's demands.

Another issue-based process for Kemalist feminists through which to press their demands on the Turkish state was the preparation of NGO shadow reports which monitored Turkey's commitment to CEDAW.<sup>172</sup> In 2003, the feminist organization Flying Broom (*Uçan Süpürge*) organized the "Civil Society Forum" (*Sivil Toplum Forumu*), which became the first

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<sup>171</sup> For the list of member organizations see AKL-TK, "Üye Örgütler (member associations)."

<sup>172</sup> These reports were then submitted to the CEDAW Committee. See UN Women, "NGO Participation at CEDAW sessions."

and largest women's NGO meeting in Turkey (Landig 2011).<sup>173</sup> The three-day forum gathered together four hundred fifty-three women's organizations with diverse political leanings from all around Turkey (CEDAW STYK 2004). This was most probably the first time when Kemalist women's organizations got familiar with Islamist and Kurdish women's rights activists to such an extent. Right after the forum, the CEDAW Civil Society Executive Committee (CEDAW *Sivil Toplum Yürütme Kurulu*, STYK) was founded under the leadership of the Flying Broom. Member organizations of the CEDAW STYK included feminist, Kemalist, Islamist, and Kurdish women's NGOs, as well as LGBT and human rights organizations. This group prepared one of the shadow reports submitted to the CEDAW Committee for the fourth and fifth periods.<sup>174</sup> Moreover, the shadow report for the sixth period (2010) was prepared under the secretariat of the Turkish Women's Union. This report included an even higher number of women's NGOs and platforms among its signatories, improving the familiarity of Kemalist women with Islamist and Kurdish women further (CEDAW-STYK 2010).

However, Kemalist feminists' encounter with Islamist and Kurdish women resulted also in the polarization of women's differential political belongings and their—thereby—differential interpretations of women's interests. Islamist women's adherence to Islamic values, especially to the principle of complementarity between the sexes, kept them from problematizing essentialist notions of gender and matters related to sexuality and body politics (Aslan-Akman 2011; Acar and Altunok 2012). Kurdish women, on the other hand,

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<sup>173</sup> Established in 1996 in Ankara, the Flying Broom is a women's rights organization that aims to "contribute to the advancement of the women's movement, to assure gender equality, to develop new possibilities of communication and cooperation, and to create common fields of action among women's organizations." In this aim the organization regularly organized meetings that brought local women's organizations together. See Uçan Süpürge, "Who Are We?" The idea of organizing the Civil Society Forum came from egalitarian and Kemalist feminists who belonged to different women's organizations. Interview with Aydan, 14 July 2011.

<sup>174</sup> The first report was presented in 1997 by the KIH-YÇ. The number of signatory organizations for the fourth and fifth-period country report presented to the CEDAW Committee in 2005 was remarkably higher compared to 1997, showing the positive impact of the issue-based platforms. In 2005, two reports were submitted to the CEDAW Committee: One by the TCK Women's Platform based in Istanbul, another by the CEDAW STYK based in Ankara. Both reports undertook similar topics from a shared perspective (KIH-YÇ 2008).

framed their demands in an ethnicized language of rights (Gökalp 2010), which brought another line of disagreement in the issue-based platforms.<sup>175</sup> The polarization between women's differential interests was visible during the submission of the sixth-period shadow report to the CEDAW Committee. The Capital City Women's Platform (*Başkent Kadın Platformu*, BKP), an Islamic women's rights organization and a member of the CEDAW STYK, wanted to include in the report information about the discrimination women faced because of the ban on the headscarf. This resulted in disagreement among Kemalist feminists over whether to cooperate with the Islamist women's organizations or not. Eventually, the Federation of Turkish Women's Associations (TKDF) with its eleven member organizations declared that they did not want to share the same platform with Islamist women. The TKDF then left the CEDAW STYK and formed a separate secretariat for preparing a shadow report.<sup>176</sup> According to Gamze from the Association for the Research and Study of Women's Social Life (KASALD), a member organization of the TKDF, those organizations that left the CEDAW STYK did it out of concern of having to negotiate some of their priorities regarding women's rights. Gamze stated that she herself was not against the wearing of *türban*, but the problem was that covered women participated in the CEDAW STYK with their "religious susceptibility" which, for Gamze, made it impossible to discuss the issue of women's rights from a feminist perspective:

We can discuss neither the issue of sexual freedoms nor the issue of homosexuality. I am for human rights [and] democracy. For me there is no difference between the right to gay marriage and the struggle for equal pay for equal work. They are the same because democracy is a holistic concept, and so is freedom. Therefore there is no negotiation like, let's spare one [of the freedoms] and maintain the rest.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> It should be noted here that the Kurdish women's organizations that took part in the platforms I mention in this chapter emphasized the Kurdish ethnic identity less than those that did not, which made it easier for Kemalist feminists to ally with them. For instance, according to Nermin from the KHKD, the president of KAMER (Nebahat Koç) was an Atatürkist. Interview with Nermin, 1 July 2011.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with Aydan, 14 July 2011.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Gamze, 11 May 2011. In the same vein, Gamze thinks that "Islamist feminism" is an oxymoron.

In the end, four different shadow reports were submitted to the CEDAW Committee. Kemalist women's organizations wrote their own report under the leadership of the Federation of Turkish Women's Associations. This report was briefer and limited in scope but in essence did not differ from the one submitted by the CEDAW STYK except for it made no reference to ethnic identity.<sup>178</sup> In addition to these two reports, the Kurdish Human Rights Project submitted a report that underlined the double-discrimination (ethnic and gender-based) faced by Kurdish women.<sup>179</sup> Finally, seventy-one Islamist women's organizations gathered and submitted a report under the leadership of Women's Rights Organizations against Discrimination (*Ayrımcılığa Karşı Kadın Hakları Derneği*, AKDER) that focused on the consequences of the headscarf ban in the fields of education, employment, and political participation.<sup>180</sup>

By the end of the 2000s, the majority of Kemalist feminists had adopted the global gender equality regime as the mediator of their now antagonistic relationship with the Turkish state. Kemalist feminists' engagement in women's issue-based platforms required them to negotiate the terms of women's interests with women of diverse political belongings in order to remain influential actors within gender politics. As presented above Islamist and, to a lesser extent, Kurdish women's articulation of their demands in the language of rights and their participation in the issue-based platforms also resulted in divisions within Kemalist feminism.

Whereas those Kemalist feminists who participated in the issue-based platforms, in Ümit's

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<sup>178</sup> Compare the "CEDAW Shadow Report of Turkey 46th Session" prepared by the TKDF and the "Shadow NGO Report on Turkey's Sixth Periodic Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women" prepared by the CEDAW STYK and TCK Women's Platform.

<sup>179</sup> This report claimed that Turkey continued "to fail to comply with its obligations under CEDAW with respect to a significant minority of its population, particularly by ignoring and thus failing to address the problems faced by Kurdish women. Without recognising the Kurds as an ethnic minority and failing to address the social and economic problems that Kurds and Kurdish women, in particular, face, the Turkish government will never be able to comply fully with its CEDAW obligations." See Kurdish Human Rights Project, "NGO Shadow Report for CEDAW."

<sup>180</sup> This report discussed "how these restrictions legitimize discrimination, and how the imposition of the ban by the state has turned into violence, patriarchal oppression, and discrimination not only by men against women, but also by women against women with a headscarf," and claimed the violation of CEDAW thereof. See The Coalition for the Partial Preliminary Evaluation Report by seventy-one Non-Governmental Organizations of Turkey, "Turkey's Sixth Report on its Compliance with the CEDAW."

words, "learned to use the right language" (see above), others such as the TKDF chose to remain outside the platforms but nonetheless adopted the global gender equality agenda. Yet, there were also those Kemalist feminists who fell altogether outside the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society, and transnational governance. In the 2000s, these women distanced themselves also from the global gender equality regime. For instance, the left-Kemalist CKD, which previously had quite close ties with the KSSGM (see above), was not invited to participate in the issue-based platforms because of the new form and composition of institutional lobbying.<sup>181</sup> Thus, in the 2000s, Kemalist feminists who were critical of globalization, neoliberalism and Turkey's EU accession process, like those in the CKD, did not find much room for themselves in the tripartite cooperation.

#### **6.4 Mobilizing the Kemalist civil society: The CHP and the Republic Meetings**

Regardless of their proximity to the global gender equality regime or the issue-based platforms, Kemalist feminists collectively followed another strategy: They invested their efforts into mobilizing the Kemalist civil society so as to revive the political conjuncture in which they could (re-)define women's interests in laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist terms. While Kemalist feminists who participated in the tripartite cooperation softened their tone on the principles of Kemalism when defining women's interests, in the Kemalist civil society there was an increased emphasis on the Kemalist definition of women's interests as the precondition for women's rights. In other words, whereas Kemalist feminists who took part in the issue-based platforms and/or adopted the global gender equality framework in their activism followed a gender-only agenda where women's interests were defined by the universal notion of women's rights, those who were active in the Kemalist civil society defined the struggle for a modern, laic Turkey as the precondition for women's rights. Kemalist feminists did not equally approve of the state of affairs in the Kemalist civil society.

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<sup>181</sup> Interview with CKD member Handan, 26 April 2011.

Especially in the CHP, the issue of women's rights was rather overshadowed by the party's overall political outlook. Yet, most Kemalist feminists, in one way or another, anyway joined the effort to revive the Kemalist spirit in Turkish politics.

In the 2000s, the Kemalist civil society retreated into what can be called a politics of anti-Islamism. This was especially so in the case of the CHP. AKP's rise to power as a single-party government pushed the CHP away from the social democratic framing of Kemalist politics that the party had adopted in the 1990s (see Section 5.6). Left-politics was put aside so as to prove that the CHP was a viable alternative for the conservative/Islamist electoral base that was the majority of Turkish voters. In this period, laicism became what differentiated the CHP from other political parties since, as Ayata indicates, the party otherwise adopted the concepts employed by the center-right parties since decades, such as development, progress, growth, profitability and productivity (2002, 113). In Ciddi's view, CHP's political line in the 2000s was characterized by ultra-laicism and ultra-nationalism where one was "either secular or religious fundamentalist; a republican or a separatist; a Kemalist or a 'second Republican;' a patriot or a traitor" (2008, 445).<sup>182</sup>

CHP's retreat into anti-Islamism had important consequences for the party's formulation of women's interests. The party's women's auxiliary organized its tenth congress two years after the AKP came to power, on 5 December 2004—the 70th anniversary of women's acquisition of political rights in 1934. At the congress, the emancipatory and materialist perspective on gender relations of the late-1990s and early-2000s was no more the frame of women's interests. In his opening speech, president Deniz Baykal referred to women only in relation to AKP's anti-secular leanings, and claimed that all gender equality legislation (in accordance with the EU accession process) and the protection of laicism was thanks to the CHP. He also stated that every problem, from laicism, education, health to social justice and

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<sup>182</sup> For an account of CHP's nationalism and laicism in the 2000s, see Ciddi (2009, 96–100).

peace, was in fact a women's problem, and sidestepped the problems women faced due to gender-based oppression (CHP-KK 2004a, 6). Furthermore, at this congress, women's labor was no longer mentioned as labor itself was not any longer on the party's political agenda (Ibid.).

The reduction of women's problems to anti-AKP politics was in complete contradiction with the Woman Program of 2002 (see Section 5.6). After the 2004 congress the women's auxiliary made a u-turn, leaving aside feminist strategies in the name of canalizing all women's efforts into anti-AKP politics. This turn was foreseeable in a report prepared in September 2004 by the CHP Platform for Science, Governance and Culture (*CHP Bilim Yönetim ve Kültür Platformu*, BYKP).<sup>183</sup> The report "Woman Reality in Turkey" (*Türkiye'de Kadın Gerçeği*) was based on a survey on women's opinions on matters such as politics, society, women's rights, family, education, religion, and culture. Women who participated in this study were classified into wearing *çarşaf* (full-body veil), *türban*, traditional headscarf, and non-covered (*açık*), and their opinions on the above matters were compared on a scale of modernity. The evaluation of the research hinted the political path to be followed by the women's auxiliary in the coming years: The report saw women as defenders of "the modernization ideology of the laic and modern Turkish Republic" (CHP-BYKP 2004, 3). The research found no big differences between conservative, traditional and modern women in terms of their eagerness to attain "the system of thought [that was] required to reach the modern civilization and modern life-style" (Ibid.). Another finding was that there was room "for dialogue, persuasion, consensus and a harmonious milieu among conservative, traditional and modern women" (Ibid.). Hence, the report concluded: "It has come into light that a sharp differentiation among Turkish women, as attempted by some circles [i.e. political Islamists], is unlikely to occur as our women are not in the extremes" (Ibid., 3–4) Findings of the report

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<sup>183</sup> Some Kemalist feminists who preferred not to organize in the party's women's auxiliary took part in the BYKP. Interview with Aydan, 14 July 2011. Thus, there's reason to assume that the BYKP's report was prepared under their supervision.

confirmed the Kemalist persuasion that the headscarf issue was not a "real" problem in Turkish society and that it was artificially introduced by the Islamists as a populist strategy to gain the electoral support of conservative-religious electorate. In other words, the headscarf issue was not about religion, it was the symbol of the Islamist middle class consolidating its power.<sup>184</sup> In line with this persuasion, the report treated the headscarf issue as of not much cultural significance, and claimed that poverty, lack of education and social and familial pressure were more primary reasons of covering than religious belief. At the same time, it reproduced the cultural significance of the headscarf by comparing the different opinions of women in Turkey on a scale of "modernity." The report also underlined that all women, regardless of their level of modernity, agreed that the most important problem of Turkey was "terrorism" (Ibid., 5), that is, the Kurdish conflict. This implied that, in the CHP's view, conservative, traditional and modern women could unite under Turkish nationalism.

In the next few years, CHP's women's auxiliary produced a number of publications in which it argued that the AKP attempted at women's rights by violating laicism and that women should join the anti-Islamist struggle. For instance, in the preface of the 2006 book *Laik, Demokratik, Tam Bağımsız Türkiye... Ancak Kadınlarla* (Laic, Democratic, Fully Independent Turkey... Only with Women), which celebrated the eightieth anniversary of the Civil Law, the president of women's auxiliary Güldal Okuducu wrote: "The government is set out to transform the society, step by step, into a moderate Islamic republic. ... As women of the Republic, we will too perform our duties against the anti-laic AKP government" (CHP-KK 2006a, 2–3). The book mainly focused on "women at the National Independence War [1919–1922] against imperialism; in the struggle for an independent, free, laic, democratic Turkish Republic." It also had sections on the advanced state of women's rights in Turkey compared to other countries under Islamic law. In its tone the book reduced gender equality to

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<sup>184</sup> It is worth noting that this persuasion was very similar to the CHP's 1970s politics against the "exploitation of religious beliefs" by right-wing political parties. See Section 4.2.

a matter of laicism and limited the discussion on women's rights only to those that were openly attacked by the AKP.<sup>185</sup> In so doing, it aimed to mobilize women against the AKP and, by making an analogy with the Independence War, to revive the nationalist spirit that would mobilize women to fight for the Kemalist definition of women's interests. As I show below, this strategy, followed by the Kemalist civil society, was also prominent during the Republic Meetings of 2007–2008.

2007 was a turning point for the Kemalist civil society in general, and for the CHP in particular. At the 2007 general elections, the AKP, coming to power for a second term, increased its votes from 34.28% to 46.58%, whereas the CHP raised its votes only from 19.39% to 20.88%. Right after, the Turkish Parliament elected Abdullah Gül, AKP's president before Tayyip Erdoğan, as the President of the Republic. From 2007 on, CHP's reduction of women's interests to anti-Islamist politics became more acute, as the analogy between now and the time of the Independence War came all the more to the fore. At this time, when many Kemalist feminists adopted the global gender equality agenda and actively participated in the issue-based platforms, the absence of positive political demands on the side of the CHP's women's auxiliary indicated that the influence of Kemalist feminists' woman-only organizing over the gender politics on mixed-sex organizations was quite weak. Prominent woman figures of the party in the parliament were those who were known for their staunch anti-headscarf stance such as Nur Senter and Necla Arat, the latter being a Kemalist feminist professor of women's studies (see Chapter 5).<sup>186</sup> In this period, CHP's women's auxiliary came close to dissolving. The eleventh congress of the branch was planned to but did not gather in

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<sup>185</sup> Another 2006 book by the women's auxiliary, *AKP'nin yüz karası* (AKP's hundred shames), listed the AKP's anti-secular practices ranging from central to local government, and implied that the AKP alone was responsible for all sexism and religious reactionism. Women's problems were contained in the laicism/anti-Islamism paradigm and *türban* was identified as the symbol of counter-revolution. Feelings of fright and being threatened were dominant emotions informing the text which offered no political vision for women other than fighting against the AKP.

<sup>186</sup> Until 2002, the CHP had no more than three women representatives in the parliament per term. This number sometimes fell down to zero. In 2002, thanks to the politicization of women's political participation, but perhaps more because of the fear of falling behind the AKP, the number of women representatives went up to eleven. Numbers are ten and nineteen for 2007 and 2011 elections, respectively.

2007. Güldal Okuducu, president since 1996, upon her criticism to Baykal's leadership for lacking intra-party democracy, was dismissed from her post together with the rest of the board members of the women's auxiliary.<sup>187</sup> Aydan, member of the party since 1975, gave a brief summary of the aftermath of this event:

Until 2010, the women's auxiliary did not have a central administrative board; it dissolved because nobody was appointed. ... The women's auxiliary was not organized in the [party] center for about three and a half years. I think this is a good example of how the CHP had shrank, had become smaller, identified itself with being in the opposition, without any claim or desire or strategy to grow. ... [In this period, feminists in the party like] Bihlun Tamaylıgil, Gaye Erbatur, especially Bihlun because she was in the Central Administrative Board, were insistent that the women's auxiliary re-organized but unfortunately they could not push it through.<sup>188</sup>

During its second term in office, AKP's commitment to Turkey's EU membership weakened. By this time, women's issue-based platforms were also marked by the polarization based on religious and ethnic belongings, and their efficiency in influencing AKP's gender politics had become questionable in the face of the party's exclusionary attitude towards women's rights organizations. This, combined with CHP's unwillingness to synchronize its gender agenda with that of Kemalist feminists, led Kemalist feminists to turn towards mobilizing the greater Kemalist civil society. Starting already in 2005, and drawing on their experience in women's issue-based platforms, Kemalist feminists founded new platforms within the Kemalist civil society with the aim of (re-)defining women's gender interests in line with Kemalism as opposed to AKP's conservative/Islamist framing. In 2005, eleven Kemalist

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<sup>187</sup> See Radikal, "CHP'li muhalif Güldal Okuducu'ya 'tırpan'" (CHP's oppositional Güldal Okuducu killed off).

<sup>188</sup> Interview with Aydan, 14 July 2011. According to many Kemalist feminists in the CHP, the women's auxiliary was doomed to fail in the 2000s because of its organizational structure in the party. At every level, that is at the center, in cities and towns, the women's auxiliary had a dual head; the president of the branch and a member of the central administrative board responsible for the women's auxiliary. The board member was hierarchically higher than the president; she made decisions regarding the women's auxiliary and she was not obliged to take the president's opinion into account. The women's auxiliary, then, did not have the power to produce its own political strategy. Together with the absence of a budget of its own, it had little decision making power. CHP member Beyhan said that at the district, city or the central levels of the party, there was always conflict between the president of the women's auxiliary and the central administrative board member responsible for the auxiliary. Beyhan thought that the women's auxiliary was essential for women's political organizing; yet, in the existing structure, it did not serve its purpose: "Constantly, a group of women dissolves, resigns, re-organizes. We have so many women who just leave... They've just had enough." Interview with Beyhan, 29 June 2011.

women's organizations founded the Anatolian National Awakening and Solidarity Platform (*Anadolu Ulusal Uyanış ve Dayanışma Platformu*, AUUDP). According to Derya, who took part in the AUUDP, the motivation behind founding the platform was not to pursue an autonomous politics of gender. The reason why women were in the leading positions in the AUUDP (and similar platforms) was, in Derya's view, that women were the most vulnerable group before the deterioration of the republican values.<sup>189</sup>

Kemalist feminists' efforts to mobilize the Kemalist civil society crystallized into a series of demonstrations in 2007–2008, coined as the Republic Meetings (*Cumhuriyet Mitingleri*). Half a year before the Republic Meetings kicked off, on 4 November 2006, the CKD organized the "People's March for the Republic" (*Cumhuriyetimiz İçin Halk Yürüyüşü*). According to the CKD member Handan, this march, organized due to "the support and participation of the democratic mass organizations and republican [political] parties in Ankara," was the precursor of the Republic Meetings.<sup>190</sup> Starting in April 2007, the Republic Meetings took place in seventeen cities in Turkey including Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir. The initial aim was to protest against the Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan's possible candidacy for the presidency of the Republic, both because of his Islamist past and because his wife, Emine Erdoğan, was wearing *türban*. The Republic Meetings were the most well-attended demonstrations in the history of the Republic. They became a cause célèbre in the mainstream media in that they, for the first time in the form of a social movement, embodied a mass opposition to "the Islamization of the laic Republic".<sup>191</sup> The Republic Meetings were also described by the mainstream media as a "women's revolution."<sup>192</sup> This was not only because Kemalist women's organizations took the leading role in organizing the demonstrations but

<sup>189</sup> Interview with Derya, member of the TÜKD, 20 July 2011

<sup>190</sup> Handan's resume, interview on 26 April 2011.

<sup>191</sup> Some popular slogans of the Republic Meetings were: "Laic, independent, indivisible Turkey" (*Laik, bağımsız, bölünmez Türkiye*), "Neither USA nor EU; fully independent Turkey" (*Ne ABD ne AB tam bağımsız Türkiye*), "We are the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal" (*Mustafa Kemal'in askerleriyiz*).

<sup>192</sup> For example, see *Hürriyet*, "Cumhuriyet 'Çağlayan'ı" (Republic's Çağlayan).

also because the participation of women was much higher than that of men. Indeed, prominent Kemalist feminists took the leading role in the organization of the demonstrations. For example, the AUUDP, which by this time had grown into a platform that included a hundred and three Kemalist mixed-sex and woman-only organizations with an aim "to guard the achievements of the Republic, national unity, and territorial integrity," was presided by Sema Kendirci, the president of TKB.<sup>193</sup>

Kemalist feminists who spoke at the Republic Meetings claimed a similarity between now and the early-republican period in terms of the counter-revolutionary threat (backed by the imperial powers) and therefore the need for nation-wide mobilization (*milli seferberlik*). Because counter-revolution posed a direct threat to women's rights, it was primarily women's task to stand up for the republican values. This way, Kemalist feminists reclaimed their position as the owners of the Republic. CKD's president Şenal Sarıhan, in a speech she gave in Samsun, addressed the crowd as follows:

Turkish women, who pioneered demonstrations, who fought with their arms in our Independence War, come into the arena once again from their kitchens, schools, offices, factories... The Turkish woman, who knows how to wipe the child she gave birth to, will succeed in cleaning the dirt smeared upon the nation of which she is the true possessor and the guardian. For this, each of us are Corporal Halide, Major Ayşe, Sister Şerife. We are Makbule of Gördes, Pilot Rahmiye, Black Fatma.<sup>194</sup>

With these words, Sarıhan linked Kemalist feminists' current claim over the guardianship of the Republic to women's involvement in the nation-building process in the late-Ottoman and early-republican periods, whereby they achieved certain rights and became the representatives of Turkish womanhood. By drawing on this period, Sarıhan conditioned women's rights by the preservation of the laic, modern, Turkish Republic. In these sense, Sarıhan's words were emblematic of how Kemalist feminists defined women's interests based on their

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<sup>193</sup> See Taraf, "Anadolu'yu 'uyandıracaklar'" (They will 'awaken' Anatolia).

<sup>194</sup> Quoted from the speech in the Republic Meeting in Samsun; 20 May 2007. All the names Sarıhan refers to are heroines of the nationalist independence struggle preceding the foundation of the Republic.

national/ethnic and cultural/religious belonging.<sup>195</sup> The analogy between now and the Independence War was especially emphasized by Kemalist feminists who organized or attended the Republic Meetings. For example, TKDF member Sema likened the spirit of the Republic Meetings to the Independence War when "women's activism was unrequited [for the sake of the nation]".<sup>196</sup> CKD member Şafak argued that during the last years of the Ottoman Empire women had mobilized for their own rights and in this aim struggled against imperialism. Likewise, the Republic Meetings were not only about women's rights: "The truth is this: Without a nation, women cannot have rights."<sup>197</sup> Drawing on this analogy, Kemalist feminists aimed to unite women for the Kemalist cause which, for them, was the precondition of their rights and the guardian of their interests.

Most of Kemalist feminists, regardless of their adoption of the global gender equality agenda and/or their involvement in the issue-based platforms, engaged with the Republic Meetings. Yet, there were also those who were critical of the demonstrations. For example, CHP member Beyhan did not want to attend the demonstrations because of their nationalist, exclusionary tone.<sup>198</sup> Aydan, another CHP member, expressed that the vigilant approach (*teyakkuz yaklaşımı*) of the attendees and the dominance of Turkish flags at the demonstrations came to represent the mainstream Kemalist movement to which she didn't feel any belonging.<sup>199</sup> Moreover, during the time of organizing the demonstrations, there were

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<sup>195</sup> In her speech, Sarıhan furthermore backed her argument by emphasizing motherhood which was, in the early-republican era, women's citizenship duty towards the state as well as a prestigious status that legitimated their inclusion in the public sphere (see Chapter 3). Her emphasis on motherhood exemplified the gendered public roles of women where politicized motherhood is a core element with its underlying naturalization, and thus the denial, of gendered power relations in the domestic sphere. Yet, politicized motherhood cannot be generalized as emblematic of Kemalist feminists' gender politics.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Sema, 27 April 2011.

<sup>197</sup> Interview with Şafak, 12 July 2011.

<sup>198</sup> Interview with Beyhan, 29 June 2011.

<sup>199</sup> Interview with Aydan, 14 July 2011. Prior to the demonstrations, the Turkish Armed Forces (*Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri*, TSK) released a statement by the Chief of General Staff General Yaşar Büyükanıt on 27 April 2007. In this statement, popularly known as the e-memorandum (*e-muhtıra*), Büyükanıt underlined that the TSK was a party in discussions on laicism and its absolute defender, and called for the AKP government to display loyalty to the republican regime by adhering to the laicism principle (Atasoy 2009, 4). Following this, some speeches and placards at the Republic Meetings called the Turkish army to duty. This led to the demonstrations being labeled as "militarist" by anti-Kemalists. After the Republic Meetings, in July 2008, the court case *Ergenekon*

disagreements between woman-only and mixed-sex Kemalist organizations. The increased visibility of Kemalist feminists with their gender agenda resulted in tension between them and mixed-sex organizations which did not necessarily welcome feminism. For example, in ÇYDD member Özden's account, the organization committee of the Republic Meeting in Izmir comprised around forty women's organizations and some mixed-sex organizations like the Workers' Party (IP) and the Atatürkist Thought Association (*Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği*, ADD). The ÇYDD was in the administrative board but the ADD didn't like the ÇYDD to be in the leadership position and refused to accept their suggestion for the spokesperson, Türkan Saylan, because of her anti-militarist leanings.<sup>200</sup> Özden contended that, because Saylan made anti-militarist remarks during her speech at the Republic Meeting in Istanbul, members of the ADD and the Worker's Party thought that "the ÇYDD was not political enough." For Özden, on the contrary, these mixed-sex organizations paid too much attention to the "discourse" and did not do as much grassroots work as women's organizations did.<sup>201</sup>

The Republic Meetings were part of Kemalist feminists' efforts to mobilize women both for gender equality and in defense of Kemalism. However, after the 2007 electoral defeat of the CHP and the consolidation of AKP's power in the following period, the demonstrations lost their initial enthusiasm. On 12 April 2008, the demonstration "National Sovereignty Meeting" (*Ulusal Egemenlik Mitingi*) took place in Ankara but it was much less well-attended than the previous demonstrations. According to the TÜKD member Ayşe, this was because political parties claimed the representation of the demonstrations, which scared people from attending.<sup>202</sup> Additionally, some Kemalist feminists thought that their cooperation with some pro-army and ultra-nationalist Kemalist groups during the Republic Meetings led to their

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was launched by the AKP government in order to clean out high-rank Kemalist army members from the Turkish military (cf. Kandiyoti 2012).

<sup>200</sup> Interview with Özden, 27 June 2011.

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Özden, 27 June 2011.

<sup>202</sup> Interview with Ayşe, 20 April 2011. Ayşe also confirmed my interpretation that the attitude of the political parties and other mixed-sex organizations towards Kemalist feminists revealed the unequal gender relations within the Kemalist civil society.

marginalization within women's activism. For instance, CKD member Handan stated that their collaboration with women's organizations weakened in the aftermath of the Republic Meetings.<sup>203</sup>

## 6.5. Conclusion

The first generation of feminist scholars in Turkey who were critical of Kemalism considered Kemalist women's relationship with the state as one of indebtedness and compliance (see Chapter 1). In an article published in 1990, Şirin Tekeli reproached Kemalist women for praising the Kemalist reforms and for organizing in order to protect, rather than expand, the rights acquired by women. She argued that, starting from the single-party period and continuing through the multi-party era, Kemalist woman activists did not challenge the state but expected it to take care of women's issues (Tekeli 1990, 153). Indeed, until the 2000s, many feminists saw Kemalist women's organizations like natural extensions of the (Kemalist) state rather than autonomous entities on their own right. It is true that since the 1930s Kemalist women who held ideas pertaining to women's liberation had organic ties with the Turkish state and their activism was rooted in state power. At the same time, as I showed in Chapter 4, Kemalist women neither always had a smooth relationship with the state, nor their indebtedness to the state or their praising of Atatürk prevented them from challenging male domination and women's oppression. In the 1970s, Kemalist women had already directed their activism at influencing state policies regarding gender equality. This chapter furthermore showed that the post-1980 political conjuncture that threatened the Kemalist hegemony within the state, especially in the 2000s, destabilized the hitherto harmonious relationship between Kemalist women and the Turkish state.

The post-1980 leaders of Kemalist women's activism were feminists who were eager to adopt the global gender equality agenda and to lobby on an institutional level for furthering

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<sup>203</sup> Interview with Handan, 26 April 2011.

women's rights. The "discovery" and celebration of the democratic potential of civil society in countering state authoritarianism (Bedirhanoglu and Yalman 2009) gave legitimacy to feminists' politicization of women's issues and raising demands before the state thereof. In the 1990s and 2000s, Kemalist feminists were, rather than paying lip service to the state, interested in following and participating in political processes and challenging the state on its keenness in ensuring gender equality. They were especially critical of the Islamist politics of gender which became increasingly influential over gender policies of the state. Thus, drawing on the global gender equality regime, Kemalist feminists pressed for a Kemalist definition of women's interests which they claimed to be in line with the "universal" notion of women's rights.

In the 1990s, together with egalitarian feminists, Kemalist feminists made a big impact on the institutional making of the politics of gender thanks to both, their experienced position in women's activism and their successful enforcement of the global gender equality agenda upon the Turkish state. They used their influence over state policies to maintain the field of gender politics as modern and laicist by mobilizing the Kemalist civil society against the growing popularity of Islamism, and the headscarf as its symbol, by labeling them as counter-revolutionary. In the 2000s, the struggle between Kemalists and Islamists within the state resulted in favor of the latter who imposed upon society a new middle-class culture where women and men had, based on an Islamic worldview and the notion of complementarity, different gender roles than what the Kemalist project had sought. As the AKP consolidated its hegemony over the state and society, Kemalist feminists acknowledged the patriarchal nature of the state and feminism became more visible in their political discourse. This was due to AKP's anti-feminist attitude towards gender equality as well as to the elimination of the Kemalist cadres within the state, which deprived Kemalist feminists of possible allies who

would take their policy suggestions into consideration. Losing their organic ties with the state made it much easier for Kemalist feminists to openly speak about its patriarchal nature.

In the 2000s, Turkey's candidacy for EU membership brought about a suitable framework for—otherwise no more welcome—Kemalist feminists within which they could make claims over the gender policies of the state. In this period, in order to remain influential actors in gender politics, Kemalist feminists joined egalitarian feminists to form issue-based platforms that also included Islamist and Kurdish women's organizations. The shift in the emphasis in Kemalist feminists' discourse from "Atatürk's principles and revolutions" to "women's human rights" made it easier for them to coalesce with women of other national/ethnic and cultural/religious belongings. In other words, thanks to the normative framework of the global gender equality regime, the political tensions between Kemalist, Islamist, and Kurdish women could be eased even though not transcended (Ertürk 2006). According to the TKB member Ümit, participation in the issue-based platforms and the use of the mechanisms of transnational governance were the prerequisites of engaging in the politics of gender:

We are the organizations that made CEDAW visible; we explained why it was necessary and how [women would] gain from it. If the state kept its reservations about CEDAW, it was over; we wouldn't be able to change the Civil Law. And we unbelievably lobbied for those reservations to be lifted, at home and abroad. ... We have written all these [reports] and sent them [to the CEDAW Committee]; only then they [the Turkish state] lifted those reservations. So, what now, shall we not use these mechanisms because they are [imposed by] the UN? What does loving Atatürk or understanding Atatürk have to do with all these?<sup>204</sup>

Indeed, many Kemalist feminists acknowledged that without the framework of the global gender equality regime, women's activism would have little influence over the gender policies of the state. Yet, the efforts to create a unified women's front for gender-egalitarian legislation were also disrupted by the tensions between women of differential political belongings, and,

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<sup>204</sup> Interview with Ümit, 18 May 2011.

as in the case of the TKDF and the CKD, Kemalist feminists were not unanimously willing to participate in the issue-based platforms and/or to adopt the global gender equality agenda.

Like in the previous decade, Kemalist feminists in the 2000s invested their efforts to mobilize the Kemalist civil society, especially Kemalist women, in defense of a Kemalist definition of women's interests. CHP's retreat into anti-Islamist politics and its failure, unlike in the 1990s, to incorporate the Kemalist feminist agenda into its political program led Kemalist feminists to build platforms within the Kemalist civil society which operated in similar ways to women's issue-based platforms. In these platforms and during the Republic Meetings, Kemalist feminists framed women's interests as preconditioned by a struggle for laic, nationalist, and modern Turkey. Through the references they made to women's involvement in the nation-building process in the late-Ottoman and early-republican periods, they aimed to reclaim their position within gender politics as representatives of Turkish women.

In the post-1980 period, Kemalist feminists' quest for furthering gender equality in Turkey was coupled with their struggle against the rise of Islamism in general and Islamist interpretations of women's gender interests in particular. The Kurdish conflict was largely absent in the Kemalist feminist agenda. Kemalist feminists refrained from openly addressing the Kurdish conflict both in the 1990s, when the war between the PKK and the Turkish army marked the Turkish political agenda, and in the 2000s, when the Kurdish movement appeared in the field of institutional politics with ethnic-based claims to citizenship rights.<sup>205</sup> The main reason for the rejection of the politicization of the Kurdish ethnic identity was that, in the eyes of the Kemalists, the recognition of cultural and political rights would be only the beginning of the Kurdish nationalist demands and eventually would lead to Kurdish autonomy and separatism (Taspinar 2005, 207). In the 2000s, Kemalist feminists collaborated with Kurdish

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<sup>205</sup>Exceptions to this were, as discussed in Chapter 5, the CHP's women's auxiliary's and the CKD's focus on the issue in the late-1990s as a problem of regional underdevelopment and one of religious fundamentalism, respectively.

feminists to the extent that both parties adopted the language of rights and operated within the framework of the global gender equality agenda. This was possible mostly because, unlike Islamist women, Kurdish feminists didn't pose a challenge to the laicist and modern tenets of the Kemalist definition of women's rights. Yet, Kemalist feminists' emphasis on Turkishness and national unity in their gender activism within the Kemalist civil society was indicative of their disapproval of the mobilization of Kurdish women over ethnic identity-based demands.

Social and economic inequalities, on the other hand, found little room in the Kemalist feminist agenda; except for the CHP and the CKD in the brief period of late 1990s-early 2000s (see Chapter 5), Kemalist feminists referred to these inequalities only as side effects of Islamism, without framing them in terms of class conflict. Kemalist women's formulation of women's interests in the 1970s, in line with the "left-of-centre" approach of the CHP, drew on social and economic inequalities faced by women in Turkey (see Chapter 4). This formulation was remarkably altered in the post-1980 period when the development of neoliberal hegemony drew its strength from "the articulation of ethnic, religious and/or nationalist identities" (Bedirhanoglu and Yalman 2009, 119). As the weakening of class-based politics in Turkey rendered class inequalities between women a not very present theme in the feminist movement (Sancar 2011), Kemalist feminists, being a party to the national/ethnic and cultural/religious antagonisms, fell even farther away from articulating social and economic issues in their politics. Their critical stance towards globalization targeted the rising influence of identity politics but not the deepening of class inequalities in Turkey. Kemalist feminists' adoption of the global gender equality framework did not challenge but sustained the absence of class issues in their agenda since this framework itself did not make reference to class issues except for when talking about upward social mobility and social inclusion. The dominant discourse on gender equality in the EU was based on the "objectives of economic growth and competitiveness" (Agustín 2013, 166), and not on the elimination of class

differences between women. However, the absence of a systematic problematization of social and economic inequalities in the Kemalist feminist agenda does not mean that class issues were irrelevant for Kemalist feminist politics. As the next chapter shows, relations of class, as well as those of nation/ethnicity, were significant determinants of Kemalist feminist politics notwithstanding their minor status on the level of discourse.

This chapter focused on scrutinizing the dual strategy that Kemalist feminists followed in their involvement in gender politics; that is, adhering to the global gender equality regime while at the same time mobilizing the Kemalist civil society. Such an analysis requires a simultaneous looking at Kemalist feminists' membership in woman-only and mixed-sex organizations without prioritizing one over the other in terms of its explanatory power over understanding Kemalist feminism. Although there are Kemalist feminists who chose to organize exclusively in woman-only or mixed-sex organizations, most of them were simultaneously active, albeit in different degrees, in the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society, and transnational governance, and in the Kemalist civil society. The analysis presented in this chapter points at the inseparability of the struggle for women's rights from the particular definition of women's interests in terms of which these rights are framed. It furthermore shows that women's activism is organically linked not only to the politics of gender but also to the politics of class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion, since they equally mediate a particular definition of women's interests.

In a similar vein, the relationship between woman activists and the state are shaped by the relations of gender, as well as the relations of class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion, and therefore should be understood beyond the simplistic autonomy vs. assimilation approach. Up until the 2000s, Kemalist women's activism was entangled with and, notwithstanding the tensions, supported by state power. In the 2000s, the processes of Europeanization and Islamization challenged the existing class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious dynamics of

gender politics and disrupted the decades-long alliance between Kemalist women and the Turkish state. Yet, Kemalist feminists persistently defined women's interests in laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist terms, and, by following new strategies, sought to influence the gender policies of the state. Similarly, they pursued a specific politics of gender with class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious underpinnings that cannot be reduced to their proximity to the state. The next chapter looks into this point in greater detail.

## **7. Kemalist feminists' grassroots activism: NGOization and the reproduction of class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious relations (1990s–2000s)**

The previous chapter analyzed how the relationship between Kemalist feminist activism and gender politics in Turkey was mediated by Kemalist feminists' involvement in the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society, and transnational governance as well as in the greater Kemalist civil society. Drawing on the global gender equality agenda, and through institutional lobbying and participating in issue-based platforms, Kemalist feminists pressed the Turkish state for gender equality legislation while they at the same time maintained, in their involvement in the Kemalist civil society, the definition of women's rights and women's interests in Kemalist terms. This chapter looks into Kemalist feminists' grassroots activism with the aim of understanding how, through the process of NGOization, their involvement in the tripartite cooperation played out on the grassroots level. More specifically, the focus of the chapter is to explore how NGOization enabled Kemalist feminists to articulate the notions of women's rights and women's empowerment in laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist terms, and thereby to pursue a politics of gender with a particular type of class-based, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious underpinnings.

Despite the clear divide between the state and civil society that the word "non-governmental" suggests (Bernal and Grewal 2014), NGOs oftentimes collaborate with and are organically linked to states and transnational organizations. From the 1980s on, NGOs all over the world have been increasingly "called upon to replace state activities in the social sector and function as repair networks for economic and political disintegration processes" (Lang 2000, 299). The role of NGOs in improving the democratic quality of civil society was stressed by institutions of transnational governance such as the United Nations and the European Union. For instance, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which drew a global framework for women's empowerment underlined the role of women's NGOs in

achieving gender equality and the importance of the collaboration between governments, transnational institutions, and civil society actors in this aim.<sup>206</sup> This development, which came to be globally known as "NGOization,"<sup>207</sup> became a most important dimension of the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society and transnational governance for it helped women's organizations to integrate to the global gender equality regime and enabled them to participate in the politics of gender thereof (see Section 2.4).

Women's engagement with the global gender equality regime and the process of NGOization gained momentum in Turkey in the 1990s. This was a time when civil society—as opposed to the state—was celebrated for being the locus of democratic demands (see Section 1.1) and when feminists were questioning the role of the Turkish state in preserving and reproducing the patriarchal relations of gender (see Chapter 5). In the Turkish case, instead of substituting for previously existing state services, women's NGOs initiated new welfare functions—especially in the areas of education and health. But this didn't make them less "non-governmental" because the nature of the services they provided already entangled them with state structures. At the same time, the state budget spared for women's NGO activism was so little that women's NGOs relied heavily on external funding by transnational organizations (Kardam and Ertürk 1999). The process of NGOization, or "project feminism" (*proje feminizmi*) as coined by feminists in Turkey, was criticized for exchanging political aims for technical project-goals and dispersing the feminist movement into isolated organizations (Bora and Günel 2002, 9). Yet, thanks to project feminism, middle-class, educated, and urban women got in touch with "other" women and thereby popularized feminism in Turkey (Ibid.)

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<sup>206</sup> See UN Women, "The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women."

<sup>207</sup> In Sabine Lang's (2013, 62) formulation, the NGOization of civil society "marks a shift from rather loosely organized, horizontally dispersed, and broadly mobilizing social movements to more professionalized, vertically structured NGOs." When discussing the process of NGOization, I follow Lang's call to "bring the public sphere back into civil society debate and thus establish conditions that make NGOs not just civil but also public actors" (Ibid., 35).

In this chapter, organized in six sections, I discuss the implications of the process of NGOization for Kemalist women's activism and for their involvement in the politics of gender in Turkey throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In the 1990s, Kemalist feminists, just like they were prominent figures of institutional lobbying for gender equality (Chapter 6), were the pioneers at the grassroots level in terms of adopting the principles of NGOization and the global gender equality agenda in their activism. Yet, the 1990s were also the years when the notion of women's rights which hitherto remained, in the mainstream of gender politics, undifferentiated by religion, ethnicity, and class (and also sexuality, disability, age, etc.), became a contested notion with the growing influence of political Islam and Kurdish nationalism, as well as of feminist activism. Kemalist feminists in this period drew on state structures and the mechanisms of transnational governance in their grassroots activism in order to struggle *for* gender equality and *against* Islamism and Kurdish nationalism. This period is discussed in the first and second sections with a focus on laicism and nationalism, respectively.

In the 2000s, the start of Turkey's EU accession process and the rise to power of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) gave new directions to Kemalist feminists' grassroots activism. Kemalist feminists' reliance on the mechanisms of transnational governance increased, while their leading position within women's activism was challenged by the consolidation of Islamist hegemony and the—now legitimate—presence of the Kurdish movement in Turkish politics. In this period, Kemalist feminists employed the notions of women's rights and women's empowerment<sup>208</sup> both to further gender equality in Turkey and to enable the inclusion of lower-class, religious, and Kurdish women into public life in laicist,

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<sup>208</sup> Conceptualized as "a process of providing women with the tools and resources needed to live independent, productive and dignified lives," empowerment suggests transition from powerlessness to be endowed with power in order to "participate within the economic and political structures of society" (Ette 2007, 146–147). Defined as such, the concept also entails, "powerful individuals exercising power over the disempowered by investing in them the ability to exercise power, assigning them a place of power and bestowing and facilitating a change from powerlessness to that of power" (Ibid., 147). This chapter draws on the problematization of the relationship between the empowering and the empowered.

nationalist, and modernist/westernist terms. Kemalist feminists' engagement with project feminism and the implications of their engagement with regards to the relations of class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion are investigated in the third section. Section four discusses Kemalist feminists' differential attitudes towards foreign funds. I look at the relationship between Kemalist feminists and Kurdish women's/feminist movement in the fifth section. In the final section I conclude with an overall assessment of the NGOization process and its repercussions on and implications for Kemalist feminist activism.

The main argument of the chapter is that NGOization, with its emphasis on "supporting the state as responsible citizens" (Ipek 2006) in Turkey, and the limitation of the gender equality perspective promoted by transnational institutions such as the UN and the EU to women's socio-economic integration into the neoliberal market structures, helped Kemalist feminists to pursue a politics of gender which drew on laicist, Turkish-nationalist, and modernist/westernist norms. By drawing on these norms, Kemalist feminists maintained and reproduced their middle-class positioning within women's activism. Kemalist feminists formulated the notions of women's rights and women's empowerment in a way in which laicism and Turkishness were the preconditions of lower-class, religious, and Kurdish women's inclusion in a neoliberal public sphere. Thus, in their aim to influence gender politics, Kemalist feminists collaborated with and/or challenged other public actors such as the state, transnational institutions, and Islamist and Kurdish woman activists.<sup>209</sup> At the same time, their grassroots activism reproduced middle-class values such as "representing" and "guiding" the people while helping individual women to become self-reliable, self-confident, and disciplined, traits that are compatible with neoliberal thinking (Ipek 2006, 20).

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<sup>209</sup> The central state level alliance between Kemalist and egalitarian feminists which I examined in Chapter 6 does not have a counterpart at the grassroots level. I therefore omit the relations between Kemalist and egalitarian feminists in this chapter.

## 7.1. Laicism on the grassroots level: Mobilizing for women's education in the 1990s

Kemalist women's grassroots activism dates back to the early years of the Republic when Kemalist women adopted the role of modernizing Turkish womanhood as a crucial dimension of their participation in the nation-building process (see Chapter 3). Since then, the main issue on Kemalist women's agenda had been women's education, which comprised literacy, women's rights as defined by the Kemalist gender reforms, and income-generative skills. Kemalist women's organizations gained new impetus in 1975 by participating in the events organized around the UN International Women's Year (IWY). In the following years, the emphasis on the role of "voluntary women's organizations" in Turkey's modernization and development increased. IWY also marked the beginning of Kemalist women's involvement in the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society and transnational governance (see Chapter 4). After 1975, Kemalist women increasingly called for the state to collaborate with women's organizations in shaping the politics of gender in Turkey. In this, they relied on the emerging global gender equality agenda provided first by the UN and then by other institutions of transnational governance (such as the World Bank and the European Union), in terms of framing their demands as well as receiving financial support (see Chapter 6). From the 1950s until the 2000s, Kemalist women's organizations also benefited from their official status as "organizations working for public benefit," which held them exempt from paying taxes and granted them financial support from the state's yearly budget.<sup>210</sup> Yet, this status gave Kemalist women's organizations more prestige than money, and women usually used their own financial resources in order to sustain their organizations.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> For information on the legal regulation on organizations working for public benefit, see *Dernekler Yönetmeliği* (Associations Regulations) and *Kamu Yararına Çalışan Dernek Statüsü* (Status of the Association Working for Public Benefit).

<sup>211</sup> For example, the Association for the Protection of Women's Rights (KHKD) in Izmir opened a counseling center for women in 1985. This was thanks to one of its members, Nermin, who, together with her son, bought an apartment and donated it to the KHKD. Interview with Nermin, 1 July 2011.

Turkey's adoption of the global gender equality regime by signing CEDAW in 1985 changed the relationship between women's organizations and the state by providing it with a legal framework for partnership. As described in Chapter 6, with the foundation of the General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women (KSGM) in 1990, Kemalist women's organizations also started to develop projects for which they received funding from transnational donors. This funding was delegated through the KSGM where Kemalist feminist activists worked in close collaboration with bureaucrats.<sup>212</sup> In the 1990s, Kemalist women's activism took new directions as the process of NGOization developed in Turkey. New leaders who identified simultaneously as Kemalist and feminist founded new organizations and/or took over existing ones (see Chapter 5). These new leaders referred to their organizations as "civil society organizations" instead of using the traditional term "women's associations." Under Kemalist feminist leadership, Kemalist women's organizations transitioned from "service, charity, volunteer based, elite organizations to service and advocacy orientation, global networking, external fund-raising and increased professionalism" (Kardam and Ertürk 1999, 175). In the meantime, thousands of women joined old and new Kemalist women's organizations as providers or recipients of trainings on literacy, health, violence against women and income-generating skills within a "development from below" paradigm (Diner and Toktaş 2010).

An early example of Kemalist feminists' involvement in state structures on the grassroots level is the Community Center (*Halk Merkezi*) project initiated in 1994 by the Turkish Women's Union (TKB). The way TKB member Ümit commemorated the foundation of the project reflects the enthusiasm of this period of rapid mobilization of Kemalist women:

Back then, the State Minister [Responsible for Woman, Family and Social Services] was a man: Hasan Gemici. We signed a protocol with him. We said, 'Wherever the TKB has a branch, there will be a Community Center supported jointly by Social Services and Child Protection Agency, civil society and the local state. ... [We]

<sup>212</sup> Kardam and Ertürk (1999, 185) list the main donor agencies in the 1990s as: UNDP, FAO, World Bank, UNICEF, UNFPA and ILO.

presented the protocol to the state. ... [We] said, 'Include us in the budget.' That's how [the TKB entered the state budget]. No other organization had achieved this. Some of them received money from the state budget but not like this. ... We received it on the basis of our concrete project, we started it.<sup>213</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, the focus of the projects run by Kemalist feminists changed alongside the developments in the framing of the global gender equality regime.<sup>214</sup> This change of focus was from projects on women's and children's health, family planning and rural development to those on education and income-generative skills training with the aim of overcoming women's economic marginalization (Kümbetoğlu 2002, 162). Yet, this change in the projects' focus was also framed by the Kemalist definition of women's rights where laicism and modernism were the preconditions for women's economic integration. Research conducted in 1995 by Esim and Cindoğlu shows that most women's organizations in Turkey pursued grassroots politics in squatter settlements and working-class neighborhoods in urban areas especially where radical Islamist politics was gaining popularity, as well as (but to a lesser extent) in villages or small towns in rural areas (Esim and Cindoğlu 1999, 182).<sup>215</sup>

Since the early 1990s, both the Islamist Welfare Party (RP) and various politicized religious orders in Turkey mobilized women in massive numbers into the Islamist movement. There was an upward mobilization of the electoral base of Islamism and a growing demand of religious women for participation in public life. Together with Islamist women's mobilization for public inclusion of the headscarf (see Chapter 6) as well as the promotion of this cause by the Islamist civil society, a powerful Islamist women's grassroots activism emerged (Saktanber and Çorbacioğlu 2008, 525). In the 1990s, the RP recruited these activists in its "Ladies' Commissions" (*Hanım Komisyonları*), where they contributed greatly to the party's

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<sup>213</sup> Interview with Ümit, 18 May 2011.

<sup>214</sup> For the shift from "Women in Development" to "Gender and Development" perspective, see Razavi and Miller (1995).

<sup>215</sup> This is not to say that the focus on rural development was completely abandoned. For example, a school project initiated in 1985 by the KHKD in a village near Izmir in order to "strengthen the ties between us [urban women] and rural women" was still in effect by 2011. Every year, members of the KHKD organized a charity trip to this village where urban women from Izmir bought local food and handmade souvenirs from the village women. "That school is like our pilot region," said KHKD member Nermin. Interview on 1 July 2011.

electoral success by mobilizing covered women from different socio-economic backgrounds in unprecedented numbers (Ibid., 526; Y. Arat 2005; Z. Yılmaz 2011). Following the re-introduction of the ban on the headscarf in higher education in 1997, many students and women who could not pursue their education or profession any longer also joined the ranks of Islamist women's grassroots activism (R. Çakır 2000). As Zehra Yılmaz argues, Islamists encouraged women to take part in the field of civil society activism because here women could be involved in Islamist politics without challenging their traditional roles as mothers and wives (2011, 816).

Kemalist feminists viewed the increasing visibility of Islamist women's activism and their demand for participation in public life with suspicion. The TKB member Ümit remarked: "Sociologically speaking, we encountered something that lied outside of what we knew. What do we know since years? My mother is a teacher; she is not covered. The headscarf is not a part of our lives. ... We were never accustomed to something like this."<sup>216</sup> Covered women's demand to participate in public life including professional life challenged the Kemalist notion of public sphere, where women's public inclusion was mediated by modernity and laicism. Previously, under the hegemony of Kemalism, lower-class, traditional women had to adopt a modern/Western outlook and a secular life-style to become a part of the middle-class, urban, educated, professional (women's) public life. As Saktanber (2002) argues, the "well-educated, urban, modern secularists" interpreted the politicization of the headscarf in two distinct ways. First, they saw it as an "unintended consequence of inadequate modernization." Second, it was part of the "dark plans of 'external forces' which, ever since the establishment of the Republic, because of the geopolitical significance of the country, have constantly tried to weaken Turkish society and divide it along the lines of ethnic and religious identity" (Saktanber 2002, xviii). This second interpretation also drew on the

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<sup>216</sup> Interview with Ümit, 18 May 2011.

absence of a massive Islamist mobilization before the 1980 period, and the increased emphasis on Islam in the post-1980 definition of Atatürkism as official ideology (see Section 5.1). For example, Özden, member of the Association for the Support of Modern Life (ÇYDD), upheld this view. In the 1970s, Özden lived in Van, a city in eastern Turkey populated by Kurds. She said: "I've seen the rural [region of Turkey]. It [veiling] wasn't there. Therefore it came to us from abroad, through Arab Islam and the Greater Middle East Initiative of the U.S."<sup>217</sup> In Özden's understanding, veiling is associated with a less modern (Arab) practice of Islam, which wasn't present even in a less modern (Kurdish) part of Turkey prior to the 1980 military coup. The 1980 coup, especially by left-Kemalists like Özden, was perceived to have been backed by the U.S. Therefore, Özden concluded that Islamism was imposed on Turkey by U.S. (imperialism) as part of its Greater Middle East Initiative.

Kemalist feminists followed two strategies in order to counter the rising popularity of political Islam among women. Their grassroots focus on education and income-generative skills training overlapped with these strategies. The first strategy targeted the education of female students in (laic) state schools, while the second addressed lower-class women's empowerment. In the 1990s, in addition to the older organizations which—among other things—provided scholarships for female students, a number of new organizations were founded with a specific purpose to support girls' education. By supporting students coming from low-income families Kemalists aimed to invest in their adulthood as laic, modern Turkish women through state education. The ÇYDD was the most popular of these organizations. Founded in 1989, the organization started modestly with giving scholarships to girls studying in rural areas of Turkey. In 1995, under the influence of NGOization and in the face of rising Islamism, the organization launched a project in cooperation with the Ministry of Education to reach out to one and a half million women and offer them courses in Public

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<sup>217</sup> Interview with Özden, 27 June 2011.

Education Centers (*Halk Eğitim Merkezleri*) on women's and child health, child education, citizenship awareness, and women's problems and rights. Starting in 1996, the ÇYDD fundraised to build schools and girls' dormitories in poor neighborhoods in big cities and in underdeveloped regions in Turkey, and once they were built, donated them to the Ministry of Education.<sup>218</sup>

The second strategy was opening courses on income-generative skills for women from the poorer sections of society. Many of these women covered their heads and, in the post-1980 period, increasingly switched from the traditional headscarf either to the modern *türban* or the full-body veil *çarşaf*. In Gülsev's account, training these women was not always an easy task for Kemalist women because of covered women's political belongings. Gülsev, a member of the Kemalist CHP, founded the first municipality-run women's counseling center in a district of Izmir in 1994. At the municipality, they offered income-generative skills training for women who lived in squatter settlements around that district. Among the applicants for the course, there were women wearing *çarşaf*. The organizers of the course accepted these attendees on the condition that they would uncover during the course since it was a woman-only course. The *çarşaf*-wearing attendees initially accepted this condition but later not only refused to take off their veil during the courses but also tried to convince other attendees to wear the *çarşaf*. When they were asked to leave the course, they protested in front of the municipality together with some Islamist men. After this, Gülsev received death threats for about half a year. Like Özden, Gülsev argued that the Islamists' efforts to spread the wearing of *çarşaf* were backed with money that came from abroad, meaning Arab countries.<sup>219</sup>

While Kemalist feminists tried to keep women and girls away from the influence of political Islam, developments in the global gender equality regime changed the dynamics

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<sup>218</sup> See ÇYDD Tarihi (History of the ÇYDD).

<sup>219</sup> Interview with Gülsev, 30 June 2011.

within women's activism. In 1995, at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, Turkey committed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. A year later, in 1996, the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) was held in Istanbul. The UN framework acquainted women in Turkey with global feminism, and Habitat II helped women's organizations to revise their agendas through a feminist perspective (Ecevit 2007, 201). Many Kemalist women who were newly recruited to activism attended Habitat II and went through a number of NGO-focused trainings. These developments accelerated the NGOization process of Kemalist women's activism, and strengthened their involvement in the tripartite cooperation.<sup>220</sup> Yet, it was not only Kemalist but also Islamist and, as I discuss below, Kurdish women's organizations that were inspired by these developments and framed their demands for citizenship rights according to the global gender equality agenda. In the second half of the 1990s, newly founded Islamic women's organizations such as Women's Rights Organization against Discrimination (AKDER) and the Capital City Women's Platform (BKP) defended the rights of covered women and defined the ban on the headscarf in the public sphere as a violation of women's human rights. Islamist women were becoming actors of gender politics through their adoption of the language of rights. Following Habitat II, the Rainbow Women's Platform (*Gökkuşluğu Kadın Platformu*) brought together more than forty conservative-religious women's organizations in Istanbul (Aslan-Akman 2011).

Habitat II-related events were also where Kemalist feminists came together with Islamist women for the first time as "equals." This resulted in tensions between them. By this time, Kemalist feminists were lobbying at the state level for an increase of the minimum age for marriage (from fifteen to eighteen) and for the adoption of eight-year primary education instead of five, which would result in the closure of the secondary sections of *imam-hatip* (prayer-leader and preacher) schools where covered girls between age twelve and fifteen

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<sup>220</sup> Another initiative of this kind was Local Agenda 21, which is a non-binding, voluntarily implemented action plan of the United Nations regarding sustainable development. Some municipalities in Turkey were individually committed to it, which provided Kemalist feminists a framework within which to operate at the grassroots level.

could attend wearing their headscarves. Nalan, who attended Habitat II representing the Turkish Association of Women Lawyers (THKD), argued that Islamist women's organizations were against both policies. Instead they aimed to politicize the discrimination faced by covered women in Turkey: "They told me they were oppressed because of wearing the *türban*. ... I said, 'Look, are you oppressed in Turkey? Please, look, don't write at least this one down [in the final report]. ... Are you informing against us to the *gavurs*? ... Be a little bit nationalist; protect your country[*'s* prestige against foreigners].'"<sup>221</sup> As the quote suggests, Nalan was worried about Turkey's prestige as a modern, laic country. She was afraid that the claims of covered women would give the impression to the non-Muslim (*gavur*) West that Turkey was an anti-democratic country oppressing religious women. Nalan recalled that Islamist women were "very well-organized" and that they received "help" (financial support from Islamists at home and abroad), while Kemalist women were "working by their own means."<sup>222</sup> With these words, she implied that Islamist women did not prioritize women's gender interests but their cultural/religious belonging to Islamism. Indeed, the argument that Islamist women had a hidden agenda (*takiyye*) and were backed by national and global Islamic capital (*Islami sermaye*) was widely held by Kemalist feminists and supported their conviction that Islamist women's priority was not women's interests.

Kemalist feminists' concern was less about the headscarf itself and more about its rising social status, which was a sign of the growing political power of Islamism. The profile of the educated, professional, middle-class covered woman challenged the modern and laicist characteristics of the Kemalist public which were, in Kemalist feminists' view, also the conditions that protected women's interests. Covered women of the lower classes, on the other hand, not only did not pose a threat to this equation but also kept alive Kemalist feminists' quest to further modernize Turkish women by integrating them into public life. Nerma's

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<sup>221</sup> Interview with Nalan, 22 June 2011.

<sup>222</sup> Interview with Nalan, 22 June 2011.

example reflects how the notion of women's rights served this quest. In the 1990s, Nerma was a member of Istanbul Union of Women's Organizations (*Istanbul Kadın Kuruluşları Birliği*, IKKB), a platform of thirty-six Kemalist women's organizations. The IKKB launched a skills-training course in 1997. This was a textile atelier in a two-floor building inside the Istanbul University campus. In Nerma's account, the attendees were "women who upheld the Atatürkist thought [i.e. adhered to Kemalism] but never had a chance to benefit from it." These were women who migrated to Istanbul from rural areas and lived in squatter settlements outside the city center. Through the skills-training course, the IKKB also aimed to modernize them by "teaching them their rights" as well as "about hygiene." When the headscarf was banned in universities in 1997, the IKKB moved the textile atelier to a park in a district of Istanbul instead of closing it down. The attendees opened a women's coffee shop inside the park, and later founded a women's co-operative.<sup>223</sup> During this time, other Kemalist feminists whose organizations were part of the IKKB were organizing what are commonly known as the "persuasion rooms" at Istanbul University. In these rooms, Kemalist feminist activists who were also academics such as Necla Arat and Türkan Saylan interviewed covered students and tried to persuade them to uncover in order to continue their education.

As the contrast between these two examples show, the exclusion and/or toleration of the headscarf was based on the class positions of covered women. The ban on the headscarf in higher education that Kemalist feminists supported aimed to suppress the possibility of an urban, educated, professional, middle-class group of covered women who would contribute to the consolidation of Islamist hegemony. Lower-class women, on the other hand, were not perceived as posing such a threat.<sup>224</sup> For Kemalist feminists the exclusion of middle-class

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<sup>223</sup> Interview with Nerma, 18 August 2011.

<sup>224</sup> This class difference overlaps with Kemalists' separation of political Islam from cultural Islam. As Saktanber argues (2002, xvi), "everything considered to be harmful or threatening to the existing social order has been put into the category of political Islam. On the other hand, that which has been considered harmless and tolerable, and, more importantly, unlikely to change in the Muslim 'quotidian', had been put into the category of cultural Islam."

covered women from the public sphere was part of their struggle against the middle-class culture promoted by Islamists. Contrary to Kemalism, Islamists' vision of gender relations was based on the idea of separate spheres and complementarity, not equality, between the sexes. In Kemalist feminists' view, unlike the middle-class covered women who were, in their activism, already promoting an Islamist view of gender relations, lower-class covered women were candidates for inclusion in the Kemalist public sphere. Indeed, their inclusion was an important strategy that Kemalist feminists employed in order to counter the Islamist politics of gender. For example, Nerma mentioned that the IKKB had an agreement with the Istanbul Textile and Apparel Exporter Associations, and sometimes women who came to the textile atelier could find jobs through the organization. She viewed women's home-based production as an expression of the idea of separate spheres, and said, "[O]ur aim is not home-based production, a woman should go out of her apartment. ... [T]hose municipalities with a conservative outlook also have skills-training courses for women. They all want women to produce at home. Our understanding is that, if a woman doesn't go out, she cannot have rights."<sup>225</sup>

## **7.2. The ethnic dimension of women's education: Projects on Kurdish women in the 1990s**

As we saw in Chapters 5 and 6, the escalating war between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish army in the 1990s was met by silence on the part of Kemalist feminists. Starting with the armed conflict in 1984, Kurdish women developed a "rights-based consciousness" (Gökalp 2010, 562). Although women mobilized mainly within the Kurdish nationalist movement, there were also independent Kurdish feminist groups. In the 1990s, Kurdish feminists developed a perspective within which they addressed both Kurdish men and Turkish feminists, situating themselves at the intersection of their ethnic and gender

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<sup>225</sup> Interview with Nerma, 18 August 2011.

identities (Kutluata 2002). Until the second half of the 1990s, Kemalist feminists didn't have much encounter with the Kurdish women's movement. Previously, Kemalist women's organizations had branches in the Kurdish-populated towns in eastern and southeastern Turkey. Women who were involved in activism there were mostly the wives of high-rank state officers such as governors, judges, or doctors. They were often members of these organizations already before they moved to the Kurdish region. Once the armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army started (1984), Kemalist women found it difficult to continue their activism, and either closed down their organizations or left the region altogether.<sup>226</sup>In the meantime the civil war, combined with poor socio-economic conditions, unemployment, and forced internal migration moved more than three million Kurdish people to urban areas in western Turkey, such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, as well as to bigger Kurdish cities in the southeast such as Diyarbakır and Van. Migrated Kurds settled down in poor neighborhoods in these cities. They, especially women, quickly became a source of cheap labor force for the informal economy, as well as the target of the Islamist movement.<sup>227</sup>

The process of NGOization that intensified in the mid-1990s (see above) had two important consequences for the ways in which Kemalist feminists related to Kurdish women and Kurdish feminists. First, the global gender equality regime helped Kurdish feminists to formulate their demands in terms of women's human rights. In 1997, the Woman's Center Foundation (*Kadın Merkezi Vakfı*, KAMER) was founded in Diyarbakır with the aim of improving Kurdish women's socio-cultural and political conditions. KAMER formulated its demands under the slogan "women's rights are human rights," without necessarily framing them in ethnic and nationalist terms (Gökalp 2010, 567). By the early 2000s, KAMER had twenty-three branches in Kurdish cities and towns. Kurdish women's organizations also started receiving funding from transnational donors. For Kemalist feminists, the funding

<sup>226</sup> Interview with Sema, member of the Federation of Turkish Women's Associations (TKDF), 27 April 2011.

<sup>227</sup> Erdem Yörük (2009) characterizes this process as "the proletarianization of the Kurdish people," which perpetuated the transition to neoliberalism in Turkey.

Kurdish women's organizations received signaled, similar to the case of Islamist women, the presence of "international powers" behind Kurdish women's mobilization. Nerma, for example, who took part in the organization of Habitat II (both in the official delegation and on the part of civil society) says:

[T]his was a period when the civil society [was] coming to life, when there was a little bit of financial support [for its growth]. Organizations received small amounts of money like five, seven, ten thousand dollars and education on how a civil society movement should be. But if the organization was for Habitat II, which was organized in Istanbul, what were those coordinators from the U.S. doing in [the Kurdish town of] Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Hakkari? I saw that [their visit] triggered a different type of organization there. It strengthened the Kurdish women's movement.<sup>228</sup>

The second consequence of NGOization was the opportunity for Kemalist feminists to complement the assimilationist policies of the Turkish state towards the Kurdish population. From the mid-1990s on, Kemalist feminists invested their efforts in women's and girls' education in the Kurdish region in order to both, empower them as women, and prevent women from being recruited to the Kurdish separatist movement. Simultaneously, they tried to counter the influence of radical Islamism which, through armed groups such as the *Hizbullah*, was allegedly supported by the state against the PKK (see Kurt 2015). The Association for the Support of Modern Life (ÇYDD) was especially active in integrating women and girls into a modern, laic, Turkish public. The organization started in 1996 with building libraries in and sending books to Kurdish cities such as Batman, Tunceli (Dersim), and Şırnak.<sup>229</sup> In 1998, the project "I Have a Daughter in Tunceli, She Will Be a Teacher" (*Tunceli'de Bir Kızım Var, Öğretmen Olacak*) started and gave financial support to girls who attended teacher training schools in Tunceli. In 2000, the project expanded to include other cities in eastern and southeastern Turkey and its title became "I have a Daughter in Anatolia, She Will Be a Teacher" (*Anadolu'da Bir Kızım Var, Öğretmen Olacak*). In the same year, the

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<sup>228</sup> Interview with Nerma, 18 August 2011.

<sup>229</sup> "Modernizing" Kurdish girls through education was not only a phenomenon of the 1990s. It was also an element of Kemalist women's activism in the early years of the Republic (see Akşit 2009).

ÇYDD initiated pre-school classes in the Kurdish cities of Kars, Van, Hakkari, Ardahan, and Siirt in collaboration with the Social Service and Child Protection Agency (*Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu*, SHÇEK). The ÇYDD also organized trips to take successful Kurdish students to Istanbul during their summer breaks, and helped girl students to move to Istanbul to continue their education after high school.<sup>230</sup>

In the second half of the 1990s, Kemalist women's organizations also participated in service provision for Kurdish women through the Southeastern Anatolia Project (*Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi*) launched by the Turkish state. Multi-Purpose Community Centers (*Çok Amaçlı Toplum Merkezleri*, ÇATOMs) were founded in the mid-1990s in cooperation with the state, civil society, and transnational governance (UNICEF) with the aim of raising women's status in the Kurdish region from a "sustainable gender-balanced development" perspective (see Kutluata 2002; Şeker 2011). ÇATOMs involved volunteers from Turkish women's NGOs who provided courses for Kurdish women on health, literacy, and income generating activities such as weaving or tailoring.<sup>231</sup> In Kutluata's (2002) analysis, ÇATOMs adopted a feminist language and method in reaching out to women in the Kurdish region by emphasizing the importance of including women in public life and supporting their economic independence. The project also supported Kurdish women in defining their own problems, finding their own solutions to these problems, and in taking initiative to realize these solutions. However, ÇATOMs were harshly criticized by Kurdish feminists for being the embodiment of "state feminism" that aimed at the assimilation of Kurds in Turkey especially by promoting birth control methods under the guise of "health education" (Kutluata 2002; Açık 2002; Harris 2008). Drawing on the Black feminist literature, Kurdish feminists criticized Turkish women's NGOs for regarding a "lesser number of children" as a universal feminist demand and

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<sup>230</sup> See ÇYDD Tarihi (History of the ÇYDD).

<sup>231</sup> Participant NGOs were known by their Kemalist and/or Turkish nationalist stances, such as the Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (*Kadın Emegini Değerlendirme Vakfı*), the Association of Turkish Women's Council (TKKD), and the Mother Child Education Foundation (*Anne Çocuk Eğitim Vakfı*).

associating the will to have more children with adherence to traditional gender roles (Kutluata 2002, 37). According to Kurdish feminists, Kurdish women's priority needs, among which was especially the need to communicate in their mother tongue, were not met by the services ÇATOMs provided.<sup>232</sup> Kurdish feminists also pointed at the similarity between the assimilationist attitude of Turkish feminists and the Turkish state which, in a report by the National Security Council, considered the increase in the Kurdish population as a potential source of Kurdish nationalism and therefore a threat to national security (Açık 2002, 296).

Kemalist feminists didn't take the criticisms of Kurdish feminists lightly. This is visible in how Nalan recalled the conflict she had with Kurdish feminists in the late 1990s. Back then a member of the THKD, Nalan visited the Kurdish region together with Işılray Saygın, who was the State Minister Responsible for Woman, Family and Social Services. Together they attended the wedding ceremony of seven hundred twenty-five couples in the city of Batman with the aim of promoting registered marriage against religious marriage that lacked official recognition by the state and therefore deprived women of civil rights. During her encounter with Kurdish women at the ÇATOM in Batman, Nalan supported the effort of teaching Turkish to Kurds. When she was suggested that she could learn to speak Kurdish instead, Nalan objected: "These [K]urdish women don't know their rights, they cannot use their rights; since the official language is Turkish they of course should learn Turkish and use [their rights]. The woman [who criticized me] is a militant herself; she has learned Turkish but she is against the other woman's learning Turkish. ... And she obstructs the [other] woman's education."<sup>233</sup> For many Kemalist feminists, like Nalan, the identity-based claims of Kurdish women had no validity because of the non-recognition of Kurdish ethnic identity by the Turkish state. Instead, women who organized on the basis of Kurdishness were

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<sup>232</sup> As research shows, the high fertility rates among Kurdish women was not because of not knowing the birth control methods and traditional reproductive practice but due to cultural isolation and gendered socio-economic inequality (Suzuki Him and Gündüz Hoşgör 2011).

<sup>233</sup> Interview with Nalan, 22 June 2011.

automatically classified as "militant" or "separatist" and their gender-based demands were thereby rendered illicit. In the meantime, the discourse of women's rights provided Kemalist feminists with the framework within which to integrate Kurdish women into a Turkish public sphere. ÇYDD member Özden adopted a similar stance and argued that the presence of Kemalist women's organizations saved Kurdish women from gender-based oppression: "Let's say that the Modern Life [ÇYDD] did not reach these [young girls]. The state does not either. These children will be kept from school. These children will get married at age fourteen. These children will be sold [for bride price]."<sup>234</sup>

In 1999, a group of Islamists started a smearing campaign against the ÇYDD and the Modern Education Foundation (*Çağdaş Eğitim Vakfı*, ÇEV) based on the claim that the organizations were spreading Christian propaganda. ÇEV was attacked because of publishing a book in 1998 based on the testimonies of a number of students whose education was previously funded by the Gülen religious order.<sup>235</sup> The ÇYDD, on the other hand, had long been threatened by fundamentalist organizations such as *Hizbullah* or IBDA-C.<sup>236</sup> This time, some Islamists claimed that the ÇYDD forced young Kurdish girls to prostitution, and that it made the use of birth-control methods the precondition for receiving scholarship from the organization (Saylan 2011). Even though such smearing campaigns against Kemalist women's organizations were not widespread, by the end of the 1990s, Kemalist women's dominant position within women's activism in Turkey was seriously challenged. Women's activism was increasingly polarized along the axes of national/ethnic and cultural/religious belongings. The process of NGOization contributed to this polarization by providing Islamist and Kurdish women's activism with funding and the frame to articulate their demands in the language of the global gender equality regime. Yet, it also provided Kemalist women's activism with

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<sup>234</sup> Interview with Özden, 27 June 2011.

<sup>235</sup> The name of the book was *Hocanın Okulları, Görünmeyen Yüzü* (Hodja's Schools, The Invisible Side).

<sup>236</sup> *Hizbullah* (not to be confused with the Lebanese *Hezbollah*) was a Kurdish Sunni-Muslim militant organization which fought against both the PKK and the Turkish state. IBDA-C stands for the Great Eastern Islamic Raiders' Front (*İslami Büyükdoğu Akıncılar Cephesi*), a Turkey-based Sunni-Muslim armed group.

effective tools to fight against Islamism and Kurdish nationalism by recruiting women who were the potential supporters of these projects of belonging into a modern, laic, and Turkish public.

### **7.3. Women's empowerment: Project feminism in the 2000s**

The political developments of the 2000s which I discussed in Section 6.2, namely Turkey's EU accession process and the AKP's rise to power, transformed the ways in which Kemalist feminists engaged with processes of NGOization and participated in the tripartite cooperation. The AKP rule deepened the political polarization along the laicism vs. Islamism axis in Turkish society. Similar to the Islamist parties of the 1990s, the AKP's electoral success was partly built on its capacity to recruit women in its women's auxiliaries.<sup>237</sup> Meanwhile the headscarf gained an elite status as more and more women from the middle and upper-middle classes appeared in public with their headscarves (Saktanber and Çorbacioğlu 2008; Çağatay 2009). The AKP also reframed Turkey's gender policy by utilizing neoliberal, nationalist, and religious discourses on gender relations (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2011). The party adopted a negative attitude towards secular (Kemalist and other) women's organizations. One consequence of this was that the financial support Kemalist women's organizations received from the state came to a halt. Although this support was symbolic in amounts, its withdrawal meant that Kemalist women's activism was no longer supported by the state.<sup>238</sup> Moreover, as the AKP increased its votes at the local elections, more and more municipalities refused to provide Kemalist women's organizations with logistic services or requested them to frame their projects differently, that is, in accordance with the conservative outlook of the party (see below).

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<sup>237</sup> AKP's women's auxiliaries today have around four million members. Yet, similar to the Islamist parties preceding the AKP, the increased visibility of women in the party doesn't translate into increased representation of women in the party administration or the inclusion of gender issues in the party discourses outside the framework of Islam, laicism, and westernization. See Ayata and Tütüncü (2008).

<sup>238</sup> I say symbolic because, for example, the TKB, having around 80 branches all around Turkey, had received an equivalent of €1000 for the whole year of 1999-2000. Interview with Ümit, 18 May 2011.

At the same time, the requirements for Turkey's EU accession included the decentralization of state power by giving the local state (i.e. municipalities, as opposed to the central state) responsibility of including the civil society in decision-making processes. For instance, the formation of City Councils (*Kent Konseyleri*) within municipalities required the involvement of women's organizations in decision-making processes.<sup>239</sup> Kemalist feminists' collaboration with the local state qualitatively increased thanks to not only the legal changes brought about by the EU accession process but also the funds provided by the EU and donor agencies in EU countries such as embassies, foundations, and think tanks that supported gender equality projects. As the EU institutions perceived NGOs as a precondition for a vibrant civil society (Lang 2013, 61), Europeanization accelerated the pace and widened the scope of project feminism in Turkey and helped women to become better acquainted with the global gender equality regime. At the same time, the perspective of development and the notion of women's empowerment became dominant themes in women's grassroots activism (Kardam 2005). In Turkey, first the Pre-Accession Financial Assistance Programme between 1999 and 2007, then the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance after 2007 (which also embraced a gender-mainstreaming perspective) supported women's empowerment projects (Landig 2011). Empowerment here meant that the EU supported women's entrepreneurial initiatives with the expectation that this would increase their labor force participation (Ibid., 209). As Acar Savran (2006) indicates, the EU's binding gender policies in Turkey were limited to the sphere of paid employment and their focus was to include women in the labor market to increase its competitive capacity. This resulted in a shift from protective mechanisms for women (based on their disadvantaged position) to the individualization of women within the framework of equal opportunity-based gender policies (Acar Savran 2006, 41–42).

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<sup>239</sup> See Kent Konseyi Yönetmeliği (City Council Regulations).

As a result of these developments, Kemalist women's organizations gained a more professional and entrepreneurial outlook. Nerma, member of the City Council and its Women's Council (*Kadın Meclisi*) in a central-district Municipality in Istanbul said:

Our aim is that everybody participates in decision-making. As the Women's Council we organize a public talk every week. ... Last year [we organized] a seminar on legal literacy related to women's rights. This is very popular in Europe. ... Women attend these seminars and receive a certificate. We focus mostly on violence against women and politics. ... This year, other municipalities participated in our package [i.e. certificate programs] and they're applying it. All of these are CHP-led municipalities.<sup>240</sup>

Activities such as preparing certificate programs and specializing in legal literacy integrated Kemalist feminists into state structures as "private experts, political consultants, or service providers" (Schultz 2010, 179). Combined with the emphasis on women's entrepreneurial initiatives, professionalization led Kemalist feminists to collaborate with the private sector in their fundraising efforts. In the 2000s, the private sector in Turkey also became an important actor in project feminism. In 2000, the ÇYDD launched the project "Modern Girls of Modern Turkey" (*Çağdaş Türkiye'nin Çağdaş Kızları*) in thirty-two cities in cooperation with the telecommunications company Turkcell. In 2005, the project "Father, Send Me to School" (*Baba Beni Okula Gönder*) started in cooperation with the newspaper *Milliyet*.<sup>241</sup> The TKB member Lale provided an example of how entrepreneurialism (*girişimcilik*), as a by-product of neoliberalism, was adopted as a value by some Kemalist feminists. She proudly explained how they, in the TKB in one of the districts of Izmir, obtained many things without paying for them thanks to the prestige of the organization. For instance, Lale made an agreement with a local logistics company which produced calendars that had the logo of the TKB, Atatürk's photos and quotes from Atatürk, as well as a two-page advertisement of the company itself. Lale said, "Look, we don't have any money; [this is all] thanks to our reputation."<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Interview with Nerma, 18 August 2011.

<sup>241</sup> See ÇYDD Tarihi (History of the ÇYDD).

<sup>242</sup> Interview with Lale, 2 July 2011.

In the 2000s, donor agencies preferred to fund projects that were designed by middle-class women's NGOs aiming to provide lower-class women with education and skills training (Üstündağ 2006) to integrate them in the labor market. As an immediate means to women's (economic) empowerment, Kemalist women's organizations functioned as an informal microcredit system; the organizations raised an initial capital with which lower-class women sold their hand-produced goods in fairs and market places, the earnings of which were invested in further production. Şule, member of the Izmir Union of Women's Organizations (*Izmir Kadın Kuruluşları Birliği*, IKKB) and the Entrepreneurial Women's Association (*Girişimci Kadınlar Derneği*, GIRKADE) in Izmir, provided a good example of this. GIRKADE's aim, Şule said, was to help women to sell their handmade products at the market price and make money in order to "support their family budget." In the meantime, women attended various seminars and courses at the GIRKADE. The organizations' main goal was to help women participate in public life; contributing to the family budget was perceived as means to this end:

Women should first become aware of the need to go out [of the house]. ... [Our aim is to] encourage women to come here [and listen to the seminars] on bodily health and mental health. Make them meet a lawyer, a psychologist, perhaps an author. My goal here is to change their point of view, I mean, this is what we do here. On the other hand, what they produce anyway doesn't have much market value. ... It doesn't sell. Because her neighbor too produces the same lacework, the same knitwork. ... They don't have a concern for the market. Here we make them think about the market or, if they're already thinking, help them to find their way.<sup>243</sup>

In Şule's point of view, empowering women meant teaching them how to be self-sustaining individuals through understanding the logic of the market. They were supposed to learn this from middle-class women who already grasped this logic. This contributed, in Altan-Olcay's (2014, 236) analysis, to "the construction of entrepreneurial gendered subjectivities, creating the conditions through which women come to define their labor in terms of individual

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<sup>243</sup> Interview with Şule, 28 June 2011.

responsibility, effort, and market capacity." But Şule also underlined that the women who came to GIRKADE were already middle and lower-middle-class women because "[e]ven the way [they] look[ed] at fashion and user-friendliness changes [due to their class positions]. ... [I]f you want to sell at a good place, you have to follow the general [i.e. popular] demand."<sup>244</sup> That meant, only those women who already held a class position that gave them access to know what's fashionable and what sells were eligible to be integrated into the market logic, which in turn reproduced their class position.<sup>245</sup>

For Kemalist feminists, skills training courses and income-generative projects also served the purpose of providing lower-class women with basic women's human rights education so as to counter the increasing hegemony of Islamist civil society which perpetuated, according to Kemalist feminists, women's subjugation to men. Nerma warned against Islamist organizations' adoption of the language of women's empowerment to realize their own gender agenda:

This is one of the scenarios prepared for Turkey since many years: In the name of women's empowerment, women's education, and women's rights—these are fields with easy access—they raised these trainers. Why? Because this is the way to implement the moderate Islam project. With these trainings, people got used to [moderate Islam]. And this didn't happen all of a sudden, it happened step by step. They take women outside the house, women attend meetings, they are treated well. This is so-called women's empowerment because women go outside the house. But on the other hand they tell them to remain in their [traditional] roles. Just like the Prime Minister now who tells [women to have] three children.<sup>246</sup>

Kemalist feminists like Nerma saw a clear opposition between the gender equality projects they ran and the AKP's gender politics. Women's rights education, for example, automatically meant countering political Islam. In Özden's interpretation, the smear campaign against the ÇYDD (see above) was launched because ÇYDD volunteers worked to change the existing

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<sup>244</sup> Interview with Şule, 28 June 2011.

<sup>245</sup> For the reproduction of class differences between women through the work of organizations which support women's entrepreneurialism in development projects, see Altan-Olcay (2015).

<sup>246</sup> Interview with Nerma, 18 August 2011.

(oppressive) relations of gender in Turkey.<sup>247</sup> In addition to projects on women's economic inclusion,<sup>248</sup> the ÇYDD in Izmir ran projects addressing students of all levels of education, including organizing summer schools for students with poor educational background and offering them courses on mathematics, science, music, drawing, and creative drama. The aim of the summer schools was to "provoke their curiosity, improve their eagerness to learn, [and organize] trips to the city [center]." Özden then added, "But it disturb[ed] the Ministry of Education because they [who live in these neighborhoods] [we]re Kurdish."<sup>249</sup> In Izmir, a city that is known for its full-fledged support for Kemalism and since the 1990s received massive migration from the Kurdish region, the lower-class population was predominantly Kurdish. Both the Kemalist and Islamist movements targeted the Kurdish population to weaken Kurdish nationalism and to assimilate Kurds into Turkishness. The former aimed to do this by offering a laicist and gender-egalitarian political project and the latter by offering an Islamic, gender-complementary one. Therefore, for Kemalist feminists like Özden, projects addressing the Kurdish population were, besides serving the purpose of Turkification of the Kurdish population, also a means to struggle against the AKP.<sup>250</sup>

An example of women's empowerment projects targeting migrant Kurdish women was provided by Nermin, member of the Association for the Protection of Women's Rights (KHKD) in Izmir. Nermin also worked as a consultant at the women's counseling center at one of the district-municipalities in Izmir. In both the KHKD and the municipality, Kemalist feminists worked in collaboration with Public Education Centers which operated under the Ministry of Education. At the Public Education Centers, Kurdish women were first offered

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<sup>247</sup> Interview with Özden, 27 June 2011.

<sup>248</sup> The ÇYDD in Izmir ran a number of projects targeting women's participation in the labor force, such as opening a course on organic toy production, in collaboration with bodies such as the EU, Izmir Development Agency (*Izmir Kalkınma Ajansı*), CHP-led municipalities in Izmir, the Ministry of Education, and other Kemalist women's organizations such as Aegean Foundation for Contemporary Education (*Ege Çağdaş Eğitim Vakfı*, EÇEV). Interview with Özden, 27 June 2011.

<sup>249</sup> Interview with Özden, 27 June 2011.

<sup>250</sup> Kurdish political parties and organizations were also active in western cities of Turkey but to a significantly lesser extent. Nonetheless, recent research shows that the organized Kurdish movement was an important facilitator of Kurdish women's inclusion in public life in the western part of Turkey. See Çağlayan et al. (2011).

literacy courses in Turkish. Then, according to their abilities, they received further courses on child care, elderly care, computer skills, etc. Here, unlike in the case of GIRKADE (see above), the aim was to train women with skills with which to "have a profession" so that they could become "economically independent," instead of only contributing to their family budget. Nermin elaborated on this aim as follows:

To me women's employment is very important because I don't believe that women's rights, women's human rights can be realized and furthered without [women's] economic freedom. If a woman is subjected to violence at home, that is because she has nowhere else to go. Plus, in Turkey the situation of the family is very important. The family in the east or southeast won't accept a divorced woman. These are the customs and traditions. Therefore, if the woman doesn't have self-confidence, [that is] if she doesn't have a certain education, a profession with which to [participate] in employment, she is in a difficult situation.<sup>251</sup>

Nermin's words represent what Saraçoğlu (2010) has coined as "exclusive recognition," that is, the association of certain social behavior exclusively as Kurdish. In Nermin's view, Kurdish people were identified with having more oppressive (patriarchal) family structures as compared to the rest of Turkish society. Therefore all women needed empowerment, but especially Kurdish women.<sup>252</sup> In reality, the skills training courses on care work and secretarial work offered to Kurdish women worked against the logic of "economic independence" since they prepared women for underpaid jobs, for they were generally seen as extensions of women's tasks in the familial sphere. Thus these courses did not significantly alter Kurdish women's class position and make them economically independent. Yet, in Nermin's narrative ethnic difference substituted class inequalities; Kurdish women were

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<sup>251</sup> Interview with Nermin, 1 July 2011.

<sup>252</sup> In his work on the anti-Kurdish sentiments among the middle-class people in Izmir, Saraçoğlu outlines what he coins as "exclusive recognition" in four components: "Firstly, in contrast to the conventional assimilationist discourse of the Turkish state, the recent anti-Kurdish discourse *recognises* the 'Kurds' as a distinct group of people. Secondly, these middle-class residents of Izmir *recognise* the Kurdishness of these Kurdish migrants when they see them in their urban encounters and observations. Thirdly, this recognition necessarily involves discursive exclusion of these Kurdish migrants through certain stereotypes and labels. ... Fourthly, these people use such negative stereotypes *exclusively* against Kurdish migrants, and not towards other 'ethnically' non-Turkish Muslim communities ..." (2010, 4–5). The transformation from conventional assimilationism to exclusive recognition, according to Saraçoğlu, was due to "three national-level structural factors; namely, the transition to neoliberal capital accumulation, the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army, and the inflow of Kurds into western Turkish cities" (Ibid., 173)

economically more disadvantaged and thus more in need of "having a profession" not because of their class position but because they were more oppressed than Turkish women. This way, Nermin naturalized and legitimized the unequal class position of Kurdish women (see Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992, 59).

While Nermin's and Özden's examples are both from Izmir, migrant Kurdish women were targeted by Kemalist women's NGOs in all urban areas of Turkey. In these NGOs, as Üstündağ (2006) observes, ethnic differences between Turkish and Kurdish women overlapped with class relations.<sup>253</sup> Yet, it is also important to note that not all Kemalist feminists were equally engaged with project feminism. Some Kemalist feminists were critical of NGO activism because it involved hierarchical relations between women. Aydan, member of the CHP as well as a number of feminist organizations, argued that Kemalist women's organizations were still more like charity organizations than grassroots feminist organizations. She criticized women in these organizations for believing in the "tale" of not having been oppressed or discriminated themselves. Even if she approved the work done in these organizations, Aydan still emphasized her problem with the way it is done:

I am not giving some women some kind of an enlightenment torch. I go and work with women. My presence there is temporary. Do they become able to cope with their problems? [That is the question.] I cannot found associations and cooperatives in their name. This is not right. ... If this [type of activism] is Atatürkism, I say I am not [an Atatürkist]. Same goes for feminism; if this is feminism, my feminism is not this one.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> In Üstündağ's view, middle-class NGO activists, assuming the role of "educator," misleadingly depicted Kurdish women as "ignorant victims" even when they were politically mobilized. These NGO activists expected Kurdish women to become "individuals who struggle against honor killings, resist against their tribe, gain their economic independence, and actively participate in politics" in spite of their primary need to access very basic social rights (2006, 24). It is also important to note that this kind of relationship is not limited to Turkish NGOs and Kurdish women but exists between Turkish NGOs and Turkish women as well as between Kurdish NGOs and Kurdish women. Kurdish women's NGOs receive similar accusations in their activism. For instance, a prominent women's rights NGO in the Kurdish region (Van Women's Association, *Van Kadın Derneği*, VAKAD) was labeled as a "missionary agent" by the local people upon receiving funding from the EU (ESI 2007, 23).

<sup>254</sup> Interview with Aydan, 14 July 2011.

Project feminism of the 2000s and the accompanying ideas of professionalism and entrepreneurialism enabled Kemalist feminists to shape the notion of women's empowerment based on the class-based, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious aspects of their gender politics. However, the reach of these developments was limited to the municipalities that were professionalized themselves, i.e. those in urban areas with sufficient human and financial resources. For the most part, Kemalist feminists' ability to utilize the resources of the local state depended on how close their ties were with local government officials. Those municipalities that were supportive of Kemalist feminist activism were usually led by the CHP. But this was not a rule; there were non-supportive CHP-led municipalities as well as supportive AKP-led municipalities. A seminar the TKB ran on women's human rights, for example, was turned into a knitting-needlework workshop once the municipality was taken over by the AKP. On the other hand, Çankaya Municipality led by the CHP refused the TKB's project of turning an empty building into a dormitory for girls even though the TKB was a member of the City Council. The TKB member Ümit said that the problem was a general lack of consciousness of local administrators about the meaning and importance of cooperation with civil society, and in this it did not matter much which political party it was:

Some of them look down upon us, like, "Who are these, a bunch of women." Some don't know about the function of civil society. Some consider cooperation as intervention in their internal affairs, they don't trust us. And some say, "If you didn't vote for me, sorry!" ... Do you see, the obstacles before us!<sup>255</sup>

#### **7.4. Kemalist feminists' disagreement over foreign funds**

Whether to receive funds, and if so, from whom, was one of the main lines of differentiation among Kemalist feminists. Kemalist feminists' preference on this issue ranged from funded projects as the only form of activism to the refusal of receiving any financial support, including domestic funds and state support. The latter overlapped with the preference to stay

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<sup>255</sup> Interview with Ümit, 18 May 2011.

out of the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society and transnational governance (see chapter 6). This short section presents the main concerns of Kemalist feminists regarding donor money and the acceptance vs. refusal of foreign funds.

A most prominent concern regarding foreign funds was whether funding bodies pursued the "hidden agenda" of strengthening moderate Islam in Turkey. The IKKB member Nerma argued that many organizations received money from transnational donors simply because it was the easy thing to do. But the donors actually imposed an agenda on the organizations together with the money.<sup>256</sup> She gave an example from a meeting she attended on violence against women hosted by an organization which, in her words, "constantly received big funds." At the meeting, a trainer who was a psychologist gave a lecture to a group of women who came from squatter settlement areas. The trainer suggested that women were responsible for preventing violence. In Nerma's recollection, the trainer said: "The man is already unemployed, spent the whole day at the coffee shop, came home at 11 p.m. If, on top of everything, the woman is nagging at him, doesn't she deserve violence?"<sup>257</sup> For Nerma, these words of the trainer indicated that some organizations which received donor money were perpetuating women's traditional gender roles under the label of "eliminating violence against women." Yet, also implicit in Nerma's argument is both an assumed alliance between transnational governance and Islamism in Turkey, and an association of the promotion of women's traditional gender roles with Islamism.<sup>258</sup> Like Nerma, many Kemalist feminists questioned the relationship between Muslim women and transnational institutions. On one

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<sup>256</sup> Interview with Nerma, 18 August 2011.

<sup>257</sup> Interview with Nerma, 18 August 2011. By the time of interview, Nerma was an advisor for a campaign protesting violence against women run by a liberal newspaper in collaboration with civil society organizations.

<sup>258</sup> Ironically, a comment similar to the one criticized by Nerma on violence against women was made by a Kemalist feminist. During our interview TKB member Lale told me about a seminar the TKB hosted in one of the districts of Izmir. As in the case of Nerma's example, women from poor neighborhoods were gathered in a room to listen to the seminar on violence against women. Lale approvingly quoted the trainer who gave the seminar. The quote was about how to apply the technique of "anger management" against a man who came home late at night and drunk: "[I]f you angrily, violently start shouting at the man like 'Where were you?' and so on, the man is already [drunk], there comes a fight. Who is responsible [for the fight]? The woman is responsible here. Even though the man is guilty, who creates uneasiness? The woman does. This is [what we mean by] anger management." Interview with Lale, 2 July 2011.

hand, foreign funds contributed to women's empowerment. On the other hand, these funds were distributed in collaboration with Islamist governments that pursued a politics of gender in which women were considered primarily as mothers and wives. As Zehra Yılmaz points out, transnational institutions like the IMF, the WB and the EU aim at keeping the idea of a "more democratic Islam" by investing in women's integration into the market economy through development and democratization programs (Z. Yılmaz 2011, 817–818). Kemalist feminists were skeptical of this process for they thought it strengthened the hand of the Islamists in the struggle over defining the politics of gender. Similarly, the EU's interpretation of the relationship between laicism, freedom of religious expression, and gender equality, and its moderate approach towards the headscarf issue (Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu 2008) made some Kemalist feminists suspect the intention of EU-funded projects.

Another concern about receiving funds was the bureaucratic red tape donors imposed.

The TKDF member Sema explained her approach to funding as follows:

When it comes to raising funds, we create our own. We don't have much of a relationship with the EU. We had a project once, it was a CEDAW[-related] project called 81 Women from 81 Cities. We suffered a lot, how shall I say, it wasn't because of ignorance. There was a lot of bureaucracy. ... 81 women, all high school graduates, we took off their kitchen aprons and brought them here to Ankara. For five days we explained them their civil rights, women's human rights and the details of the CEDAW agreement. ... Many of them later founded their own organizations. Many became members of political parties. ... [But still,] I see it [the bureaucratic formalities the project required] as a waste of time, it takes away my energy.<sup>259</sup>

Sema's positive account of the project—which also reflects her middle-class attitude towards the recipients of the training, i.e. housewives with "kitchen aprons" with poorer educational backgrounds learning their rights from Kemalist feminists activists—and her negative view of receiving funds as a "waste of time" reflect many NGO activists' resentment about the red tape imposed by the project administration process (see also Işat 2009). However, according to Serpil, member of the feminist organization Association for the Support and Training of

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<sup>259</sup> Interview with Sema, 27 April 2011.

Women Candidates (*Kadın Adayları Destekleme ve Eğitim Derneği*, Ka-Der), the TKDF's distance towards foreign funds reflected an outmoded understanding of Kemalism and women's activism. Previously a TKDF member herself, Serpil said:

They don't pay attention to CEDAW or the like. Why? They are against funding by the EU, they are against [funds] from abroad, they have a strange nationalist [thinking]. 'Why do we need [foreign funds], we're self-sufficient...' They are happy being close to the government, going to the parliament, visiting the President of the Republic.<sup>260</sup>

While most Kemalist feminists were at least cautious about an unconditional reliance on the mechanisms of transnational governance, there were some who fully adhered to the idea of project feminism through foreign funds. According to Gamze, member of the Association for the Research and Investigation of Women's Social Life (KASAID), without international donors, women's activism was simply incapacitated. She said:

I know the EU projects very well. Such concerns about the EU funds are groundless and ridiculous. Imperialism exists for sure but I find resisting it with some well-known jargon, some uninformed, slogan-like discourses ridiculous and ignorant. EU funds of course have certain objectives: Democratization, improving women's rights, improving disability rights. They provide funding in the light of these objectives and this is clear. So yes, they want to change us. They want us to be a more democratic, better country, it's true. I want to contribute to this. Some think like, "Only certain organizations get money from Brussels." They don't know how to write EU projects and this is what they say when they don't receive money.<sup>261</sup>

In the 2000s, for many Kemalist feminists who wanted to be involved in grassroots activism, foreign funding was unavoidable. Yet, even those who didn't receive foreign funds adopted the dominant form of project feminism because they perceived it as more efficient, more popular, or more prestigious. The different approaches to foreign funds that I presented in this section point to Kemalist feminists' differential levels of involvement in the tripartite cooperation, but not to different levels of engagement with the global gender equality regime or with project feminism. For instance, both Nerma's IKKB and Sema's TKDF were highly

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<sup>260</sup> Interview with Serpil, 25 April 2011.

<sup>261</sup> Interview with Gamze, 11 May 2011. The KASAID ran an EU-funded Project in 2007 named First Step, Woman in the Local State (*İlk Adım, Yerelde Kadın*). The Project aimed to provide women with theoretical and practical information on how to prepare to run for local elections.

involved in promoting the global gender equality agenda at the level of institutional lobbying. Rather, Kemalist feminists' approaches to donor money overlapped with their differential interpretations of Kemalism with regards to globalization which I discussed in the previous two chapters. While those who upheld a more leftist and—at the same time—neo-nationalist view of Kemalism preferred to keep away from collaboration with transnational institutions in their activism, those who perceived westernization as the defining element of Kemalism found it useful to rely on transnational mechanisms of governance in their struggle against Islamism and Kurdish nationalism. At the same time, as Serpil's and Gamze's quotes imply, the level of NGOization itself became a marker of status among Kemalist feminist women.

### **7.5. Troubled relations with Kurdish women and Kurdish feminist activists (2000s)**

Political developments of the 2000s led to significant changes in the ways in which Kemalist feminists related to the Kurdish women in general and Kurdish feminists in particular. With the AKP's rise to power, the organic link between Kemalist feminists and the Turkish state was broken. Previously, governors and district governors appointed by the central state were predominantly Kemalist men who tended to welcome the activism of Kemalist women, or whose wives were themselves Kemalist activists. Changes in the state bureaucracy brought by the AKP made it difficult for Kemalist feminists to remain in the Kurdish region because they now posed a challenge to the Islamization policies of the AKP-led state. In this period ÇATOMs gained an increasingly Islamic profile, as well.<sup>262</sup> But more importantly, the Kurdish movement entered a new phase, in which the emphasis on Kurdishness as ethnic identity increased alongside "the use of language of equal and constitutional citizenship by Kurdish actors" (Keyman 2012, 475). This move influenced the Kurdish women's movement;

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<sup>262</sup> In a recent article on feminist activism ÇATOMs are considered to be examples of Islamic feminism. See Özkazaç-Pan (2015). In 2014, there were forty-four ÇATOMS in nine Kurdish cities, and the project had reached an overall number of two hundred and fifty thousand women. See Çok Amaçlı Toplum Merkezleri (Multi-Purpose Community Centers). For a recent evaluation of the ÇATOM project see Şeker (2011).

in the 2000s, the Kurdish women's movement was bigger, stronger, and institutionalized through representation in successive Kurdish political parties—which since 2005 has a forty percent quota for women—as well as the umbrella organization the Democratic Free Women's Movement (*Demokratik Özgür Kadın Hareketi*) (Bozgan 2011).<sup>263</sup> The local state in the Kurdish region was also increasingly run by Kurds themselves who had their own civil societal networks on gender activism, which left less and less room for Kemalist feminist activism.

The court case against the ÇYDD (see Section 6.2) was a sign that the Islamists—Turkish and Kurdish—did not welcome secular women's activism in the region. In the 2000s, as I examined in the third section, the ÇYDD and other Kemalist women's organizations focused more on lower-class Kurdish women who migrated to urban areas in western Turkey and less on those in the Kurdish region. The ÇYDD continued to run projects such as "Modern Girls of Modern Turkey" and "Father, Send Me to School" (see above) but switched from working in collaboration with ÇATOMs and providing courses for girls and women to supporting girls' boarding schools financially and providing education for the teachers in these boarding schools.<sup>264</sup> In this way, Kemalist feminists could still reach those girls in the Kurdish region without having to be there themselves.

In the 2000s, Kurdish feminists also began to join nation-wide initiatives of feminists and women's rights activists. NGOization, as Bozgan argues (2011, 771), enabled Kurdish and Turkish women to come together and build joint platforms such as the Congress of Women's Shelters (*Sığınaklar Kurultayı*), Women's Congress (*Kadın Kurultayı*), Women's Initiative for Peace (*Barış İçin Kadın Girişimi*), World Women's March (*Dünya Kadın*

<sup>263</sup> DÖKH recently dissolved itself and reformed under the name Free Women's Congress (*Kongreya Jinên Azad, KJA*). See Evrensel, "DÖKH yola KJA olarak devam edecek" (The DÖKH will continue as the KJA).

<sup>264</sup> See ÇYDD Tarihi (History of the ÇYDD). On the other hand, thanks to the financial investment of the private sector, these projects reached a greater number of students. For example, "Modern Girls of Modern Turkey," from 2000 to 2004, reached a total number of eighty-five thousand students in the Kurdish cities of Siirt, Kars, Iğdır, Erzurum, Doğubeyazıt, Urfa, Diyarbakır (Kulin 2014).

*Yürüyüşü*), and the Local Agenda 21 (*Yerel Gündem 21*), in cooperation with transnational feminism (see also Chapter 6). Many Kemalist feminists who joined these platforms had their first encounters with Kurdish feminists. These platforms were also the sites where Kemalist feminists faced Kurdish feminists' criticism about the nationalist outlook of the mainstream feminist movement in Turkey. For example, in one of the Congress of Women's Shelters and Solidarity Centers (*Sığınaklar ve Da(ya)nışma Merkezleri Kurultayı*) Kurdish women's rights activists criticized some Turkish feminists for not coming to terms with the question of nationalism and for alienating Kurdish women with their arbitrary application of so-called universal principles.<sup>265</sup> As Kemalist and Kurdish feminists encountered each other, Kurdish feminists' perception of socio-economic problems such as poverty as reflections of ethnic conflict (Gökalp 2010, 568) and Kemalist feminists' resistance to include in the agenda problems that specifically pertained to Kurdish women created tensions between them.

As Kurdish women's movement grew and its demands became more audible and—given the EU-related reforms—were considered as more legitimate in the 2000s, Kemalist feminists also diversified in their approach to the Kurdish conflict, Kurdish women, and Kurdish feminism. Political positioning (ranging from centre-right to socialist-left), profession, ethnic background (Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Balkan, Caucasian, etc.), class position, or personal experience (such as having lived in the Kurdish region) all influenced Kemalist feminists' approach to the issue. It is possible to speak of three tendencies: The rejection of Kurdish ethnic identity, the reduction of the Kurdish question to feudalism, and the recognition of Kurdish feminists' demands.

The first tendency, the rejection of Kurdish identity, translates into Kemalist feminists' refusal to discuss Kurdish women's problems separately from all-women's problems in Turkey. When refusing to acknowledge Kurdish women's specific problems at the intersection

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<sup>265</sup> See Dilşah Deniz's (2005) presentation at the 8th Congress of Women's Shelters and Solidarity Centers in Diyarbakır.

of gender and ethnic oppression, Kemalist feminists employed the "universality" of women's rights which, in practice, corresponded to a homogeneous notion of Turkish womanhood. The tension between Kemalist and Kurdish feminists at the 9th Congress of Women's Shelters and Solidarity Centers organized in Izmir in 2006 provides a good example of this. In Nermin's account, the reason for the tension was that Kurdish feminists wanted to organize a workshop during the congress on "the Turkish state's systematic violence against Kurdish women." Nermin and some other Kemalist feminists argued that "[t]here is no violence that the state does specifically to [different groups of] women. If [violence] is done, it's done to everyone. It's not done separately to Kurdish women."<sup>266</sup> In Nermin's recollection, Kurdish and Kemalist feminists collectively decided to discuss whether to have the workshop or not at the plenary session. At the plenary session, a woman whose institutional affiliation was questionable to Nermin introduced herself in Kurdish. This added to the crisis. Eventually, Kemalist women collected signatures to dissolve the congress, and so the congress ended.<sup>267</sup>

Nermin supported her claim that women's problems in Turkey are undifferentiated by—in this case—ethnicity by using a number of side arguments. For example, she pointed at the hybridity of Turkish society which made it difficult to distinguish who was Kurdish and who was not: "Perhaps, if you look at [my background], I also have Kurds [in my family]. But I don't have any claims about this. We are not people who ... [think in terms of] Turkish, Kurdish, Alevi. ... If there is a problem, it concerns all of us." Another argument Nermin used was that the insistence on the recognition of Kurdish identity was a "trap" for women because it hindered the possibility of solidarity among women. She claimed that it was Kurdish men who did not want this solidarity: "Those groups of men who guide these women provoke this

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<sup>266</sup> Interview with Nermin, 1 July 2011.

<sup>267</sup> Interview with Nermin, 1 July 2011. The 12th Congress of Women's Shelters was also dissolved, this time because Kemalist feminists insisted on singing the Turkish national anthem, while Kurdish feminists wanted to politicize the closure of the Kurdish Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*) by the Constitutional Court on the very day. Interview with Münire Dağ, president of the Adana Women's Shelter and Association for Solidarity/Consultation (*Adana Kadın Da(ya)nışma ve Sığınma Evi Derneği*), 4 May 2011.

issue. I think this is the gist of the matter." Finally, Nermin argued that the recognition of Kurdish ethnic identity would violate the principle of national unity: "[T]he question of nationalism is above everything. Right now, beyond being women, we are specifically concerned with our nationalism problem." To strengthen her argument Nermin also drew on Turkey's reputation vis-à-vis the West, which she felt responsible for representing: "Because this [the congress] [wa]s organized with international funds and the results [of the congress] directly goes to the European Union. I think it's wrong to have such results [that highlight Kurdish women's problems] from Izmir, from the women's movement where I have been seriously involved."<sup>268</sup>

Nermin, having a centre-right party background, was not alone in her rejection of the politicization of Kurdish ethnic identity. Women from different political affiliations expressed similar views. Pinar, member of the CHP and the KHKD in Izmir, criticized Kurdish feminists for not appreciating Kemalist feminists' efforts to improve the conditions of Kurdish women and for instrumentalizing women's problems for their nationalist cause: "[N]o matter how much I work to provide service, I remain to be the other woman. I mean, you, as Pinar, cannot know our traditions, what we experience ... I work with Kurdish women [in Izmir] but I don't see them [the Kurdish feminists] there. But [they] do very well in taking advantage of Kurdish women's misery."<sup>269</sup> Sevil, member of the Women's Party (*Kadın Partisi Girişimi*, KPG), suggested that they as the KPG supported Kurdish people's democratic rights such as representation in the parliament, and that it was wrong to expect Kurds to deny their ethnic background. Yet, she also employed the "universality" of women's rights which silenced ethnic antagonism: "[A]ctually, when you look at it, you see that the differentiation [among women] is always induced by men. ... For example, you are talking about the woman question. Someone comes up and says, 'You didn't mention the Kurdish women.' These

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<sup>268</sup> Interview with Nermin, 1 July 2011.

<sup>269</sup> Interview with Pinar, 1 July 2011.

Kurdish women don't live in another country. The problem I'm talking about is their problem, too. It's the problem of both the Turk and the Kurd. It is the woman question."<sup>270</sup>

The second tendency, the reduction of the Kurdish issue to a question of feudalism reflects Kemalist feminists' modernist perspective on gender equality which, in the case of Kurdish women, required Kurdish women to prioritize the struggle against feudalism in Kurdish society—as the precondition of gender equality—over their ethnic identity-based demands. Sibel, member of the CKD, summarized this view as follows: "Without opposing to the landlords, without abolishing feudalism, can you talk about women's liberation?"<sup>271</sup>

According to the IKKB and GIRKADE member Şule, Kurdish women were oppressed because of feudalism, not because of being Kurdish. Yet, she said that Kurdish feminists were instrumentalizing Kurdish women's oppression to serve their nationalist cause. Şule argued that the leaders of the Kurdish women's movement were in fact woman landlords who were Kurdish nationalists. Addressing an imaginary Kurdish feminist, she said:

[Y]ou claim that your people are oppressed, [but] you are the oppressor. It's not the state that oppresses; you yourself oppress [those people]. ... I think there is a contrast here. ... You tell me that the Turkish state exerts systematic violence against Kurdish women and Kurdish men. ... You go on and mention this on international platforms. But you are a woman who owns God knows how many villages. ... [A]s a woman from such a family, you maintain feudalism. ... You don't try to improve the life conditions of [your own people]. But you fight against the state. I call this hypocrisy.<sup>272</sup>

Şule's words exemplify the argument that eliminating feudalism was a prerequisite of the struggle for gender equality. According to her, the elimination of feudalism was the Turkish state's intention when suppressing Kurdish ethnic identity. Şule argued that Kurdish landlords and religious leaders prevented the people of the region from "being enlightened," from "having a good relationship with the state," and from "forming their bond of citizenship," and criticized Kurdish feminists for not having confronted these leaders. Şule's approach is also an

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<sup>270</sup> Interview with Sevil, 21 June 2011.

<sup>271</sup> Interview with Sibel, 17 May 2011.

<sup>272</sup> Interview with Şule, 28 June 2011.

example of exclusive recognition (see above), that is, to associate certain social patterns exclusively with Kurdishness. For instance, she did not suggest an analogous prioritization of the struggle against Turkish landlords or capitalists as a precondition for Turkish (or other non-Kurdish) women's liberation. The ÇYDD member Özden disagreed with Şule's formulation "Turkish state vs. Kurdish feudal lords" and argued instead that the Turkish state had from the early years of the Republic incorporated landlords into its structures with no intention of dissolving feudalism. Yet, when it came to the Kurdish feminist agenda, she thought similarly to Şule: "[T]hose friends who claim that we [the ÇYDD] pursue politics of assimilation, why don't they ... object to early marriage, honor killings, *töre* [custom] killings brought by feudalism, ... *berdel* [sister-swapping], [women's] inferiority?"<sup>273</sup>

In the early 1990s, Mesut Yeğen had analyzed how the Kurdish conflict was silenced in state discourses throughout the republican period by being reduced to reactionism, feudalism, regional underdevelopment, and foreign conspiracy (Yeğen 2009).<sup>274</sup> In the 2000s, Kemalist feminists drew on these discourses in order to silence the specific problems of Kurdish women and to argue against Kurdish feminists' claims and demands as part of their fight against Kurdish nationalism. In this aim they also employed the "universality" of women's rights. As feminist scholar Çağlayan puts it: "Assuming a universal state of womanhood and isolating the woman question, women's emancipation and/or liberation from the differences between women and the multiple relations of oppression, may result in the expectation that Kurdish women will set aside the ethnic dimension of their identity. The price of not meeting this expectation is to be accused of nationalism" (Çağlayan 2013, 84).<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Interview with Özden, 27 June 2011.

<sup>274</sup> An example of the reduction of the Kurdish question to foreign conspiracy was provided by Şafak, member of the CKD and the Workers' Party: "Who creates this question, whose politics is this? Let's look at the maps [prepared by] the U.S. Let's look at the first Middle East project. Let's look at where is Turkey, how are its borders?" Şafak also argued that the Kurdish movement was reactionary because it was backed by imperialism. Interview with Şafak, 12 July 2011.

<sup>275</sup> Çağlayan (2013) also indicates that Kurdish women find it hard to openly challenge feudalism. There are Kurdish feminist organizations that politicize the gender issues related to feudal social relations. These

Yet, there is a third tendency among Kemalist feminists to be more critical towards Kemalist nationalism and to recognize the political stance of Kurdish feminists that draws on both gender and ethnic oppression. Kemalist feminists who held this perspective were mostly those who, through the organizations or platforms they were involved in, came across and collaborated with Kurdish feminists in their activism. Also, they all identified as social democrat or socialist. Serpil met Kurdish feminists during her membership in Ka-Der. As a member of Ka-Der, she was also involved in activism in the Kurdish region. Serpil argued that the Kurdish People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*) was the only political party that allowed feminists in. Serpil added that she hesitated to identify as Kemalist because most Kemalist women did not agree with her views on the Kurdish question.<sup>276</sup> CKD member Handan claimed that it was very understandable that women in the Kurdish region had different demands than the rest of women in Turkey. She also suggested that the ethnic oppression Kurdish women faced contributed to their gender struggle: "[T]he oppression women faced there actually enhanced and matured their struggle. That today there are so many woman members of the parliament ... who belong to the Kurdish party is also a result of this. Furthermore they are feminists."<sup>277</sup>

Kemalist feminists who held a more positive view of Kurdish feminism were also critical towards other Kemalist feminists on their approach to the Kurdish conflict. For example, Aydan criticized Kemalist women who were unwilling accept the demands of the Kurdish feminists for thinking that Kurdish (and Islamist) women's movements were threats to the survival of the Republic. She explained: "I want them [Kurds] to live where they are without having to migrate. Of course there are cultural and certain economic rights. I can't see anything more natural than raising demands for such rights. Identity[-based claims] today is a

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organizations receive criticism from the Kurdish movement. For instance, KAMER was criticized for harming the image of the Kurdish movement for politicizing *töre* killings (Paker 2011).

<sup>276</sup> Interview with Serpil, 25 April 2011. Serpil also supported Kurdish people's demands to citizenship rights including education in mother tongue and their demand to autonomy in local administration.

<sup>277</sup> Interview with Handan, 26 April 2011.

reality for everyone.<sup>278</sup> A similar criticism of Kemalist women came from Beyhan, who acknowledged the contributions of Kurdish (and Islamist) women to the feminist movement in Turkey, and regretted that the "discourse of peace" was only adopted by Kurdish women. Beyhan argued that Turkish women too had to adopt the discourse of peace because "peace should be where we find our common ground." She also complained about not being able to openly argue for this within the Kemalist circles she belonged to.<sup>279</sup>

## 7.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I analyzed how the process of NGOization enabled Kemalist feminists to employ the notions of women's rights and women's empowerment in their grassroots activism so as to pursue a politics of gender with a particular type of class-based, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious underpinnings. I argued that through project feminism Kemalist feminists struggled both to achieve gender equality in Turkey and to maintain the definition of gender equality in laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist terms. In so doing, they also maintained and reproduced their middle-class positioning within women's activism. In the 1990s, Kemalist feminists engaged in the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society, and transnational governance thanks to the adoption of the global gender equality regime by the Turkish state and the accompanying process of NGOization. Their grassroots activism targeted the recruitment of lower-class, religious, and Kurdish women to a modern, laic, and Turkish public life through projects on women's and girls' education. In this way, Kemalist feminists aimed to further gender equality while at the same time challenging Islamism and Kurdish nationalism. In the 2000s, AKP's rise to power and Turkey's candidacy for EU membership changed the dynamics of Kemalist feminist activism. Kemalist feminists gained a more professional, entrepreneurial outlook so that the projects they ran had a greater emphasis on women's economic inclusion through empowerment. In this period Kemalist

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<sup>278</sup> Interview with Aydan, 14 July 2011.

<sup>279</sup> Interview with Beyhan, 29 June 2011.

feminists continued to challenge political Islam and Kurdish nationalism by framing their gender activism in laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist terms. Yet, project feminism also led to differentiation among Kemalist feminists with regards to foreign funding, as well as to their approach to Kurdish women and their relations with Kurdish feminists.

Kemalist feminists' grassroots activism cannot be reduced to the process of NGOization or the tripartite cooperation. Kemalist women's efforts to include lower-class, religious, and Kurdish women in the Kemalist public sphere were a constitutive element of their gender agenda and dated back to the emergence of their activism in the 1930s. Yet, in the post-1980 period, the global gender equality regime served Kemalist feminists as an effective and legitimate framework within which they could engage in gender politics while reproducing—and sometimes challenging—laicist, nationalist, modernist/westernist, and middle-class values in their activism. Kemalist feminists drew on this framework especially in the 2000s when the consolidation of Islamism in the social and political spheres and the exclusion of the Kemalist cadres from state institutions made it difficult for them to pursue their agenda. In this, the process of NGOization gave them a leverage in participating in gender politics at a time when they were being increasingly excluded by the AKP governments.

The analysis I presented in this chapter shows that the process of NGOization helped Kemalist feminists to develop an anti-Islamist and nationalist gender agenda by providing the conditions within which they could reproduce their middle-class positioning within women's activism as modern, urban, professional women, based on which they mediated the inclusion of lower-class, religious, and Kurdish women in public—including economic—life. On the grassroots level, project funds were mostly accessible to women's organizations in urban areas, and the requirement that grant applications had to be written in English excluded many women from the process (İşat 2009). On the level of transnational governance, donor agencies

supported those empowerment projects that didn't challenge unequal—global and domestic—class relations. The notion of gender equality promoted by the transnational institutions such as the EU or the World Bank (Stratigaki 2004; Elson 2009) helped Kemalist feminists to reproduce their middle-class positioning in their activism as modernizers of womanhood in Turkey.

Through project feminism, Kemalist feminists synchronized their gender agenda with the process of neoliberalization of the economy and social relations. They adopted project feminism as an immediate means to women's empowerment, but the projects were not designed to alleviate the problems lower-class women faced in the labor market in the long run because they treated poverty and unemployment as individual matters that can be dealt through temporary projects (Çoban 2008; Rittich 2011). Moreover, empowerment projects which functioned similarly to microcredit programs aimed to integrate women into the labor market while, as Acar Savran indicates, presenting poverty as a "state of nature" which women should fend against on their own instead of raising demands for the redistribution of resources (2006, 45). In this too, NGOization operated as a mechanism that reproduced the existing class positions of women as well as the unequal relationship between women belonging to different classes.

The relations of class provide a key insight into Kemalist feminist politics, yet they remain invisible in their political discourse. The "relationality" of class points at the interdependencies between the dominant and the dominated classes (Eder 1993, 12).<sup>280</sup> At the level of grassroots activism, the interdependency between Kemalist feminists and lower-class, religious, and Kurdish women came through in the former's concern for educating, guiding, raising awareness (of rights), bringing service to the latter for the sake of empowerment. In terms of the greater politics of gender, this interdependency was visible in Kemalist feminists'

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<sup>280</sup> For the formation of middle-class femininity through relations with the lower classes, see Davidoff (1995) and Skeggs (1997). For feminist perspectives on how class is internalized and continually played out in everyday lives of people, see Acker (1999) and Reay (2004).

differential treatment of lower-class religious and Kurdish women and middle-class Islamist women's and Kurdish feminist movements. Lower-class covered and Kurdish women, as addressees of Kemalist feminist grassroots activism not only did not challenge the Kemalist definition of the public sphere but also sustained the purpose of Kemalist feminist activism. On the other hand, Kemalist feminists criticized the Islamist women's movement for promoting gender relations that were not welcome in Kemalism, and reproached Kurdish feminists for maintaining feudalism, indulging in nationalism, or being insusceptible to the problems of lower-class Kurdish women. The global gender equality regime proved a useful framework for this differential treatment by providing the opportunity for Kemalist feminists to make alliances with certain transnational women's networks, and delegitimize Islamist women's and Kurdish feminist movements thereof, for not prioritizing gender over other categories of social relations (see also Chapter 6).

The process of NGOization provided a suitable ground for the reproduction of these class dynamics that informed Kemalist feminist politics. Kemalist feminists employed the notions of women's rights and women's empowerment in a way that embraced covered and Kurdish women as lower-class, "yet-to-be-modernized" women and delegitimized their middle-class activisms. This overlapped with the Kemalist notion of a solidaristic relationship between women of different classes. Esim and Cindoğlu, describing Kemalist women's activism in the late 1990s, pointed out the vertical/hierarchical relationship between Kemalist women and the beneficiaries of their activism. Characterizing the motives of the activists as "altruistic and populist in nature," they said, "they might 'want to save the poor' by sharing their knowledge and expertise, [but] redistribution of wealth and social justice are not on their agendas" (1999, 182). By the end of the 2000s, the consolidation of neoliberalism which went hand in hand with Islamism made Kemalist feminists more sensitive towards the issue of social inequalities but at the same time perpetuated the process of NGOization. Ghodsee

(2004), who identifies the process of NGOization as "feminism-by-design," argues that NGOization works to weaken grassroots opposition to neoliberalism and the withdrawal of the welfare state by blaming the disadvantaged position of women vis-à-vis men solely on patriarchy and by co-opting educated middle-class women who could otherwise seek a class-based opposition to women's oppression. Indeed, NGOization was often itself an obstacle to the inclusion of the issues of redistribution of wealth and social justice in Kemalist feminists' agenda for it further obscured class relations. At the same time, it generated singular solutions to the problems faced by women instead of analyzing how gender differences related to patriarchy (Bora 2006, 28). As such, NGOization assisted Kemalist feminists to reinstate class, national/ ethnic, and cultural/religious differences between women in Turkey.

## 8. Conclusion

Through a case study of Kemalist feminism this dissertation aims to contribute to the scholarly debates on the relationship between women's activism and the politics of gender. With this aim I offered a historical analysis of the making and development of Kemalist feminist activism as it was situated within the framework of gender politics in Turkey, with a special focus on its class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious dynamics. In this final chapter I summarize and discuss the main findings and arguments of the dissertation in the light of the methodological-conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2.

### 8.1. Summary of the research findings

Kemalist women's activism emerged in concert with the consolidation of Kemalism during the single-party period in Turkey (1923–1946). Kemalism's gender project was built on the three pillars of laicism, nationalism, and modernism/westernism. The notions of "new woman" and "modern family" were at the core of this project, reinforcing the gender, class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious aspects of Kemalism. Kemalist gender reforms improved women's status in the family and enabled their inclusion in the public sphere and professional life. At the same time, "women's emancipation" under Kemalism was limited in a number of ways. First of all, the ideological primacy of women's household and care work duties restricted their active involvement in public life. Second, Kemalists assigned women the role as mediators between Western values and Turkish national culture, which subjected their public behavior to male authority and control. Neither covered women who resembled the old regime, nor "over-westernized" women were embraced within the Kemalist project. Third, non-Turkish (and non-Muslim) groups such as Kurds were not welcome in the Kemalist public sphere unless they were assimilated and Turkified. Fourth, class differences between women (and men) were subsumed under Kemalism's imagination of a classless society divided into modern, urban and rural, "yet-to-be-modernized" populations. This

imagination held upper-class urban women responsible for educating and modernizing the women of the lower classes, but without necessarily ensuring their public inclusion. Finally, women in the early-republican period rarely took part in the decision-making processes of the state; except for a few symbolic figures, they were excluded from the strategic institutions of the state as well as from the institutional sphere of politics.

Women who benefited from the Kemalist regime became the pioneers of Kemalist women's activism which, starting from the 1930s, replaced early-republican feminism. As I discussed in Chapter 1, early feminist scholarship in Turkey treated Kemalism and feminism as mutually exclusive political projects, which made it difficult to account for Kemalist women's struggle for gender equality in the multi-party period (1946 onwards), and subsequently Kemalist feminism of the post-1980 period. Therefore, in Chapter 3, I conducted an alternative reading of the relationship between early-republican feminism and Kemalism, based on which I offered a different evaluation of the formation of Kemalist women's activism. In part Kemalist gender reforms were answers to the demands of the early-republican feminists organized in the Turkish Women's Union (TKB). Early-republican feminists supported Kemalism's laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist project but they disagreed with Kemalists over the issues of women's political representation and the relationship between the interests of women and those of the nation. Kemalists were not against women's political representation *per se* but they were intolerant with women's autonomous organizing for political rights. Similarly, they supported women's formal equality with men but defined their interests as subservient to those of the nation. Kemalist women, some of whom were simultaneously active in the TKB, invested their efforts in mobilizing women in the service of the Kemalist project by equating women's interests with the nation's interests. While Kemalists marginalized early-republican feminists and excluded them from politics, Kemalist women's activism grew and absorbed early-republican feminism. This

resulted in the partial appropriation of the early-republican feminist ideas by the Kemalist discourse of women's rights. After the dissolution of the TKB in 1935, Kemalist women's activism was the only possible ground for women who wanted to pursue gender politics. Since then, there have always been women in Turkey who sought women's gender interests, be it in Kemalist woman-only organizations or mixed-sex organizations such as the Republican People's Party (CHP), even though they did not identify as feminists.

Based on this alternative reading, I argued that Kemalist women's activism was a synthesis of early-republican feminism and Kemalism. This synthesis made it possible for Kemalist women to challenge women's oppression and raise gender-equality demands in the multi-party period and to identify as feminists in the post-1980 period. My argument drew on two of the conceptual implications of the de-centered and intersectional approach to the analysis of women's activism I developed in Chapter 2. The first point was that historically women's struggle for rights often went hand in hand with nationalist modernization projects. This resulted in a tension between women's citizenship rights and their identification with culture and tradition, and led to women's articulation of their gender interests in nationalist terms. The course of women's public inclusion and the development of women's activism in Turkey followed a similar pathway as in other secular and/or nationalist modernization projects in non-dominant parts of the world. Women's public inclusion was perceived as a prerequisite of modernization but it was simultaneously restricted by the class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious dimensions of the Kemalist project as well as by male authority and control over women's public appearance and behavior. There was an inherent tension between women's struggle for emancipation and the male-dominant political struggles within which women sought equal rights, thus the initial alliance between early-republican feminists and Kemalist nationalists resulted in the suppression of the formers' autonomous activism and its assimilation into Kemalism in later stages of modernization. In the case of

Kemalist modernization, the tension between feminism and Kemalism remained a constitutive element of Kemalist women's activism and revealed itself in different ways and forms during the multi-party period.

My second point was that in many examples of secular and/or nationalist modernization projects women were excluded from state-building processes and the institutional sphere of politics. This meant that the only available field for women who wanted to pursue gender politics was women's activism. Therefore, based on other feminist scholars' (Jonasdottir 1988; Walby 1990; Lister 1997; Werbner 1999; Joseph 2000) earlier suggestions, I utilized a broader definition of politics which goes beyond the formal sphere of political parties and the parliament, and includes the field of women's activism. Applied to the analysis of Kemalist women's activism, such a model allowed for a more thorough investigation of their political participation and their involvement in gender politics. It also enabled to see the political motivations behind Kemalist women's activism, instead of perceiving the not manifestly political field of activism as apolitical work incapable of challenging the status quo. In fact, through activism, Kemalist women defined and pursued their gender interests as well as interests based on their class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious belongings. Thus, the particular rights they did or did not stand for corresponded to the class-based, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious political project (i.e. Kemalism) within which their activism was embedded.

These points helped me to trace how Kemalist women, starting from the multi-party period in 1946, adapted their activism to the domestic and world political conjunctures while remaining loyal to the founding principles of Kemalism, namely laicism, nationalism and modernism/westernism, and, to a lesser extent, to the Kemalist notion of citizenship based on the ideas of Turkishness, classless society, and the modern family. The story of Kemalist

feminism I offered in this dissertation is the story of this adaptation, that is, the relationship between women's activism and politics in general, and gender politics in particular.

At the beginning of my research there was, and there still is, very little research on Kemalist feminist activism. In women's and gender studies scholarship Kemalist feminists were either assimilated under egalitarian feminists (e.g. Y. Arat 1994) or not recognized as feminists at all (e.g. Erdoğan 2006; Çaha 2013). Similarly, Kemalist women's activism was not part of the history of women's activism in Turkey. As I put forth in Chapter 1, Kemalist women's and Kemalist feminist activism's omission from the women's and gender studies literature in Turkey was due to a number of reasons. One reason was that Kemalist women belonged to the oppressor group, whose "authoritarian modernist" (Sancar 2011, 12) feminism contributed to the perpetuation of the existing hierarchical relations between women in Turkey. The second, more important (but less visible) reason was that feminist scholars who researched and discussed Kemalism's gender project and the formation of Kemalist womanhood in the late 1980s and 1990s prioritized, in their analytical framework, the category of gender over the categories of class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion. Similarly, in their evaluation of Kemalist modernization, feminist scholars focused on its national/ethnic (Turkishness) and cultural/religious (laicism) dynamics at the expense of class and transnational processes that influenced it. Finally, feminist scholarship in Turkey grew alongside the intellectual efforts which criticized Kemalism as a nationalist modernization project from post-Marxist and post-structuralist/deconstructivist perspectives, therefore it focused more on discourses than on practices. In the aftermath of the 1980 military coup which claimed to reinstate Kemalism but which, in practice, eliminated leftist politics, Kemalism was perceived by many as the main obstacle in the way of Turkey's democratization. In the same vein, feminist scholars saw Kemalism's gender project as the primary source of gender equality in republican Turkey. This perspective led feminist scholars

of women's and gender studies to the conclusion that Kemalism and feminism were inherently incompatible with each other and that Kemalist women's activism did not serve women's liberation. As a result, the period between the dissolution of the TKB in 1935 and the (re-)emergence of feminist activism in the 1980s was, despite the boom of Kemalist women's organizations in this period, omitted from the history of women's activism as the "barren years" (Tekeli 1998) of women's movement.

This perspective of feminist scholars of the late 1980s and 1990s was also my own point of departure when I started my research on Kemalist feminists. Upon interviewing Kemalist feminists, however, I found out that most of them had politicized in the 1970s and a significant number of them pursued gender politics already before the 1980s. This information turned my attention to Kemalist women's activism before 1980. In fact, my inquiry into Kemalist women's activism in the multi-party period until 1980 revealed that the gender agenda Kemalist women developed from the late-1940s onwards remained a constitutive element of their feminist politics in the post-1980 period. As I examined in Chapter 4, with the introduction of the multi-party regime in 1946, Kemalist women organized with the aim of preserving women's acquired rights and raising awareness among Turkish women about the importance of being dutiful citizens. This was because, with the introduction of the multi-party regime, women's political representation had sharply decreased, discussions around women's rights had dropped out of the political agenda, and the Democrat Party's rise to power in 1950 had given a conservative turn to Turkish modernization, incorporating Islamic elements in the official Kemalist ideology. From the 1960s women's interests in Turkey differentiated based on politics of class and of culture/religion. In response to this Kemalist women sided with CHP's left-of-centre approach and canalized their collective efforts for furthering gender equality in Turkey. The late-1960s and 1970s saw the mobilization of Kemalist women in significant numbers in both woman-only organizations and CHP's

women's auxiliary. By the end of the 1970s, Kemalist women's demands included: Greater political representation for women, the recognition of women's unpaid labor at home, equal pay for equal work, revisions of the Civil Law and the Labor Law to eliminate legal discrimination against women, budget for family planning, and domestic workers' access to social security and pension (S. Çakır and Gülbahar, 1999).<sup>281</sup> Kemalist women's participation in international women's networks, the events organized around the UN International Women's Year (IWY) in 1975, and the emergence of women's studies as a discipline in Turkey in the late-1970s helped Kemalist women articulate their demands for women's rights and frame their gender agenda.

The findings of Chapter 4 challenged the view that there was no significant women's movement in Turkey until the 1980s. I showed instead that Kemalist women's activism was informed by both Kemalism and the ideas around women's emancipation. Kemalist women remained loyal to the Kemalist definition of women's interests based on laicism, nationalism, and modernism/westernism but they also, without embracing "feminism" as an ideology, challenged male domination and women's oppression and sought to further gender equality.

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I investigated the making of Kemalist feminism in the post-1980 period by focusing on, respectively, the development of Kemalist feminist ideas in relation to those of anti-system and egalitarian feminisms; Kemalist feminists' relationship with the state, civil society, and transnational governance; and their grassroots activism. In these chapters I showed that Kemalist feminist activism was both an effort to improve the social, political, and economic conditions of women in Turkey and a struggle to maintain Kemalism as a reference point in defining women's interests as a means to counter political Islam and Kurdish nationalism.

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<sup>281</sup> Even if there is no evidence that Kemalist women were informed by the second-wave feminist literature, some of these demands bring to mind the domestic labor debate of the 1970s.

From the late-1980s onwards leaders of Kemalist women's activism started to identify simultaneously as feminists, and synthesized feminist ideas with the Kemalist definition of women's interests. Kemalist feminism developed as a response to the differentiation of women's interests based on culture/religion and nation/ethnicity (but not on class) and to Turkey's adoption of the global gender equality agenda. As I mapped out in Chapter 5, the main characteristics of Kemalist feminism were a laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist understanding of women's rights, a self-demarcation from anti-system feminism and a strategic alliance with egalitarian feminism, an orientation towards influencing, challenging and/or complementing state policies, a solidaristic approach to the relationship between upper- and lower-class women, and simultaneous membership in woman-only and mixed-sex organizations. In Chapters 6 and 7, I analyzed how these characteristics played out in Kemalist feminists' participation in the politics of gender in Turkey throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

In the post-1980 political conjuncture, Islamism emerged as the main challenge to Kemalism's hegemony over the state and society. In response to the politicization of women's headscarf as the symbol of political Islam, laicism became the dominant theme in Kemalist feminist politics as the prerequisite of any discussion about women's rights. As opposed to the Islamist notions of gender segregation and complementarity between the sexes, Kemalist feminists favored a Western-liberal version of feminism which, by emphasizing women's individuality, stood for laicism and modernity. At the end of the 1990s Kemalist feminist Nermin Abadan-Unat summarized Kemalist women's political aims under three topics: Realizing male-female equality within the framework of human rights and democratic freedoms, and raising awareness in civil society and public administration to this end; preserving the principle of laicism without compromises as the primary safeguard of woman's status in an egalitarian society; and supporting the structural socioeconomic transformations

that will ensure woman's economic independence and enable her to become a citizen who has the awareness of freedom and egalitarian values (Abadan-Unat 1998, 331). By this time, Kemalist feminists also differentiated on the basis of their approach to globalization, capitalism, and the category of women's labor. While most Kemalist feminists adjusted their political agenda to Turkey's transition to neoliberalism, women in the left-Kemalist CKD and the social democratic CHP adopted a more critical view of the socio-economic repercussions of globalization and problematized women's unpaid domestic labor. Kemalist feminists disagreed with anti-system and egalitarian feminists over the root cause of women's oppression. Whereas anti-system and egalitarian feminists singled out patriarchy as the main source of gender inequality, Kemalist feminists saw tradition, religion, lack of education and access to economic resources as more prominent reasons of women's inferior position in society. Based on their view of patriarchy, Kemalist feminists criticized other—especially anti-system—feminists because of their support for covered women as well as Kurdish women's struggles for citizenship rights, and for their disloyalty to the Kemalist principles when they were in conflict with the feminist view of women's liberation. Yet, they formed a strategic alliance with egalitarian feminists for both groups aimed to influence, challenge and/or complement state policies towards women.

When Turkey adopted the global gender equality framework (CEDAW) in 1985, Kemalist women had been already for a decade (IWY) preparing to participate in policy-making processes. Since the mid-1980s, gender politics in Turkey has been shaped by what I called a tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society, and transnational governance (mainly the UN and the EU). As I showed in Chapter 6, Kemalist feminists in collaboration with egalitarian feminists have been among the most influential actors in this cooperation. During the 1990s Kemalist feminists' previous experiences in women's activism and their organic relationship with the state helped them to successfully enforce the global gender

equality agenda upon the institutional making of gender politics. At the same time, they pressed for a Kemalist definition of women's interests as a strategy to counter the growing popularity of Islamism and to maintain the field of gender politics as modern and laicist. In the 2000s, AKP's rise to power resulted in the gradual elimination of Kemalist cadres from the state and the exclusion of secular women's organizations from decision-making processes regarding gender policy. Kemalist feminists in this period relied more on the mechanisms of transnational governance and employed the language of women's human rights more rigorously in order to still retain some influence over the gender policies of the state. Having lost their organic ties with the state, they also took a more critical attitude towards its patriarchal nature and its relationship with women's organizations. They came to think, as one informant put it: "The women's movement needs to be independent. Neither adherence to the state nor to any other [male-dominant] institution will take us to the right place. ... The state is anyway a male-dominant state."<sup>282</sup>

In the 2000s, Kemalist feminists' engagement with the global gender equality regime enabled them to continue framing the notion of women's rights with reference to Kemalist principles, and to participate in the politics of gender thereof. At the same time, the parallel processes of Turkey's EU accession and the consolidation of the AKP's hegemony further differentiated women's interests based on culture/religion and nation/ethnicity. By this time, Islamist and Kurdish women's activism had grown stronger and become actors of the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society, and transnational governance. This unsettled Kemalist feminists' dominant position in the field of women's activism and led them to negotiate the terms of women's interests with Islamist and Kurdish women. During Turkey's EU-oriented gender equality legislation process, Kemalist and egalitarian feminists formed issue-based platforms as a means to participate in policy-making, which included

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<sup>282</sup> Interview with the IKBB member Nerma, 18 August 2011.

Islamist and Kurdish women's rights organizations. In these platforms Kemalist women translated the primacy of laicism, Islamist women the headscarf issue, and Kurdish women their ethnic identity-based demands into the language of women's human rights. According to Acar and Altunok, "different veins of the women's movement have found it easier to coalesce under the perceived 'neutrality' of the international standards, [and] these platforms enabled them to come together to promote gender equality and respond to specific developments or violations when need be" (2009, 26). On the other hand, the scope of women's issue-based platforms was limited to issues such as women's political representation, violence against women, and legal reforms to ensure gender equality, and did not include issues pertaining to women's religious and/or ethnic identities. Still, the question whether to coalesce with Islamist and Kurdish women in the struggle for gender equality divided Kemalist feminists from within; whereas some Kemalist feminists chose to remain in the issue-based platforms and compromised on their laicist and nationalist framing of women's rights, others refused to collaborate with Islamist and Kurdish women and/or opted out of engaging with the global gender equality agenda altogether.

Examining the strategies in which Kemalist feminists participated in the politics of gender in Turkey enables to see how women, when engaging in gender activism, simultaneously pursue a particular politics of class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion. Kemalist feminists perceived Islamist women's quest for participating in the public sphere with their headscarves as a sign of reactionism, anti-laicism and counter-revolutionism, and refused to discuss the headscarf issue with reference to rights. While they defended laicism and modernism/westernism as prerequisites of gender equality and thereby contested the Islamic view on gender relations, Turkish nationalism was present in the Kemalist feminist agenda in the form of a deliberate disregard of the Kurdish conflict. The very existence of Kurdish ethnic identity was recognized only by few organizations such as the CKD and CHP's

women's auxiliary, but even then only with references to tradition, reactionism, and regional underdevelopment. The state oppression of this identity, on the other hand, was not mentioned. In the 2000s, Kemalist feminists found it easier to coalesce with Kurdish women's rights organizations since they did not pose a challenge to the laicism and modernism/westernism principles of Kemalism, but only to the extent that Kurdish feminists did not bring up their ethnic identity-based claims.

As for the politics of class, social and economic inequalities found little room in the Kemalist feminist agenda. The Kemalist definition of women's interests was based on a solidaristic view of the relationship between women of different classes where urban, educated, professional middle-class women were responsible for educating and modernizing the lower-class, traditional and uneducated women. In line with this view, Kemalist feminists saw feminism as the well-educated, not oppressed women's task to further gender equality by teaching the women of the lower-classes their rights and how to use them. With the exception of those in the CKD and CHP's women's auxiliary, Kemalist feminists saw no necessary relationship between gender equality and the elimination of class inequalities. In fact, the minor status of class inequalities within feminist activism—with the exception of socialist feminists—was one of the things that made feminism attractive to many Kemalist women in the first place. Another factor that hampered the possibility of a greater focus on social and economic inequalities between women was the general marginalization of class-based politics in the post-1980 Turkish politics. This was the case especially within the Kemalist civil society, which, unlike the left-of-centre approach of the 1970s, interpreted class inequalities as a byproduct of political Islam and criticized globalization for perpetuating the rise of Islamism but not for its socio-economic repercussions. Finally, the global gender equality regime to which many Kemalist feminists subscribed made reference to class issues only in

terms of economic inclusion and thereby helped sustain the minor position of class issues in the Kemalist feminist agenda.

Notwithstanding the lack of a systematic problematization of social and economic inequalities in the Kemalist feminist agenda, class issues were highly relevant for Kemalist feminist politics. As I explored in Chapter 7, this was especially visible at the level of Kemalist women's grassroots activism where class differences between women were translated into cultural/religious and/or national/ethnic differences so as to maintain and reproduce Kemalist feminists' middle-class positioning within women's activism. In line with Turkey's engagement with the global gender equality regime, Kemalist feminists' (as well as Islamist and Kurdish women's) post-1980 grassroots activism was marked by the process of NGOization/project feminism. Just like the adoption of the global gender equality agenda, the process of NGOization functioned as a political opportunity structure for Kemalist feminists to articulate the notions of women's rights and women's empowerment in laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist terms. In the 1990s, when the notion of women's rights belonged to the mainstream of gender politics but still framed with reference to Kemalism, a significant number of women joined the ranks of Kemalist feminists, causing what Helms (2014) calls the "movementization of NGOs." Through projects funded mainly by transnational donors, Kemalist feminists invested their efforts into enabling the inclusion of lower-class, religious, and Kurdish women into public life by means of educating, modernizing, and Turkifying them. In the 2000s, processes of Europeanization and Islamization challenged Kemalist feminists' leading position within women's activism by facilitating the development of Islamist and Kurdish women's activism. In this period, having less state support for their grassroots activism, Kemalist feminists drew on the mechanisms of transnational governance more rigorously, adopted the form of project feminism as an immediate means to women's empowerment, and synchronized their gender politics further with the process of

neoliberalization of the economy and social relations. In so doing, they simultaneously supported women in becoming autonomous individuals in line with neoliberal thinking and sustained their middle-class positioning as women who educated and guided the rest of Turkish womanhood.

Kemalist feminists' grassroots activism was marked by their struggle for gender equality and against Islamism and Kurdish nationalism. Compared to their relationship with Islamist and Kurdish woman activists, Kemalist feminists' attitude towards lower-class covered and Kurdish women was remarkably different. Lower-class covered and Kurdish women, as addressees of Kemalist feminist grassroots activism did not challenge the Kemalist definition of the public sphere but sustained the purpose of Kemalist feminist politics. Kemalist feminists' opposition to the headscarf did not apply to the traditional headscarf that lower class urban women and women in rural areas and small towns wore. Unlike the traditional headscarf, the modern *türban* represented not only political Islam but also a new middle-class culture where women and men had, based on an Islamic worldview and the notion of complementarity, different roles than in Kemalism's gender project. Kemalist feminists, especially in the 2000s, resented the rise in the respectability and status of Islamist women who promoted this middle-class culture. As for Kurdish women, on the other hand, class played a role in relation to both culture/religion and nation/ethnicity. In the post-1980 period, both Islamists and Kemalists targeted lower-class Kurdish women's assimilation into Islamic and laicist versions of Turkishness, respectively. Thus, Kemalist feminists' efforts to educate, modernize, and Turkify lower-class Kurdish women was inseparable from their struggle against Islamism. Kemalist and Kurdish feminists agreed on a laicist notion of gender equality, but the former reproached the latter for supporting Kurdish nationalism and being insusceptible to the problems of lower-class Kurdish women. Kemalist feminists likewise interpreted ethnic-identity based political and cultural demands of Kurdish women as signs of

separatism. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the process of NGOization facilitated the reproduction of these class dynamics that informed Kemalist feminist politics.

Chapters 6 and 7 showed that the relationship between women's activism and statehood cannot be isolated from the greater framework of politics since women's activism is organically linked to not only gender politics but also the politics of class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion. In the case of Kemalist feminism, this required a simultaneous analysis of Kemalist feminists' membership in woman-only and mixed-sex organizations. In the early-republican era, defending women's political rights not in women's autonomous organizations but together with Kemalist men was one of the founding principles of Kemalist women's activism. In the multi-party period Kemalist women modified this principle and raised political demands in their woman-only organizing but also continued to pursue a gender agenda in mixed-sex organizations. Throughout the republican time, leaders of Kemalist women's activism often had membership in both woman-only and mixed-sex organizations. In the post-1980 period, many Kemalist feminists pursued gender politics simultaneously in the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society, and transnational governance, and in the Kemalist civil society.

The CHP, being one of the oldest and nation-wide Kemalist organizations, provided a good example for analyzing Kemalist women's multiple membership in woman-only and mixed-sex organizations. During the late-1960s and 1970s the CHP's left-of-centre approach in general and the gender agenda of its women's auxiliary in particular had greatly influenced and was influenced—to a lesser degree—by the politics of Kemalist woman-only organizations. Upon its re-establishment in 1996, the women's auxiliary never reached its pre-1980 mobilization and influence over the politics of gender in Turkey. In the meantime Kemalist women's organizations had already built their independent gender agenda in collaboration with egalitarian feminists and were involved in lobbying and grassroots activism

within the state-civil society-transnational governance framework. Thanks to Kemalist feminists' relations with and/or membership in the CHP, by the end of the 1990s the party's women's auxiliary had quickly adopted Kemalist feminists' agenda in its program and developed it further by including perspectives on women's unpaid labor. In return, Kemalist feminists' relationship with and/or membership in the CHP secured the respectable status of Kemalist woman-only organizing within the larger Kemalist movement. Kemalist feminists not only aimed to influence CHP's gender agenda but also drew on the party's political outlook in their woman-only activism. From the late-1980s onwards, Kemalist feminists employed the dual strategy of adhering to the global gender equality regime to further women's rights in Turkey and, at the same time, mobilized women (and men) in the greater Kemalist civil society for a Kemalist framing of women's rights. In the 2000s, the CHP's retreat into anti-Islamist politics and its failure to incorporate the Kemalist feminist agenda into its political program led Kemalist feminists to invest their efforts into building platforms within the Kemalist civil society, which operated in similar ways to women's issue-based platforms. The Republic Meetings were a result of these efforts where Kemalist feminists aimed to mobilize the Kemalist civil society in defense of a laic, nationalist, and modern Turkey, which was, in their view, the precondition of women's interests.

As a final point, it is important to note that the main characteristics of Kemalist feminism that I outlined and analyzed are not adopted and/or supported by every Kemalist women's organization or Kemalist feminist to the same degree. For the scope of this dissertation I investigated Kemalist feminism in terms of the gender, class, national/ethnic, and cultural/religious implications of Kemalist feminist politics, and did not focus on the particular political outlooks of different Kemalist women's organizations or individual political views of different Kemalist feminists. The analysis of Kemalist feminist politics was not differentiated by the three cities—Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir--included in the research,

either. The research material I presented in this dissertation suggests that different organizations and individual Kemalist feminists have diverging views on a wide range of topics including: Kemalism, feminism, laicism, Turkish nationalism, modernity, westernism, capitalism, globalization, the state, transnational governance, lobbying, grassroots activism, class relations, Islamism, headscarf/*türban*, Kurdish ethnic identity and Kurdish nationalism, and woman-only vs. mixed-sex organizing. Thus, these main characteristics should not be taken as absolute imperatives of Kemalist feminism but as commonly adopted political strategies of individual Kemalist feminists whose political views, outside the scope of gender activism, do not necessarily overlap. Similarly, the ways in which these strategies are realized change depending on the specificities of the political conjunctures in which Kemalist feminists pursue their gender politics.

## 8.2. Contribution to scholarship

As opposed to dominant Western feminist perspectives on women's activism in this dissertation I drew on a de-centered and intersectional methodology in order to analyze the relationship between women's activism and gender politics. In this section I reflect on the dissertation's contribution to the scholarship that informed my methodological-conceptual framework.

The dissertation's most significant contribution is to Turkish feminist historiography. Apart from the general inclusion of Kemalist women's activism as a brand of feminism in the feminist and gender studies scholarship on Turkey, my research contributes to an emerging body of feminist research that focuses on women's activism in the multi-party period until the 1980s. Since the late-1990s, there have been attempts to approach the history of women's activism in Turkey from a new angle. These were attempts by feminist scholars who are critical of Kemalism yet do not position themselves as against it, and as such they harbor the possibility of a more comprehensive historical perspective on women's activism. For instance,

in their recent article, Sancar and Akşit refer to all women's studies scholars as feminists (2011, 188). Doing so, the authors recognize the contribution of Kemalist women to the development of women's and gender studies in Turkey. Similarly, there are scholars who acknowledge a latent feminist awareness in women's activism of the pre-1980 period. Yaraman suggests, for example, that *Kadın Gazetesi* journal (1947–1979) was the proof of women's awareness of male domination, and argues that "even if not many in number, all gains [of women] are built upon such visible-invisible blocks [i.e. attempts], which find their way in the social subconscious" (1999, 100). In a similar vein, Sancar grants that women had, although in a clandestine manner, "a female awareness" of the "woman question" in the early stages of the multi-party period (2012, 292). From the 1960s, both Kemalist and socialist women organized against gender inequality, which they collectively recognized. According to Sancar this was possible because of the emergence of "community-oriented thinking" (*toplumculuk*) as a new perspective on social relations; both left-politics and feminism originated in this new thinking (2012, 300). Similarly, Yıldız Ecevit calls this period of women's activism "the restless years," implying that it foreshadowed feminist activism (2007, 192). Similarly, Sancar poses the question to what extent this period of women's activism was embraced by the women's movement that grew stronger in the post-1980 period so as to engender a manifestly feminist political agenda (2012, 301–303).

This new body of research does not openly challenge dominant Western feminist perspectives on women's activism and feminist organizing but it is in line with the de-centered approach I adopted in the dissertation. The perspective it offers has two interrelated implications for research on Kemalist women's and Kemalist feminist activism and also corresponds to the methodological-conceptual framework of this dissertation. The first of these implications is that Kemalist feminism, although it is a post-1980 phenomenon, can be understood comprehensively only by looking at women's activism in the multi-party period as

a whole. Kemalist women produced a certain brand of feminism, which was based on the evolution of their activism in the decades preceding 1980. Therefore, to outline the characteristics of Kemalist feminism it is necessary to include Kemalist women's pre-1980 activism in the analysis. For instance, IWY and the advent of the field of women's studies in Turkey have been as influential in the making of Kemalist feminism as was the emergence of feminist activism.

The second implication is that integrating the pre- and post-1980 periods in the analysis of the history of women's activism, as opposed to arguing that feminism was possible only in the post-1980 socio-political context makes it possible to rethink the emergence and development of different brands of feminist activism in relation to each other. This is not to argue that Kemalist women's pre-1980 activism was also a brand of feminism but to suggest that the transition from women's to feminist activism is complex and should be understood as a process rather than a clear delimitation. Looking at the continuities between the two seemingly unrelated phases of women's and feminist activism in Turkey can shed light on the common origins of different feminisms. Some of the significant feminist demands that are attributed to the post-1980 period had their roots in women's activism of the preceding decades. For example, all of the suggested amendments to the Civil Law by Kemalist women at the IWY-related Woman's Year Congress in 1975 were later adopted and further politicized by feminist activists in the post-1980 period. The newly emerging UN-led global gender equality agenda was greatly influential on Kemalist women's pre-1980 politics. As I examined in Chapter 6, in the post-1980 period, both Kemalist and egalitarian feminists adopted this agenda in their lobbying efforts to further gender equality. Similarly, feminist scholars in Turkish social science have been side by side first with Kemalist women, then with Kemalist feminists in the academia. For example, Hamide Topçuoğlu, the co-founder and later president of the Kemalist women's organization KASAD, was a member of the jury that

evaluated anti-system feminist Şirin Tekeli's thesis for associate professorship which focused on the political representation of women in modern Turkey (1977). This thesis was highly critical of the Kemalist notion of gender equality. Examples like this suggest that, instead of evaluating Kemalist women's gender politics in the pre-1980 period by their adoption of an explicit feminist terminology or its lack thereof, we might recognize different framings of gender equality and the demands for women's liberation without necessarily having to define a single origin for different brands of feminism in Turkey. This way, we can retrieve the history of nearly four decades of women's activism, and perhaps build a bridge between early-republican and post-1980 feminisms.

Methodologically, the dissertation contributes to the newly emerging field of intersectionality studies, especially to the sub-field that has to do with the application of an intersectional framework and investigation of intersectional dynamics (see Cho et al. 2013 in Chapter 2). My purpose in adopting an intersectional approach was to understand the entangled relationship between women's activism and gender politics, which not only meant not privileging gender when analyzing women's activism but also argued for the inseparability of gender from other categories of social relations. I particularly used the model developed by Walby (2009) where regimes of complex inequality such as gender, class, and ethnicity are co-constituted by and through each other simultaneously, with a focus on the domains of polity and civil society. The research findings, by showing how Kemalist women's framing of their politics changed over time alongside the changes in the intersections of these regimes, proved that each category takes all others as its environment. We see this more clearly in the post-1980 period when the actors of gender politics multiplied together with the politicization of ethnic and religious identities in Turkey and alongside the processes of globalization and Europeanization. Intersectionality enabled the analysis of Kemalist feminism with its gendered, class-based, national/ethnic and cultural/religious dynamics without prioritizing one

of them. Thus, it moved the analysis of Kemalist women's politics beyond the confines of the laicism-Islamism grand narrative in reference to which most feminist and gender research on Kemalist womanhood and Kemalist women's activism was conducted.

Another methodological contribution of the dissertation is to de-centered perspectives on women's activism that argue for moving away from taking the dominant forms and agendas of women's activism in the West as a reference point when evaluating women's activism and its relation to gender politics in the non-West and non-dominant West. In order to avoid the homogenization of the categories Western and non-Western, I used another axis of differentiation, dominant vs. non-dominant, in my analysis of Kemalist feminism. I thereby showed how, (1.) with regards to its location in a non-dominant world region, Kemalist feminism shared certain characteristics with other women's activisms (such as overlapping of its agenda with nationalist modernization projects, its investment in the cultural domain of national sovereignty, and its complex relationship with the West and concepts and ideas associated with the West); (2.) with regards to its dominant position in its local (i.e. national) context, it emphasized a universalist, state-oriented, gender-only agenda and marked other (i.e. Islamist and Kurdish) women's activisms in Turkey as particularistic.

In terms of the conceptual implications of an intersectional and de-centered methodology in the analysis of women's activism and gender politics, the dissertation contributes to feminist scholarship as follows.

As for the complex relationship between modernization, nationalism, and gender politics, findings of the research generally overlap with the feminist historical and social science literature on the Middle East region which suggest that (1.) the "woman question" has been at the heart of the debates on nationalism, modernization, and secularization, and (2.) women's struggle for rights evolve in parallel to nationalist modernization projects, resulting in a tension between women's citizenship rights and their identification with culture and

tradition. My first contribution to this literature is to show that, in the Turkish case, the notion of solidarity between women of different classes was very influential on women's inclusion in modernization processes. My second contribution is to trace the links between women's struggle for citizenship rights and transnational processes by pointing out that Kemalist women had started drawing on the politics of international women's networks much earlier than their adoption of the global gender equality regime in the late-1970s. For the post-1980 period, the research findings suggest that the status of women's public appearance as the representation of national culture has weakened as nation itself became a destabilized notion thanks to the political fragmentations along ethnic and religious belongings in the Middle East region. Also, Islamization and the questioning of Western modernity weakened the significance attributed to women's status and women's public appearance as a signifier of the level of modernity.

As for conceptualizations of citizenship and its relationship to women's public inclusion, the research findings are in line with the relevant feminist literature in that they show how, (1.) women's inclusion in the public sphere is conditioned by the dominant notions of citizenship, and (2.) the divisions within women's activism overlap with different conceptualizations of citizenship and thereby with class, national/ethnic and cultural/religious differences and hierarchies between women. In the post-1980 period the Kemalist notion of citizenship was seriously challenged by feminist, Islamist, Kurdish women in terms of women's public inclusion, exposing that what was once the condition of inclusion is in fact an obstacle to many women's full participation in public life. The tension between nationalism and women's citizenship in Kemalist women's activism became evident in this conjuncture where different interpretations of gendered citizenship based on religious and ethnic identity politics challenged the hegemony of the Kemalist discourse of women's rights. At the same time, globalization, ethnic and religious claims to citizenship on local, national and supra-state

levels made citizenship a very contested notion in the political field at large. As a common trend in the Middle East region and beyond, social and economic rights detached from the discussions on citizenship rights. These developments shaped Kemalist feminism; the Republic Meetings were an example of how Kemalist women sought women's gender interests and at the same time defended a politics of citizenship within which it was possible for them to seek these interests. The Kemalist framing of women's rights, in return, limited Kemalist feminists' willingness to problematize the unequal relations of gender within the family and to build cross-class and cross-ethnic alliances within women's activism.

The dissertation contributes to the gender and politics literature in a number of ways. First, by formulating women's activism as women's politics, it emphasizes the extent at which women's activism might be a direct, constitutive element not only of gender politics but also of politics at large. The research findings suggest that, instead of taking women's activism and male-dominant institutional politics as separate units and analyzing the former as a separate entity, doing away with the institutional-not institutional separation and looking at women's activism as a constituent of political history that is no less vital than, for example, party politics enables a more thorough analysis of women's activism. In a similar vein, by not prioritizing women-only organizations over mixed-sex organizations, the dissertation analyzed Kemalist women's activism from an angle that allowed to reveal that the framing of Kemalist women's gender politics drew on and influenced the politics in Kemalist mixed-sex organizations. This became, in return, another dimension of the "women's activism as women's politics" proposition.

A second contribution of the dissertation to the gender and politics literature is through the adoption of a broad definition of feminism as opposed to a narrow one based on white, middle-class, Western feminists' universalized assumptions about women's interests and feminist organizing. Apart from showing that feminisms are, whether they adopt a gender-

only agenda or not, underpinned by specific politics of class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion, the research findings point at the strategic function of avoiding and/or adopting the label "feminism" in women's pursuit of gender politics. Thus, there is no necessary link between identification with feminism and the extent at which a particular women's activism prioritizes women's strategic interests over their practical interests. In the case of Kemalist feminists, their preference for the language of women's (human) rights—instead of that of feminism—served a dual purpose. First, "women's rights" was a practical and convincing way of framing feminist demands. On the level of transnational governance, women's human rights were an imperative of the global gender equality regime. On the state level, feminist demands were less threatening when translated into a rights discourse because of Turkey's commitment to the global gender equality regime and the foundational status of "woman rights" in Turkish modernization. On the societal level, "women's rights advocacy" (*kadın hakları savunuculuğu*) was more acceptable than the politics of "separatist," "bra-burning," "man-hating," "bourgeois," "Western import" feminists, as they were often presented in both the mainstream and leftist media (see Ford-Smith 1997; Smith 2000; Heng 2000). Therefore, the potential of "women's rights advocacy" was much greater than "feminism" in terms of gaining the consent of the state and society in furthering gender equality. Second, Kemalist feminists claimed that a Kemalist, that is laicist, nationalist, and modernist/westernist definition of women's interests was in line with the "universality" of women's rights. In so doing, they labeled Islamist and Kurdish women's demands for greater inclusion in the public sphere as particularistic and divisive and therefore against the philosophy of women's rights.

In a similar vein, the research findings show that there is no necessary correlation between autonomous organizing and the pursuit of women's gender interests or women's empowerment. Women might organize in independent woman-only organizations or mixed-

sex organizations or both, depending on which forms of organizing better facilitates their pursuit of gender politics. This is a specific contribution to the recent debates around women's activism under state socialism and the questions of agency and autonomy in state-led mass organizations. The Turkish case suggests the applicability of these debates to a wider geography, namely to women's activism in other non-dominant world regions.

The dissertation's final contribution to the literature on gender and politics concerns the state-civil society relations that the dissertation took as the main site of interplay between women's activism and gender politics. The multiplicity of the actors of gender politics and the complexity of the relationship between these actors due to their differential politics of gender, class, nation/ethnicity, and culture/religion, proves the need to rethink the relationship between women's activism and the state beyond the autonomy vs. assimilation paradigm. The research findings show that, until the 2000s, Kemalist women's and Kemalist feminist activism was entangled with and supported by the Kemalist state. In the 2000s, the processes of Europeanization and Islamization disrupted the decades-long alliance between Kemalist women and the state. Yet, Kemalist feminists persistently defined women's interests in Kemalist terms and participated in the politics of gender by following new strategies that still targeted state policies towards women. Women's involvement in the tripartite cooperation between the state, civil society, and transnational governance as discussed in this dissertation confirms the need to analyze women's activism as part of internationalized statehood and through the lens of political opportunity structures. The dissertation thereby also contributes to the feminist debates on NGOization and women's activism.

### **8.3. Developments after 2011**

Political developments in Turkey and globally in the aftermath of my field research in 2011 imply that Kemalist feminists' above-mentioned commonly adopted political strategies to engage in gender politics will continue to inform their activism in the near future. Around the

time I finished my field research, the AKP came to power as a single-party government for the third time in a row. One of their first moves was to establish a new Ministry of Family and Social Policy (*Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı*) that replaced the State Ministry for Women and Social Affairs. The omission of the word "women" from the ministry's name received harsh criticism from feminists.<sup>283</sup> Since then the AKP took more rigorous steps towards "treating women predominantly as mothers and wives, as recipients of welfare rather than individuals in their own right" (Ilkcaracan 2012). After the EU-oriented reform period, gender equality legislation has seldom been on the AKP's agenda. The last legal gain feminist achieved in their involvement in the state-civil society-transnational governance triangle was the 2012 Law on Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women.<sup>284</sup> The KSGM, now operating under the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, closed its doors to secular women's rights organizations.<sup>285</sup> For example, Kemalist and egalitarian feminist organizations that previously participated in the state delegation in UN-related meetings were not invited to join the Beijing+20 meeting in 2015.<sup>286</sup> Instead, the AKP invested its efforts into creating government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs), which promoted its gender politics in the field of civil society. Islamist women's GONGOs, such as the Women and Democracy Association (*Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği*, foundation 2013), claim that the notion of "gender equity" is superior to the Western, universalistic notion of "gender equality," and more compatible with Turkish culture.<sup>287</sup> More recent gender policies of the AKP, especially after it extended its term in office for another four years after the

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<sup>283</sup> See Belge, "Kadın Bakanlığı Kaldırıldı, Kadın Örgütleri Öfkeli" (The Women's Ministry is Abolished, Women's Organizations Are Angry).

<sup>284</sup> See Library of Congress, "Turkey: Parliament Adopts Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence."

<sup>285</sup> See Sosyalist Feminist Kolektif, "Violence against women cannot be eradicated by ignoring the expertise and experience of women's organizations!"

<sup>286</sup> See Kadın Koalisyonu, "Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı Kadın Örgütlerini Uluslararası Siyasal Süreçlerden Dışlıyor" (The Ministry of Family and Social Policy Exclude Women's Organizations from International Political Processes).

<sup>287</sup> See Hürriyet, "KADEM Başkan Yardımcısı Sümeyye Erdoğan: 'Dünya tarihinde kadını ezen uygulamaları en çok Batı'da görürsünüz'" (KADEM's Vice President Sümeyye Erdoğan: 'The most oppressive practices towards women are seen in the West').

November 2015 elections, overly violated the laicism principle and thereby posed a threat to women's legal gains. These policies include the de-criminalization of religious marriage unaccompanied by formal marriage (see Kuyucu 2016) and the formation of a parliamentary commission to prevent the cases of divorce and to strengthen the family institution.<sup>288</sup> The post-2011 developments in Turkey's gender politics are part of a larger, global trend where religious and conservative political actors re-define the rights of women in non-feminist terms and against what they coined as the "gender ideology" (see Molyneux 2013; Kandiyoti 2015; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). They suggest that in the near future secular women's organizations in Turkey will have even lesser chances to exert direct influence on the gender policies of the state.

At the same time, AKP's increasingly conservative, anti-secular and anti-feminist gender politics mobilized thousands of women from different age groups and political belongings to participate in feminist activism. These women, even if they did not necessarily identify as "feminists" joined the protests and campaigns organized or joined by feminists. AKP's attempt to ban abortion in 2012, the Gezi-inspired protests in 2013, nation-wide protests against public sexual assault and femicide following the murder of the young university student Özgecan Aslan in 2015, and AKP's attempt to decriminalize child abuse in 2016 are some of the examples that particularly encouraged women—especially young women—to side with feminist politics. For many, feminism became synonymous with being, in one way or another, against the AKP and its gender politics. In the meantime, Kurdish women's activism gained momentum and further legitimacy as Kurdish feminist politicians gained more visibility in the local state (i.e. municipalities in the Kurdish region) as well as in

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<sup>288</sup> While the latter does not seem directly related to laicism, the policy report produced by the parliamentary commission includes measures such as giving religious personnel authorization to perform a formal marriage ceremony. See Kazete, "Müftülere nikah yetkisi TBMM'de" (Authorization for Muftis to Perform Marriage is Taken to the Parliament).

the Parliament.<sup>289</sup> Kurdish feminists' critique of Turkish nationalism and the ways in which it shapes feminist politics in Turkey led them to develop the notion of "Jineoloji," the "science of women" that builds on Kurdish women's collective struggle for liberation (Özgür Kadın Akademisi 2015; Düzgün 2016). Since 2015, state violence in the Kurdish region following the termination of the peace process between PKK and the Turkish state (see Weiss 2016; Ünal 2016) in general and the state oppression on Kurdish feminist organizations and members of the Parliament in particular triggered a stronger opposition against ethnic discrimination on the side of feminist politics.

In response to these developments, Kemalist feminists have softened the emphasis on Kemalism in framing their politics and adopted a discourse that is more explicitly feminist. The widening of the opposition against the AKP did not change the negative labelling of Kemalism that consolidated in the 2000s by the joint efforts of leftwing, liberal and Islamist intellectuals as well as of anti-systemic feminists. Similarly, although the defense of laicism was one of the main dynamics behind the recent feminist mobilization in Turkey, this did not result in the recruitment of young women in Kemalist women's organizations. Kemalist feminists in this period became more aware of the younger generation of feminists' preference for organizing in less hierarchical, horizontal, dynamic and flexible forms and their call for acknowledging and embracing the national/ethnic, cultural/religious, and sexual differences between women. The shift of emphasis from Atatürk's principles to those of feminism in the Kemalist feminist discourse should be interpreted as Kemalist feminists' effort to join and influence this most recent wave of feminist mobilization in Turkey.

Since 2011, Kemalist feminists have become more prominent figures in party politics. In 2010, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who had been serving as an MP since 2002, became the CHP's president. The new party leadership opened its doors to civil society including Kemalist

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<sup>289</sup> See Gültan Kışanak, Naje Al-Ali and Latif Tas, "Kurdish women's battle continues against state and patriarchy, says first female co-mayor of Diyarbakir. Interview."

women's organizations. One of the first tasks the new leadership undertook was the remobilization of the women's auxiliary. New members of the central administrative board of the women's auxiliary were mostly Kemalist feminists who had been away from the party during the former president Deniz Baykal's leadership. In 2012, the new central administrative board prepared new regulations for the women's auxiliary, which then provided it with more autonomy at all levels (CHP-KK 2012). For the elections in November 2015, the CHP nominated a number of Kemalist feminist candidates some of whom, such as Aylin Nazlıaka and the CKD's president Şenal Sarihan, became members of the parliament. The politics of gender that the party adopted in its most recent program encompassed most of the gender equality agenda that was commonly adopted by Kemalist and egalitarian feminists.<sup>290</sup> In the meantime, a new organization, the Women's Party (*Kadın Partisi*, KP), was founded in June 2014 by a group of Kemalist feminists who were previously members of the Association for the Support and Training of Women Candidates (Ka-Der). As an example of Kemalist feminists' quest to be involved in party politics while remaining autonomous, the KP defines its aim as a transition "from male democracy to real democracy."<sup>291</sup>

In the post-2011 period, feminists' altogether exclusion from the state strengthened the strategic alliance between different brands of feminism in Turkey. The further deepening of the laicism-Islamism polarization has made laicism one of the overarching themes of the greater social opposition, diminishing, for the time being, the importance of antagonisms based on other categories of social inequality such as nation/ethnicity and sexuality in oppositional political discourses. AKP's neoliberal-neoconservative project has become threatening for both Kemalist and Kurdish political movements—albeit differently and rather unequally. In this context, Kemalist feminists' weakened emphasis on Kemalism gave them a

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<sup>290</sup> See Elçik, "Seçim Beyannamelerinde 'Kadınlarımız/Kadınlarla/Kadınlar Olarak'" ('Our Women/With Women/As Women' in Elections Declarations) and "Seçim Beyannamelerinde Aile ve Bakım Hizmetleri" (Family and Care Services in Elections Declarations).

<sup>291</sup> See Kadın Partisi (Women's Party).

greater capacity to form alliances with feminists across the political spectrum. Following the Gezi-inspired protests, a broad feminist alliance joined by Kemalist, Islamist and Kurdish women's organizations reiterated their demand for an egalitarian constitution (TKB 2013). Now showing a greater recognition of the Kurdish conflict, Kemalist women's organizations became signatories to joint petitions by Turkish and Kurdish feminists calling for its peaceful resolution.<sup>292</sup> Kemalist feminists also continue in their efforts to adopt the global gender equality regime and thereby to take part in the state-civil society-transnational governance framework, this time with more willingness to include in their agenda issues such as the rights of LBT women and Kurdish women's right to education in mother tongue.<sup>293</sup>

The post-2011 developments suggest that, once again, Kemalist feminists adapt their strategies of furthering gender equality in Turkey to new political contexts in general and new dynamics of gender politics in particular. The Kemalist definition of women's interest, although its specific framing is subject to change, remains to be a foundational basis of their gender struggle. In the coming years, Kemalist feminist activism will continue to be an influential actor in Turkey's gender politics and, as such, to offer a crucial insight into the relationship between women's activism and the politics of gender.

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<sup>292</sup> See, for example, Kadın Koalisyonu, "Joint Declaration of Women's and LGBTI Organizations for Peace"

<sup>293</sup> These topics were included, for example, in the seventh period shadow report of Turkey submitted to the CEDAW Committee. See KaosGL, "Kadınlar CEDAW 7. Dönem Gölge Rapor taslağını tartıştı" (Women Discussed the Draft 7th Period Shadow Report for CEDAW). See also AWID, "Joint Declaration of Women's and LGBTI Organizations for Peace in Turkey."

## Appendix: List of Organizations

- Anatolian National Awakening and Solidarity Platform (*Anadolu Ulusal Uyanış ve Dayanışma Platformu*, AUUDP). Kemalist mixed-sex platform founded by 11 Kemalist women's organizations in 2005, reaching 103 woman-only and mixed-sex associations and platforms in 2008.
- Association for the Support and Training of Women Candidates (*Kadın Adayları Destekleme ve Eğitim Derneği*, Ka-Der). Feminist organization founded in 1997.
- Association for the Preservation of Women's Rights (*Kadın Haklarını Koruma Derneği*, KHKD). Kemalist woman-only association founded in 1954.
- Association for the Research and Investigation of Woman's Social Life (*Kadının Sosyal Hayatını Araştırma ve İnceleme Derneği*, KASAİD). Kemalist woman-only association founded in 1953.
- Association for the Support of Modern Life (*Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği*, ÇYDD). Kemalist woman-only association founded in 1989.
- Association of Turkish University Women (*Türk Üniversiteli Kadınlar Derneği*, TÜKD). Kemalist woman-only association founded in 1949. Member of International Federation of University Women since 1953.
- Association of Turkish Women's Council (*Türk Kadınlar Konseyi Derneği*, TKKD). Kemalist woman-only association founded in 1959. Member of the International Council of Women since 1973.
- Atatürkist Thought Association (*Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği*, ADD). Kemalist mixed-sex association founded in 1989.
- Federation of Turkish Women's Associations (*Türkiye Kadın Dernekleri Federasyonu*, TKDF). Kemalist woman-only federation founded in 1976. Member organizations include the KHKD, the TKKD, the TÜKD, and the KASAİD.

- Istanbul Union of Women's Organizations (*Istanbul Kadın Kuruluşları Birliği*, IKKB). Kemalist woman-only organization founded in 1994. An umbrella organization for Kemalist women's organizations in Istanbul.
- Izmir Union of Women's Organizations (*Izmir Kadın Kuruluşları Birliği*, IKKB). Kemalist woman-only organization founded in 2003. An umbrella organization for Kemalist women's organizations in Izmir.
- Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP). Kemalist mixed-sex political party founded in 1924.
- Republican Women's Association (*Cumhuriyet Kadınları Derneği*, CKD). Kemalist woman-only association founded in 1997.
- Turkish Bars Women's Commissions Network (*Türkiye Barolar Birliği Kadın Hukuku Komisyonu*, TÜBAKKOM). A network for the women's commissions of bars associations in Turkey founded by Kemalist feminists in 1999.
- Turkish Jurist Women's Association (*Türk Hukukçu Kadınlar Derneği*, THKD). Kemalist woman-only association founded in 1968. Member of the Fédération Internationale des Femmes des Carrières Juridiques since foundation.
- Turkish Women's Association (*Türk Kadınlar Birliği*, TKB). Kemalist woman-only association founded in 1924.
- Women's Party Initiative (*Kadın Partisi Girişimi*, KPG) Kemalist woman-only initiative founded in 2009.
- Women's Research Association (*Kadın Araştırmaları Derneği*, KAD). Kemalist woman-only association founded in 1990.
- Workers' Party (*İşçi Partisi*, IP). Kemalist mixed-sex political party founded in 1992.

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### List of interviews

- Interview with Banu, member of Ka-Der, 4 April 2011.
- Interview with Selma, member of ÇYDD, 5 April 2011.
- Interview with Filiz, member of CHP and a number of other women's and feminist organizations, previously member of TKB, 8 and 13 April 2011.
- Interview with Ufuk, member of TKB, CHP and a number of other women's organizations, 13 April 2011.
- Interview with Ayşe, member of TÜKD and a number of other women's and feminist organizations, previously member of Ka-Der, 20 April 2011.
- Interview with Sevinç, member of CHP, 21 April 2011.
- Interview with Serpil, member of Ka-Der and CHP, previously member of the KASAID, 25 April 2011.
- Interview with Handan, member of CKD and TÜBAKKOM, 26 April 2011.
- Interview with Sema, member of TKDF, 27 April 2011.
- Interview with Gamze, member of KASAID, previously member of CHP, 11 May 2011.

- Interview with Sibel, member of CKD and IP, previously member of a feminist organization, 17 May 2011.
- Interview with Ümit, member of TKB and CHP, 18 May 2011.
- Interview with Sevil, member of Ka-Der, KPG, ADD, and CHP, 21 June 2011.
- Interview with Nalan, member of IKKB (Istanbul), TÜKD, THKD, TÜBAKKOM, and TKB, 22 June 2011.
- Interview with Özden, member of ÇYDD, 27 June 2011.
- Interview with Şule, member of Ka-Der, GIRKADE, KHKD, IKKB (Izmir), and a number of other women's organizations, previously member of a number of social democratic political parties, 28 June 2011.
- Interview with Beyhan, member of CHP, ÇYDD and a number of other women's organizations, 29 June 2011.
- Interview with Gaye, member of CHP, ÇYDD, IKKB (Izmir) and a number of other women's organizations, 30 June 2011.
- Interview with Gülsev, member of CHP and a number of women's organizations, 30 June 2011.
- Interview with Nermin, member of KHKD, previously member of Ka-Der and IKKB (Izmir), 1 July 2011.
- Interview with Pınar, member of KHKD and CHP, 1 July 2011.
- Interview with Lale, member of TKB, 2 July 2011.
- Interview with Şafak, member of CKD, IP and ADD, 12 July 2011.
- Interview with Aydan, member of the CHP and a number of feminist organizations, 14 July 2011.
- Interview with Derya, member of TÜKD and AUUDP, 20 July 2011.
- Interview with Nerma, member of IKKB (Istanbul), TÜBAKKOM, THKD, TÜKD, KAD and a number of transnational women's networks, 18 August 2011.
- Interview with Münire Dağ, the president of Adana Women's Shelter and Association for Solidarity/Consultation (*Adana Kadın Da(ya)nışma ve Sığınma Evi Derneği*), 4 May 2011
- Interview with Ayşe Ayata, professor of political science at the Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 19 July 2011.
- Interview with Yaprak Zihnioğlu, feminist researcher, personal correspondence via email, 15 December 2014.