FEMINIST RESISTANCE TO VIOLENCE: COVERAGE OF RADICAL FEMINIST MEDIA IN TURKEY*

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse how the radical feminist media cover the issue of violence against women and how it relates violence in a general context from militarism and state violence. Pazartesi and Amargi, two radical feminist magazines, play a significant role in the Turkish alternative media. Although the feminist critique of violence primarily covers violence against women, the feminist movement and media with the breeze of third wave feminism are not indifferent to the problem of state violence and militarism, and represent conscientious objection and the anti-war movement.

Key words: Violence against women, militarism, antimilitarist feminism.

Resumen

Este artículo intenta analizar cómo los medios de comunicación radicales cubren la temática de la violencia contra las mujeres y la vinculan al militarismo y la violencia de estado. Se destacan dos revistas feministas radicales, Pazartesi y Amargi, las cuales juegan un papel importante entre los medios alternativos turcos. Aunque la crítica feminista de la violencia cubra primordialmente el tema de la violencia contra la mujer, estas publicaciones, no ajenas al feminismo de la tercera ola, prestan atención igualmente a la violencia de estado y al militarismo, y presentan una postura crítica de objeción y oposición a la guerra.

Palabras clave: violencia contra las mujeres, militarismo, feminismo antimilitarista.

The contemporary feminist movement in Turkey first emerged in the late 1980s with street rallies against domestic violence. This has been a very successful and effective campaign accompanied by many activities setting the agenda of the movement until today. The priority of the movement in the second half of the 1980s was raising public awareness of domestic violence and sexual harassment. The feminist movement in Turkey went a long way in combating violence against women both as a concept and practically\(^1\). By the end of the 1980s and the 1990s, the feminist movement tended to form sustainable and long lasting organisations which Bora and Gunal have noted as a «period of institutionalising» and «project
based feminism». Since then, gender equality and violence against women have been uniting focal points of the women’s movement and the feminist media in the country. The contemporary women’s movement in Turkey has evolved from «egalitarian feminism» to «feminism of difference». Those who take the first stand do not question militarist culture and state violence in Turkey. They comfortably articulate secular Kemalist ideology and Turkish nationalism I would categorise radical feminist media as a representative of «feminism of difference».

The representation of women and gender issues in the media have become major focal points for the feminist movement, and this, in turn, has also led to greater gender sensitivity in the mainstream media which tend to sensationalise cases of violence against women. Today the radical feminist media in Turkey have connections with three emerging dynamic movements. Firstly, the second and the third wave of feminism in Turkey have made feminists more aware of their differences in terms of ethnicity and their political or religious standing in addition to emphasising their common goals. Secondly, in the 1990’s, feminist literature and women’s studies courses and programs trained a new generation of feminists inspired by post-structuralist and post colonialist studies. Thirdly, after the internal division of feminism, the socio-political dynamics of the country, made feminists more aware that women from different backgrounds may have a common platform to act together for gender equality against the patriarchal male coalition. Starting from the 1990’s, the feminist movement no longer has only one strong homogenous voice with the emergence of Islamist, Kemalist and Kurdish feminism, in other words feminism of difference. It is possible to say that there are many women’s groups and many feminisms in Turkey today. Since the 1990’s, the feminist movement in Turkey has more international and global contact with governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Violence against women, including domestic and sexual violence; rape; incest; virginity tests and prostitution has been taken as a broad concept by the feminist media. Sometimes premarital and extra-marital sexual contact; adultery; living alone; and wearing or not wearing a head scarf, makes a woman a potential target of violence. The perpetrators of violence may be family members (particularly in the case of honour killings); school principals: administrators in educational and public institutions; and police officers, who may see themselves as responsible for ensuring the chastity of women by maintaining and exercising control over a woman’s body and female sexuality. However my aim is to show in this article how

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8 I am grateful to James Edwards, for helpful comment and suggestions term of grammar and language.
specific conditions of the country, have made the feminist media cover violence as a multidimensional and complicated phenomena with ethnic and militarist aspects.

The Jamaican diplomat and scholar Lucille Mathurin Mair noted in Nairobi at the third UN conference of women in 1985, «...violence follows an ideological continuum, starting from the domestic sphere where it is tolerated, if not positively accepted. It then moves to the public...»4. This is the framework in which I would like to discuss the issue of violence in the feminist media.

As a peace journalist J. Galtung has stated, «...violence is any act that limits human self realisation»5. Again, as Michael Howard puts it, militarisation is the perception of militarist values as main cultural values of all society6. In Turkey the daily culture has been militarised so heavily that it is getting hard to talk about civil practices. Human Rights Watch’s annual report notes that police initiated violence cases are increasing in the country7. As Cockburn suggests militarised masculine culture has put a mental and physical gender line between women’s and men’s lives8. I will expand the antimilitarist reaction of feminist media in the course of the article.

In this article I aim to show the gradually changing perspective of the feminist movement (and the feminist media) on violence that extends their perspective to state violence and its specific forms. I will use the contents of Pazarlesi and Amargi as two leading radical feminist examples in the alternative media in Turkey9. Feminist media (in collaboration with the feminist movement) have developed some sensitivity towards such issues as militarism, terrorism, state violence, and ethnic violence since the 1990s. In turn the expanding sensitivity to violence of the radical feminist media also expands audience groups from women to the groups like LGBTTs, and male initiatives questioning masculinities and other gender issues. Although women’s suffering has much in common with those areas, it can be said that the feminist media have turned their focus from «domestic violence» to «symbolic violence», «a culture of violence» or «public violence».

It should be noted here that the feminist media in Turkey have never fallen into the trap of representing cases of violence against women (especially murders and honour killing) as individual disorders or mental problems as the mainstream

9 There are two new feminist magazines in Turkey: Feminist Yakıslımalar (Feminist Approaches) is a four monthly electronic magazine. See http://www.feministyakıslımalar.org Feminist Politika (Feminist Politics) is three monthly hard copy magazine published by a socialist feminist collective. Since I have covered the leading examples of feminist media I have not included analysis of these magazines: these can be studied in another article.
media usually do, but as political issues. However the feminist media to some extent have taught the mainstream media to handle honour killings and domestic violence more carefully. Currently there is the systematic murder of women taking place in Turkey. Male violence killed 217; women in 2010; 17 women in January 2011; 28 women in February 2011; and 24 women in March 2011. Many of the murderers were former husbands or partners of those women. The reaction of women against the murder of women and honour killing is becoming more noticeable and more systematic. On the International Day of Violence Against Women, The Women Platform came up with slogans such as: «We are rebelling against the murder of women» and organised guerrilla activity covering a building with this banner. They also protested Turkish Prime minister, R. Tayyip Erdogan who gave a speech in Womanist Conference and said that he did not believe in gender equality. They raised banners saying «As it is said we are not equal we get murdered more» and «The love of men kills 3 women every day». Ankara Women's Platform members protested the murder of women by wearing black clothes of mourning and stating «life is our right, honour is your problem».

Many major legal changes regarding violence against women in Turkey have taken place in the framework of Turkey’s EU membership. Between 2001-2004 the Civil Code, Penal code and Labour Law have been amended in the Turkish Parliament. In the amendments sexual violence against women has been described as a «crime against the individual» rather than a «crime against society». Many other new regulations such as banning virginity tests, sexual harassment in the work place and marital rape have been included and defined in the amended Penal Code. During the amendments Turkish women’s organisations established a monitoring committee to follow up on the changes. Both secular, egalitarian and radical feminist and women’s organisations supported gender equality related issues in EU negotiations period not because they are EU obligations but because Turkey needs these changes regardless. Işık, a Turkish feminist activist, in an interview notes that the Turkish agenda of EU membership provided a good opportunity for women to lobby for regulations and changes relating to violence against women. The European Commission’s Turkey Progress Report gives credit to some recent development but also
draws attention to two important issues: a) the increase in honour killings and lack of sheltering for women who are victims of violence; b) lack of resources and measurable targets in implementing the national action plan on gender equality and violence against women.

**PAZARTEŞI: POPULARISING THE POLITICAL AND POLITICISING THE POPULAR**

*Pazarteşi* was published for the first time in 1995. It has introduced «political intervention» into the agenda and has enjoyed a very high circulation. *Pazarteşi* is an early example of Turkish alternative media from a radical «marginal feminist perspective», which brings together Islamist, Kurdish and Turkish feminists from different classes and regions for the first time. In this sense *Pazarteşi* contributed to the public debate on the culture of difference and has raised a feminist voice on the Kurdish problem and on Islamic practices by representing women’s voices from diverse backgrounds. That was the period where feminism in Turkey became feminisms. This division made the radical feminist movement and the media more inclusive, and open toward all minorities among women in Turkey.

Furthermore, *Pazarteşi* brought together, within its radical feminist critique, not just the conservative and neo-liberal policies from a feminist perspective, but also popular culture. Popular cultural products and names are the raw materials of *Pazarteşis* political discourse. *Pazarteşi* sometimes carried out a feminist analysis of high profile pop singers, anchor-men and TV programmes. As Yesim Arat emphasises, *Pazarteşi*, has «challenged the borders of the political» on the one hand, and politicised popular culture containing feminist criticism on the other.

Pazarteşi also brought a new journalism practice initiated by feminist women. According to Seckin, *Pazarteşi* has taken a uncompromising position on women’s activities rather than adopting professional journalistic objectivity. *Pazarteşis* ed-
Editorial priorities can be understood from its first issues, for instance its back cover is almost always allocated to messages against violence.26

Pazartesi’s perspective or portfolio is not limited to domestic violence but also explores the violence applied by the authorities and security forces; some women were kidnapped and harassed by «unknown» people in the second half of the 1990s. Most of those women have leftist and Kurdish backgrounds in various organisations. By giving importance to such news Pazartesi courageously took a stand against all kinds of institutionalised violence which actually fills a gap in the media in general.

Women who are caught in the midst of an ethnic conflict in the South East of Turkey have been placed on the pages of Pazartesi. It regularly reports on the victimisation of women in the Kurdish regions due to the armed conflict. The editorial of the 100th issue of Pazartesi also commented on the armed conflict in the South-East as follows: «This magazine has tried to take sides against the war that has been taking place before all of us. ...As much as fighting against gender blindness, this magazine has tried to increase awareness against the otherisation of the oppressed nation’s women»27. Now there are additionally Kurdish women’s journals, a women’s movement and Kurdish women studies literature.

AMARGI28

Amargi describes its main function as an: «expanding political theoretical feminist magazine» which makes it different from Pazartesi, which depicts «the feminist interpretation of popular culture». Being aware of anything done by women and for women is not, by itself a feminist act for Amargi. Pazartesi, in this sense at least at the beginning, was more women’s magazine rather than feminist magazine. In other words, Amargi makes a distinction between women’s activities and feminist activism. The motivation of Amargi derives from its feminist interpretation of hard news or the political agenda of the country.

In each issue, Amargi deals with a specific theme on subjects as wide ranging as: the headscarf problem; the body politic; the modernism project of creating an «other» in Turkey; local elections; women’s participation in local governments; prostitution; sexual slavery; the masculine double standard on moral codes toward women’s honour; gendered citizenship rights; poverty; project-based feminism; sexual orientations; motherhood and aging. As the first editorial of the magazine stated:

26 Here are some examples from back cover page headlines of Pazartesi: «Who is going to calm us down!», «We won’t forget, we won’t let it be forgotten, we won’t forgive!», «Let’s make it (Violence Against Women) stop!», «I hear, I see and I do not stop speaking out!». Almost 40 per cent of the magazine’s issues have examined crime and violence against women on the front or back cover pages.

27 B. Seçkin, op. cit., p. 5.

28 Amargi is a Summerian word, meaning «freedom» and «returning back to mother». See http://www.amargi.org. Amargi is a women’s institute established in 2005 with a quarterly magazine that carries the same title. It is a non hierarchical women’s group debating masculine reason or patriarchy in philosophy, political life and daily practices.
those who benefit from feminist theory through an analysis of the empowerment of women, women’s human rights, and the struggle against poverty, etc. «should not feel marginalised».

Parlar and Mutluer in Amargi remind readers that the recent history of Turkey reads like a “diary of violence”39. They add that the normalisation of violence in Turkey represents a manipulation initiated by the status quo. as they put it: «If the public opinion had not normalised violence in the South East of Turkey, that violence would have been called war». As a response to this ongoing violence in Turkey, in November 2007, 122 women from different professions signed a declaration entitled «we have made a commitment to peace30». The second issue of Amargi was devoted to militarism and the expanded borders of militarism from army service to the depiction of masculinity31. Selek32, in Amargi, underlined that the feminist anti-war stance should not be limited to policy making for oppressed peoples, and that women should discuss the way they march in rallies, the use of flags and banners, and what they wear. According to Selek, men do not openly describe their military service experiences; «They do not talk about how they feel diminished under the cruel slaps of militarism and life»33.

As Cynthia Enloe notes, militarisation is a deeply gendered process in which certain forms of masculinity and femininity work. In other words, militarisation needs the approval of both genders while privileging men against women34. As Enloe puts it, militarised manoeuvres cannot be successful unless they receive women’s approval35. Militarism can work harmoniously with other forms of oppressive systems like nationalism and racism. Militarised areas separate both lands and minds by barbed wires, mines or ideologies36. As Saigol has remarked, within militarised cultures, concepts such as «strategy», «action plan» and «target» become regular words within other modern-civil institutions as well. Eventually, militarised-violence remains invisible

30 For more information http://www.vaktigeldi.org.
32 A Turkish court acquitted Pinar Selek on terrorism through bringing allegations related to national security charges. She had been cleared three times before, however the authorities continue to push for criminal sanctions against Pinar Selek. She has been accused of causing explosion at an Istanbul Spice Market in 1998 that killed seven people. However for many international and local intellectuals and activists Selek’s real crime was to have been in contact with Kurdish separatist groups as part of her academic research. Selek’s case is an internationally monitored human right violation. Prosecutors have appealed the not-guilty verdict, many people have signed the petition saying that they are witnesses of Selek’s innocence and international human rights organisations warned that according to the European Convention on Human Rights, everyone has the right to a fair trial in a reasonable time.
since it is deeply internalised by societal daily practices\textsuperscript{37}. Women’s problems with security «reveals a complex interrelation between militarism, war impoverishment and unequal distribution of resources and unequal life choices» according to Pettman\textsuperscript{38}. Both \textit{Pazartesi} and \textit{Amargi} have published such writers, activists or organisations on their pages like Cockburn, Enloe, Women in Black, Greenham Common Women, and Winpeace. «Men-military» versus «women-protected» binary opposition as Pettman suggested creates a gender relation where women directly or indirectly support militarisation\textsuperscript{39}. «Danger comes to women in many forms, and often at or close to home. Chivalry and ‘protection’ never guarantee safety»\textsuperscript{40}.

FEMINISM, MILITARISM AND HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

Representation is a central question in cultural theory, «both as a political and as an epistemological» outlook\textsuperscript{41}. To me, feminist media outlets are born of the need to make marginalised groups’ voices heard\textsuperscript{42}. Media discourse is also driven by all existing discourses \textsuperscript{43} and it is intertextual\textsuperscript{44}. Representing the variety of violence within the framework of third wave feminism, radical feminist media expands the definitions, forms, patterns and analysis of gendered violence in the country and globe. This is more so in \textit{Amargi} than \textit{Pazartesi}.

In Turkey where military service is obligatory, public opinion recently has been introduced to the concept of conscientious objections. Conscientious objectors are being arrested and imprisoned by military authorities. Starting from the second half of 1990s, female conscientious objectors spoke out in the feminist media. In the news entitled «Yes women object too» antimilitarist women talk in \textit{Pazartesi}\textsuperscript{45}. A female conscientious objector Nazan Askeran says «I do not want to be a threat to any living creatures who will inhabit the planet in the future... I do object to this militarist mentality which surrounds our lives». İnci Ağlagül says «As I remain silent I would be part of the guilt»\textsuperscript{46}.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibidem}, p. 148.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibidem}.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibidem}.
\textsuperscript{44} N. Fairclough, \textit{Media Discourse}. London, Arnold, 1995.
Another form of military related violence covered by the radical feminist media is fed by the debates of motherhood. Ethnic violence in Turkey created a dichotomy of «mothers of martyrs» versus «mothers of guerillas» each excludes the others. *Saturday Mothers* is a civil disobedience movement led by women who have quietly sat in protest in Istanbul since the 27th of May 1995, against arrests and killings associated with the Kurdish problem, making this the longest continuous protest in Turkey. Many women have been politicised within the search for their missing children. According to Yurtsever this experience pushed women to question their traditional gender roles. As Sirman noted, motherhood is the way for women to earn their rights of citizenship by providing soldiers or fighters for militarist and nationalist projects.

Another form of violence can be named as state supported violence. Turkish activist and lawyer Eren Keskin says violence is a state policy in Turkey, not only torture by the security forces but also attorneys, doctors, judges who ignore the evidence of violence have been contributing to the existing violence culture. Despite reports by women of rapes carried out by security forces in Turkey, Keskin states that not one single person has so far been prosecuted.

It is no coincidence that as feminist analysis and criticism has developed, militarism has been questioned more. The feminist media discourse could not have been indifferent to all the surrounding discourses. By this, I mean, the feminist movement inevitably found itself involved in an anti-militarist discourse which questions the use of masculine violence as being protective to women. Considering militarism is attached to masculinities it is not surprising that feminist criticism deals with militarism and nationalism in this highly militarised culture.

Transnational feminisms are engaged in bridging dialogues and alliances in the world for peace, security and conflict resolution. Third world feminism like the examples in Turkey has developed and formulated culturally specific «feminist concerns and strategies». The feminist media in Turkey tend to see violence against women not as a culturally specific problem, but as part of the global patriarchal oppression. In addition to this the feminist media do not give credit to the discourse «women are naturally peace makers». However as Ulker noted in Amargi feminists are antimilitarist since they are against all kind of violence. They underline the global and regional nature of the violence against women throughout the Middle

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East. Today, the feminist media are getting more and more eager to analyse such violence-related issues as militarism, terrorism and post-colonialist relations.

The discourse of the mainstream media is fed by power relations, status quo politics, and ideological issues. In this sense, the mainstream media play a very important role in militarising society by sanctioning violence, nevertheless Turkish feminists see «the deep connection between violence and politics»54.

The feminist media in Turkey has been transformed within the country’s «culture of violence» so that the issues of all groups of oppressed women such as Kurdish women, minority non-Muslim women, and LGBTTT people are covered. In the late 1990s Turkish feminism became more engaged in anti-militarism and in the ethnic conflict in South Eastern Anatolia. In other words, the feminist media have shifted their focus from women’s issues to more gender-related issues that are part of the culture of violence in Turkey. This is seen more in Amargi since it is a more third wave feminist publication in terms of content in comparison to Pazartesi.

The feminist media have also become more generous in representing gender identities which are subjected to violence, nationalism and militarism. All sexual orientations and preferences are now more and more visible in the feminist media. Men and women who question masculinites55, homophobia, conscientious objectors, different identities and groups of men and women are being represented. Altınay in Amargi remarks that when other gender identities join their forces with feminism, sexual politics goes towards a creative and liberal analysis56.

Alfred Vagts, by dividing civil militarism and military militarism, defines the former one as the army’s influence on civic life, celebrating and integrating military values in political and social life.

Vagts57 notes that «militarism expands in ‘peace time’ rather than war time». Civil militarism embraces hierarchy and attaches masculinity to violence and femininity to the need of protection58.

CONCLUSION

Having lived in a highly militarised culture, both in the army and the civil society sense, the ears of Turkish feminists are wide open to the calls of all non-violent and anti-militarist groups and initiatives like anti-war activists, pacifists,

and anti-globalists. There are many young feminist activists who are engaged in anti-militarism and related issues. Selek and Altınay state that Turkish society needs peace and peace needs a feminist perspective.

Feminism in Turkey, by enlarging its focus of violence, is getting to know political activism better and better and bringing together different groups and identities. Unlike the egalitarian feminism, feminism that recognises the differences among women and focusing on the analysis of gender within general power relations will bring a wider front of action. This new feminism and media stand on gender differences rather than discrimination against women. I believe that feminism and all alternative equality-seeking movements will lead to a «radical pluralist democracy» that may give voices to those who are pushed to the margins, suppressed and subordinated, such as gays, lesbians, environmentalists, women, black people and so on, without privileging any one group over the others and by not putting a hierarchical relationship between them.