

Feminist Resistance to Violence in the Media in Turkey

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The feminist movement in Turkey first emerged in the late 1980s, with a street rally against domestic violence. This was a very successful campaign accompanied by many activities setting the agenda of the movement. The priority of the movement in the second half of the 1980s was raising awareness among women about domestic violence and sexual harassment. By the end of the 1980s, the feminist movement tended to form sustainable and long lasting organizations.

As Bora and Gunal have noted, the feminist movement in Turkey was marked as a 'period of institutionalizing' and "project based feminism" during the 1990s (2002, p. 8). Since then, the representation of women and gender issues in the media have become major focal points of the feminist movement, and this, in turn, has led to greater gender sensitivity in the mainstream media¹. The 1990s was a period of feminist publications, translations from Western academic literature and also long lasting feminist magazines.

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... (Moghadam 2002, p.71). This is the framework in which I would like to discuss the issue of violence taken on by the feminist media. As a peace journalist J. Galtung (year reference) has stated that violence is any act that limits human self

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¹Although one of the leading media corporation, Dogan Group, sponsors for campaign violence against women as it is still the case that the portrayal of violence against women carries the victim blaming discourse.

realisation. In Turkey the daily culture has been militarised so quickly that it is getting hard to talk about civil practices Militarised masculin culture has put a mental and physical gender line between women's and men's lives (Cockburn 2004)

In this paper I aim to show the gradually changing/transforming perspective of the feminist movement (and feminist media) on violence. I will take the magazines called *Pazartesi* and *Amargi* as two leading feminist examples of alternative media in Turkey. By transforming I mean that the feminist media (in collaboration with the feminist movement) has developed some sensitivity towards issues such as militarism, terrorism, state violence², ethnic violence and towards groups like LGBTTs, and towards male initiatives questionings masculinities and other gender issues. Although women's suffering is common to all those areas, it can be said that the feminist media have turned their focus from "domestic violence" to "a culture of violence." To begin with, I should remark that the feminist media in Turkey never represent cases of violence against women (especially murders and honour killing) as individual disorders or mental problems but they emphasize that it is a political issue.

Pazartesi³

Pazartesi has been published since 1995. It has been a "political intervention" to the agenda (Arat 2004: 290) and has enjoyed a very high circulation. *Pazartesi* is an early example of Turkish alternative media from a radical 'marginal feminist perspective' (Arat 2004: 282), which brings together Islamist, Kurdish and Turkish feminists from different classes and regions. It has raised a feminist voice on the Kurdish problem and on Islamic practices by giving women from diverse backgrounds a chance to voice their own problems. *Pazartesi* has defended

² *Saturday Mothers* who quietly protested against arrests and killings associated with the Kurdish problem in Turkey (Moghadam 2002, p. 73).

³ Pazartesi mean Monday refers to day which early founders met every week.

headscarves, as an issue of “women’s self-expression, but not freedom of religious practice” (2004, p. 288). The gap between different feminist voices such as those of Kemalist/seculars, and more importantly, nationalist feminists has been discussed for a long time on the pages of *Pazartesi*.

Furthermore, *Pazartesi* has also brought together, within its radical feminist critique, not just conservative and liberal policies, but also popular culture. Popular cultural products and names are the tools of *Pazartesi*’s political discourse. Today it is very ordinary to see this discourse in the mainstream media. As Yesim Arat emphasizes *Pazartesi*, has “challenged the borders of the political” on the one hand, and politicized popular culture containing feminist criticism on the other (p. 282).

After a short break, *Pazartesi* has returned to publication in November 2003 and from January 2006 onwards, after the issue no. 106, it started to publish special issues on themes such as motherhood, sexuality and labour.⁴ *Pazartesi* also publishes updated reports, interviews and news in an online format⁵.

According to Seckin (2005, p.4) *Pazartesi* has taken a militant position on women’s activities rather than adopting professional journalistic objectivity as Donna Allen also notes (1991). *Pazartesi*’s editorial priorities may be followed starting from its first issues. Its back cover is almost always allocated to messages against violence⁶.

⁴ *Pazartesi* is run by a group of women who were active in socialist revolutionist movement before 1980s. The same group had published two important but short lived publications, *Feminist* and *Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs* between 1988 and 1990.

⁵ See www.pazartesidergisi.com

⁶ Violence against women has been taken as a broad concept by the Feminist media, including domestic and sexual violence, premarital and extramarital sexual contact, adultery, rape, incest, virginity tests, suicide of girls and women, honour killings, prostitution, and wearing or not wearing head scarf etc. Sometimes being married, living alone, or being the mother of lost children makes a woman a potential target of violence. The perpetrators of violence can be family members, school principals, administrators in educational and public institutions, police officers, who see themselves as responsible for ensuring the chastity of women by maintaining and exercising control over female sexuality.

Pazartesi doesn't attempt to hide feelings of rage on the issue of honour killings. Honour killings are punishments meted out to the victims, but they also serve as a warning to other women according to Gülbahar (2004, p.4) as she put it in *Pazartesi*.

Pazartesi also discusses the violence applied by authorities and security forces: Some women were kidnapped and harassed by "unknown" people in second half of the 1990s. Most of those women have leftist backgrounds in various organisations or political parties. By giving importance to such news *Pazartesi* courageously takes a stand against all kinds of institutionalised violence, and actually fills a gap.

Women who are caught in the midst of an ethnic war in the South East of Turkey have been on the pages of *Pazartesi*. It regularly reports on the victimization of women in the Kurdish regions, due to the armed conflict. The editorial of the 100th issue of *Pazartesi* 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 otherization of the oppressed nation's women"(Seçkin 2005: 4).

Amargi

The feminist interpretation of popular culture is not a priority in *Amargi*⁷. *Amargi* describes itself an "expanding" political theoretical feminist magazine. Being aware of anything done by women and for women is not, by itself a feminist act. In other words, *Amargi* makes a distinction between the women's movement and the feminist movement.

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.

⁷ *Amargi* is a Summariian (Sumerce demek isteddim) word, meaning "freedom" and "returning back to mother". See <http://www.amargi.org>.

The motivation of *Amargi* derives from its feminist interpretation of hard news or the political agenda⁸. The 12th issue of *Amargi* has appeared recently.

In each issue, *Amargi* deals with a specific theme on subjects as wide ranging as the headscarf problem, or the body politic and the modernism project of creating an ‘other’ in Turkey, the local elections and women’s participation in local governments, prostitution, sexual slavery, male double standard moral codes toward women’s honour, gendered citizenship, poverty, and the project-based feminism. As the first editorial of the magazine has stated, 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 marginal”.

Parlar and Mutluer in *Amargi* remind readers that the recent history of Turkey reads like a “diary of violence”. They add that the normalisation of that violence in Turkey represents a manipulation initiated by the status quo. “If the public opinion had not normalised violence in the South East of Turkey , that violence would have been called war” they have stated (2009, p.47). In November 2007, 122 women from different professions singed a declaration entitled “we have made a commitment to peace”⁹.

The second issue of *Amargi* was devoted to militarism. It expanded the borders of anti-militarism from army service to reproduction of masculinity (Selek 2006, p.27). Selek, in *Amargi*, underlined that the feminist anti-war standing should not be limited to policy making for oppressed peoples, and that women should discuss the way they walk in rallies, under flags, banners and the clothing they wear (2006, p. 29). As Cynthia Enloe

⁸ *Amargi* is a women’s institute established in 2005 with a quarterly magazine carries the same title. It is a non hierarchical women’s group and discusses male reason or patriarchy in philosophy, political life and daily practices.

⁹ For more information <http://www.vaktigeldi.org>

(1990) notes, militarization is a deeply gendered process in which certain forms of masculinity and femininity work. In other words militarization needs the approval of both genders while privileging men against women. As Enloe puts it, militarized maneuvers cannot be successful unless they receive women's approval (2006 p.45), Militarism can work harmoniously with other forms of oppressive project like nationalism and racism. Militarized lands separate the lands and minds by barbed wire/mines or ideologies as Enloe mentions (1990, p. 200). As Saigol (2000) has remarked, within militarized cultures, the words such as "strategy", "action plan" and "target" become regular concepts within the other modern -civil institutions as well. Eventually violence remains invisible since it is deeply internalized by societal daily practices (p. 217). Both *Pazartesi* and *Amargi* have published those writers and activists on their pages.

Feminism, Militarism and Hegemonic Masculinity

Representation is a central question in cultural theory, "both as a political and as an epistemological" outlook (Ganghuly 1992: 60). To me the feminist media outlets are born of the need to make the unheard/marginalised groups' voices heard (Ganghuly 1992, p. 62). Media discourse is also driven by all existing discourses (McDonalds) and it is intertextual (Fairclough 1995). The feminist media discourse could not have been immune to all the surrounding discourse.

Transnational feminisms are engaged in bridging dialogues and alliances in the world for peace, security and conflict resolution (Moghadam 2002, p. 72). The feminist media in Turkey see violence against women not as a culture/country specific problem, but as part of the global patriarchal oppression. The feminist media do not give credit to the discourse "women are naturally peace makers". They underline the global and regional

nature of the violence against women throughout the Middle East. Today feminist media are getting more and more eager to analyze other violence-related issues such 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 the society by sanctioning violence. Yet, the Turkish feminists see “the deep connection between violence and politics” as Keane (1996) has put it.

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 also transvestites, and LGBTT people are covered. In the late 1990s Turkish feminism became more engaged in anti-militarism and in the ethnic war in southeastern Anatolia¹⁰. In other words, the feminist media have shifted their focus from women’s issues to gender issues that are related to the culture of violence in Turkey.

The feminist media also have become more generous in representing other gender identities who are subjected to violence, nationalism and militarism. All sexual orientations and preferences are now more and more visible in the feminist media. Men who question masculinities¹¹, homophobia, conscientious objectors (Amargi 12: 57)¹², different identities and group of men and women are being represented. Altınay in

¹⁰ This was the time when PKK and Turkish Army had a break in the region.

¹¹ A group men have established an initiative called “We are not Men” protesting violence against women after the rape and murder of Italian artist P. Bacca in April 2008 (Aslan 2009, p.44).

¹² Starting from second half of 1990s female conscientious objectors voiced in the feminist media. In the news entitled “Yes women object too” antimilitarist women talk in Pazartesi (Yurdalan 2005). A female conscientious objector Nazan Askeran says “I do not want to be a threat for any living creatures who will inhabit to the planet in the future... I do object this militarist mentality which surrounds our lives”. İnci Ağlagül says “I remain silent I will be part of the guilt”.

Amargi remarks that when other gender identities join forces with feminism, sexual politics goes further than sexual violence towards a creative and liberal analysis.

Having lived in a highly militarized culture -in both army and civil society sense-, the ears of Turkish feminists are wide open to the calls of all non violent and anti-militarist groups and initiatives such as anti war activists, pacifists, anti-globalisers. There are many young feminist activists who are engaged in anti-militarism and related issues like P. Selek (2008), and A. G. Altinay (2004) who claim that peace needs a feminist perspective.

Conclusion

I would like to close my argument by emphasizing the importance of the emerging dynamics in Turkey's feminist media.

Firstly, the second wave of feminism in Turkey has made the feminists more aware of their differences in terms of ethnicity, and their political or religious standing as well as emphasizing their common grounds. In the 1990's, feminist literature and women's studies courses and programs trained a new generation inspired both by post-structuralist and post colonialist studies. As mentioned above, the feminist movement no longer has only one strong voice after the emergence of Islamist, Kemalist and Kurdish feminism. Today feminists realise more clearly that women from different backgrounds may have a common platform to act together for gender equality or against the patriarchal male coalition. There are many women's groups and many kinds of feminism. Lastly, the feminist movement in Turkey has more international and global contacts with governmental and non-governmental organizations since the 1990s (Aliefendioglu 2007, 128). 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. I believe that feminism and all alternative equality-seeking movements/subpolitics 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, greens, women, blacks and so on, without privileging any one group over the others by not putting a hierarchical relationship between them.

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