

ISLAMIC WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN TURKEY: FROM THE PRIVATE LIFE TO THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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Democracy and the development of an opportunity ground for Islamic Groups

- The Ottoman background: Combination of Western values with the Islamic ones
- The republic and the modernization on the basis of Western values
- During the single party regime (1923-1950) religious civil societal groups were banned and thus were sent to underground
- Transition to multi-party system in 1950s and the liberal policies of 1980s have given way to the rise of an opportunity ground for the Islamic groups to interest in the issues related to the public sphere
- Islamic groups thus started to deal with such issues as politics, economy, education, media, and intellectual activities etc.

Islamic women's interest in modern education

- Education has become an significant care of Muslim groups starting from 1950s onwards
- Muslim intellectuals, thus, started to write books and articles on the importance of education (in either religious or modern senses) for Muslim women
- Thus religious women started to attend modern schools in addition to the Koranic courses and Imam Hatip Schools, including universities with their headscarves in 1960s
- At the beginning of the 1960s there were only four headscarved female students in universities but in later decades the number increased seriously
- 1980s thousands of female students came to attend modern universities with their headscarves

Islamic women in media, civil society and politics in the post-1980s

- Urbanizational and modernizational dynamics motivating Islamic groups to take active part in the public life in the post 1980s
- A series of journals have been published on women and family by Islamic groups (such Mektup, Kadın ve Aile, Bizim Aile, etc)
- A large number of associations and foundations have been established by the religious women's groups (Hekva, Hazar, Başkent Kadın Platformu, etc)
- Religious women have been mobilized under the roof of political parties starting with Welfare Party and continuing through other parties following it

Kemalist Reaction to the articulation of the Islamic women in the public sphere

- Kemalist elite, reacted to the articulation of religious women into the public sphere with their headscarves, seeing it as a revolt against secularism and modernization
- In the mid-1980s headscarf was started to be banned in universities by the Kemalist elites
- In the 28 February of 1998 (military manipulation in politics) the headscarf became a ground of cleavage between Kemalist elite and religious groups
- Although civilian politicians tried to liberate the headscarf in universities, it was pushed back by bureaucratic elite (constitution court in particular)

Islamic women in street: A struggle to penetrate into the public sphere

- Islamic women took street actions against the ban of headscarf through 1980s and 90s
- Very successive massive demonstration held by Islamic groups (Hand to Hand Human Chain for Freedom to Belief)
- The street actions against the ban on headscarf gave way to the change of women roles: transition from traditional women to a politicized women

Islamic women's groups under the influence of modernization and feminist movement

- Threefold influences on Turkish Islamic women: feminist movement developed in Turkey in 1980s and Islamic feminism developed world-wide
- **Modernization of the country:** urbanization, flow of capital to the middle class, development of economy, the mobilization of religious groups, etc.
- **Feminist influence:** woman's rights, equality, women's freedom, discrimination against women, woman's identity, women's perspective articulation in public life, women's participation in politics, etc.
- **Islamic feminist influence:** criticism of traditional gender roles, criticism of patriarchal culture, re-interpretation of the religious text, alternative ways of existentialism and self realization (third wave women's movement)

Attitudes of Islamic women's groups to feminism

- Basically two understandings of women developed among Islamic groups:
- ***Traditional***: Believing in the traditional roles of women as motherhood, child-care, housewife etc.
- ***Critical/Feminist***: Criticizing the traditional roles, and secondary position given to women in Muslim societies and struggling to change them

The discourses of Islamic women in Turkey

- They struggle to take part in the public life (education, business politics, etc.) with their headscarves
- They attempt to protect the institution of family on the basis of mutual respect and principle of fairness
- They react to the secondary position given to women in the name of Islam, believing that it is because of patriarchal culture
- In order to develop an egalitarian understanding of Islam for women, some of them argue that we have to re-interpret the text and re-define its meaning with women's perspective (Islamic feminism in Turkish context)
- They criticize an essentialist understanding of women, believing that they as Muslim women have a different identity, different context of inferiority, different experience and thus different way of self-realization