European Review, Vol. 13, No. 3, 459–479 (2005) © Academia Europaea, Printed in the United Kingdom

Ottoman Muslim and Turkish women in an international context

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Women's movements in the late Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey are explored in an international context. The international contacts of individual and organized women in both the first and the second waves of 'feminist' activism are considered. It is necessary to determine the influence, on the one hand, of Turkish women on the international scene of the women's movement and, on the other hand, the influence of the international organizations on Turkish policies vis-à-vis women. In this way a little light can be shed on the indirect ways Turkish women, through international networks, were and are able to exert influence on the changing policies of the Turkish government regarding the position of women in their society.

Introduction

The development of a social and political movement referred to as 'first wave feminism' in Europe and other regions culturally belonging to the 'West' is sufficiently well known, but it was not limited to the 'West'. In the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century women in China, Japan, Persia, Egypt and also the Ottoman Empire developed many activities to improve their position in society.[1,2]

In all these countries, men and women started to question the position of women in their society. The backwardness of women was discussed in newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets and books, mostly first by men, but later also by women themselves. Changes such as an improved access to education for women were introduced, women's periodicals started to appear and women's organizations were founded. In general, the women (and men) in these countries, again not unlike most of the early feminists in the 'West', accepted the patriarchal ordering of society as such and did not ask for radical changes in male–female relations.

Women and men were regarded as fundamentally different and complementing each other. These 'familial feminists' – also called bourgeois, liberal or social feminists – aimed at improving the position of women within the existing patriarchal structure; not women's individual development, but the development of the society (or nation) as a whole was at stake. They argued that not only women, but also the whole society would benefit from a decrease in the backwardness of women. They did not strive for equality, but rather equal validity or, 'equality in difference'. Women's suffrage, therefore, was not an issue for them, since politics belonged to the domain of men and not of women.

'Second wave feminism' was more radical. Women in most countries had gained the right to vote and the more radical streams of feminism had been silenced. However, in the wake of the civil rights movements of the 1960s in the United States, women's activities showed such an upsurge that it became characterized as a 'second wave', regarding the earlier movement as a 'first wave' of feminism. Women active in this second wave asked for fundamental changes in the male–female relations. They wanted to be the equals of men and regarded the individual development of women as more important than that of society. This second wave of feminism eventually also reached the countries mentioned above and the Republic of Turkey by the 1980s.

Often these movements are studied within the context of an individual (nation-) state and this can be very useful in itself. However, these movements went beyond the national borders and many women were active in an international context. In this article I will explore the women's movements and the development of various forms of feminism in the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey in such an international context.

In the first part, I will briefly describe the women's movement as it developed in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Turkish Republic. The contacts of these women involved in this 'first wave' feminist movement with the international scene of feminists are explored. Furthermore, I will also discuss their activities in other international respects.

In the second part I will discuss the development of the women's movement(s) in Turkey from the 1980s onwards in the context of their international activities within the networks of international women's organizations as well as those of international organizations such as the UN and the EU.

First wave feminism in the late Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Republic of Turkey

The Ottoman Muslim women's movement: periodicals and organizations

Through the increased interaction between the Ottoman Empire and Europe in the nineteenth century, an increasing number of Ottoman Muslim men of letters

became familiar with discussions around women and their position in society in Europe and started to question the position of women in their own society. Articles in the newspapers and periodicals started to appear in the nineteenth century, discussing issues such as polygamy and women's education, and articles appeared on the struggle for women's rights in other countries such as France. In 1869, the editors of the newspaper *Terakki* (Progress) initiated the publication of the first women's periodical in Ottoman Turkish as a weekly appendix to the newspaper between June 1869 and September 1870. This *Terakki-i Muhadderat* ('Progress' of Virtuous Ladies) was followed by many others in the years to come. Under the influence of these discussions, the opportunities for women to be educated improved. In 1869 a law was passed that made the education of girls between six and ten obligatory, although its application was limited. Still, an increasing number of women were able to get education. Some fathers hired tutors to teach their daughters at home, others sent their daughters to small schools in the homes of educated women, or to ones where they were taught by a graduate of the female teacher's college which had opened in 1871. They all contributed to the slowly but steadily growing number of literate women. The women educated this way also started to speak for themselves. In the regular newspapers and periodicals letters started to appear from Ottoman Muslim women, as well in the women's periodicals owned and edited by men. Eventually, women started to publish periodicals for themselves. Most were short-lived and stopped appearing within a few months or even weeks after the first number. There was one outstanding exception, the longest living Ottoman Turkish women's periodical, which, though owned by a man, was mainly filled with writings by women, namely the *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (*Journal for Ladies*). It started to appear in September 1895 and was closed down in 1908 after more than 600 issues.[3,4] The periodicals published before 1908 were not really radical in content and did not really demand structural social changes. Especially when Abdülhamidian censorship became stringent the subjects were limited: belle-lettres, on how to raise children, on the relations with diverse members of the family (mothers-in-law, husbands), on Islam, on health and hygiene, household chores, and needlework, but also on the lives of famous Muslim and non-Muslim women.

The Young Turk revolution of July 1908 forced Sultan Abdülhamid II to restore the Ottoman constitution, and made a temporary end to the censorship. A number of new periodicals started to appear, amongst them women's periodicals. In these women's periodicals both women and men dared to discuss the position of women in society more frankly than before and in the wider context of national issues. While the earlier periodicals of the period before 1908 provided some distraction plus a vast majority of articles on how to be a good mother, a good spouse and housewife and a good Muslim, the periodicals published after 1908 went a step further and wanted Ottoman Muslim women to take an active part

in the enhancement of their position as women vis-à-vis men, of the position of Muslims vis-à-vis the non-Muslims in the Empire and of the Empire vis-à-vis the European powers.

Writing and publishing opened a way for women to communicate with each other, for the raising of grievances regarding their inferior position and exchanging useful information and giving support. Another way to express this kind of solidarity was the formation of women's organizations.

In the Ottoman Empire, the number of Ottoman Muslim women's organizations seems to have remained very limited until 1908. Only after the revolution of that year did the number of women's organizations increase rapidly. The first organization, which was at least presided over by a leading Ottoman Muslim woman, the wife of Midhat Pasha, was founded during the unrest in the Balkan provinces of 1876 in order to offer help to the wounded soldiers.[5] The author Fatma Aliye seems to have founded a similar help organization in 1897,[6–8] while her sister, Emine Semiye, founded the *Şefkat-i Nisvan* (Women's Compassion) in Thessalonica in 1898.[9] Another women's organization founded in Thessalonica was the *Heyet-i Hayriye-i Nisvaiye* (Women's Charitable Committee) which was founded in 1907 by the female graduates from a local school.[10] These 'proto-organizations' seem to have been founded for one specific purpose, and probably were not very long lived. It was only after the Young Turk Revolution of July 1908 that it became officially possible to establish genuinely civil (women's) organizations. The 'Law on Organizations', moreover, forced them in 1909 to formalize their existence and to be registered. Most of these organizations had a charitable character, although the aims of their charity varied. Improving the situation of soldiers and their families and of poor women and children, providing opportunities for education, and the enlightenment of women, were the most important, but not their only goals.

Not only Ottoman Muslim women, but also other women living within the borders of the Ottoman Empire organized themselves. The number of 'mixed' organizations with women of various ethnic backgrounds was limited. Greek, Armenian and Jewish women were often active in charitable organizations set up around their churches and synagogues, respectively. Women from a foreign background founded their own clubs such as the *Société des Abeilles* (Society of Bees), a charitable organization under the presidency of the wife of the French Ambassador, Mme. Bompard, just before the First World War,[11] or the organizations of German and Austrian women living in Istanbul. During the First World War, German women together with prominent Ottoman Muslim women founded an organization to assist the families of soldiers-in-arms. However, the 'internationalism' of this organization did not go beyond the cooperation within the borders of the Ottoman Empire and in that sense could hardly be called international.

Some international women's organizations were also active in the Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic. In the nineteenth century the Catholic 'Amies des Jeunes Filles' seems to have had a branch in Istanbul, the YWCA, too, was active in Istanbul. Both organizations directed their attention mainly to non-Muslim women and girls, although the YWCA also seems to have had activities that included Muslim girls.

Overall, the level of 'internationality' seems to have been very low amongst Ottoman Muslim women. Newspapers sometimes reported on their activities. The *Tanin* (Echo), for example, announced an 'International Women's Congress' in 1914 and reported on the openings speech of the Italian Minister of Science.[12,13] There was no mention of any Ottoman woman involved. When the Dutch feminist Aletta Jacobs, and Carrie Chapman Catt, the president of the International Women Suffrage Alliance, travelled all over the world in 1911 and 1912, they did not visit the Ottoman Empire.

Although the women living within the Ottoman Empire hardly seemed to have shown any active interest in the activities of some women to develop an international platform to promote and protect women's rights, some Ottoman Muslim women living abroad were involved in some early efforts of women organizing themselves internationally.

Ottoman Muslim women and international women's organizations

In the nineteenth century, many international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, were founded. Professional organizations such as those of doctors, scientific organizations such as those of statisticians, and social organizations such as the Red Cross, were established and started to organize regular meetings on an international platform. Ottoman men actively participated in these international organizations of various character, and visited, amongst others, international medical conferences, international agricultural conferences, international statistics conferences, either with or without the consent and financial support of the government. In addition, the Ottomans were represented at the Hague Peace Conferences at the end of the nineteenth century. Although not explicitly stated, these platforms were basically all-male affairs and only rarely were women admitted.

Women started to get organized internationally too; one of the first, less known international conferences for women was organized in France, where, under the Republic, French feminism had undergone a revival. This International Congrès du Droit des Femmes was convened in 1878, and 11 foreign countries, 16 organizations, and 219 people signed up as official participants; unofficial participants added another 400 to the total.[14]

On the other side of the ocean, in Washington, DC, ten years later, in 1888, the International Council of Women was founded at a convention held in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention of 1948, which had launched the women suffrage movement in the United States. It was originally envisaged as a central bureau to collect, exchange and disseminate information on suffrage work internationally. Representatives of 'associations of women in the trades, professions, and reforms, as well as those advocating political rights' were invited and 49 women of 'all the countries of the civilized globe' – in fact, England, Ireland, France, Norway, Denmark, Finland, India, Canada, and the United States – attended the founding meeting.[15] However, due to the diverse character of the participating organizations and the presence of rather conservative women members, the enfranchisement of women was not put on the agenda.

Although no Ottoman women were present at the foundation of the International Council, at its congress in Berlin – which was held in June 1904 – an Ottoman Muslim woman joined the delegates: Hayriye Ben-Ayad, the daughter of Tunuslu Mahmud Pasha and a sister-in-law of the author Sami Paşazade Sezai.[17] She had been living in Europe for a long period, escaping the suppression of the Ottoman regime and could hardly be regarded an official representative of the Ottoman women, let alone as a person backed by the Ottoman government. It is very likely that Selma Rıza, the sister of the leader of the Young Turks, Ahmed Rıza, also got in touch with the International Council of Women while living in exile in Paris. In a book on the legal position of women in several states published by the International Council of Women in 1912, she is listed as a 'Honorary Vice-President For Countries where Councils are not yet [sic!] formed': in her case 'Turkey', where she had returned after the Sultan Abdülhamid II had been forced to restore the Ottoman constitution in 1908.[18]

Disappointed because of the disappearance of the demand for enfranchisement, some of the founding members of the International Council of Women, founded a 'temporary' International Women Suffrage Committee at the annual convention of the National American Women Suffrage Association in Washington in 1902. Although the Ottoman Empire certainly did not have a suffrage movement at that moment, nor any associations of female professionals, it was, surprisingly enough, represented at the founding meeting in Washington. The person 'representing', what was called 'Turkey', was not an Ottoman woman, though, but Florence Fensham, a Christian missionary and Dean of the American College for Girls at Constantinople.[19,20] In 1904, in Berlin, this temporary organization was transformed into the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, in 1923 it changed its name into the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, and in 1946 it became simply the International Alliance of Women.

Republican period

While the series of wars between 1911 and 1918 provided a period of florescence for the women's organizations, the War of Independence and the subsequent foundation of the Turkish Republic seems to have meant the end of almost all of the women's organizations founded in Ottoman times.

The young Republican regime, under the firm leadership of Atatürk, initiated a profound modernization process. The new Turkey had to become a modern, secular nation-state based on the Western European examples. Part and parcel of this national modernization process was the modernization of women. A new Turkish woman had to be created. Motherhood remained the most important duty for women, but this mother should be well educated and actively contribute to the economy. The number of vocational schools for girls increased and the first women who had set foot at University in 1915 were followed by many others. Women were given the vote in 1930 for local, and in 1934 national, elections. Atatürk wanted to give it to them, because, as some would have it, he wanted to distinguish his from the other totalitarian regimes in Europe.[21,22]

The modernization process was enforced through a very stringent form of state control not only in economic, but also in social policies. This also affected the women who wanted to organize themselves; there was little leeway for free movement.

One of the organizations severely hit was the *Türk Kadın Birliği* (Union of Turkish Women). This organization was founded in 1923 by the author and feminist activist, Nezihe Muhittin as the *Kadınlar Halk Fırkası* (Women's People's Party). The party demanded suffrage for women, based on the argument that women had contributed their share to the victory over the Greek enemy and other occupiers of Anatolia. Mustafa Kemal, however, had planned to use the name 'People's Party' for his own political party and thought women were still not ready for active participation in politics. Moreover, as the modernist reformer he wanted to be, he probably did not like a group of women to take any initiative by themselves.[23] Thus, the *Kadınlar Halk Fırkası* was forced to become a women's organization instead of a women's political party, although the *Birliği* continued to pursue its political goals as well as its social aims; in 1928, however, the *Türk Kadın Birliği* was further depoliticized through an enforced change of its board and statutes.

Another victim of the one-party regime was the *Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyet-i İslâmiyesi* (Organization for the Employment of Women), which had been founded during the First World War by the Minister of War, Enver Pasha. It was closed down in January 1926 after alleged improprieties of its board; later the Republican People's Party announced the foundation of an organization that aimed at employing women.[24,25] When the *Türk Kadın Birliği* was closed down

immediately after the 12th congress of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, there were only very few charitable organizations left and most of them were directly or indirectly controlled by the party, which pursued its control not only in its economic, but also in its social policy.

Turkish women on the international platform

During the war years, Turkish women had started to attend university, and an increasing number of vocational courses had been opened to Ottoman Muslim women. In the years after the war this development continued; women got full access to the University and an increasing number of vocational institutes for girls were opened to raise the new women who would contribute to a better and independent economy. [26]

During the early years of the Republic an increasing number of individual women actively visited conferences and congresses of international organizations, including meetings of international women's organizations, where they testified to the progress made by the New Turkish Woman.

In July 1924, Nimet Cemil, who accompanied her father, the president of the University, to an international congress in Lyon, gave a speech at that congress about the changing position of Turkish women in society.[27] That same month, Safiye Ali, the first female Turkish doctor, attended a congress of the International Organization of Female Doctors in London.[28,29]

The first meeting after the War of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, held in 1920 in Geneva, was attended by a Turkish woman, T. Keibrizli [sic!], who claimed to have been a member of the 'Société des Dames Turques'. She attended the meeting as the 'Government Delegate'. But it is unclear whose delegate she exactly was, nor is it clear what the 'Société des Dames Turques' was. It certainly was not the Türk Kadın Birliği, which was only founded in 1923.

The Türk Kadın Birliği explicitly aimed at working on an international platform. Amongst the activities listed as undertaken during the first three years of its existence, we can find 'inscription des membres à la Société d'assistance de la Ligue des Nations [?]' and 'réception d'invitations au Congrès des femmes musulmanes.'[30] The international contacts of the Türk Kadın Birliği culminated in the organization of the 12th Congress of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAWSEC), which was held in Istanbul in April 1935.

In 1924, Efzayiş Yusuf (later known as Efzayiş Suat) visited a meeting in Washington of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), an organization founded in 1915 during a meeting in the Hague of women who rejected the war. Efzayiş Yusuf had studied at the American Girls' College of Constantinople. She had been invited to the congress through the

mediation of the representative of WILPF in Istanbul. According to a Turkish newspaper, her appearance and talk was widely covered in the American press.[31]

The same Efzayiş Suat who visited the US wrote an extensive letter to the organ of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, the *International Women's News* in 1930 reporting how women successfully rallied and got the right to vote and to be candidates in local elections. She expressed the expectation that women would get the same rights on the national level by 1931.[32] In 1932 she was the only female delegate to attend a conference on cooperation between the Balkan countries.[33]

In 1931, Seniha Rauf, a member of the Türk Kadın Birliği, represented Turkey at a study conference of the IAWSEC's Committee for Peace and the League of Nations.[34] Together with Lamia Tevfik, she was also present at another international women's congress in Marseille in 1933.[35]

Turkish representatives also participated at the first Congress of Oriental Women in Damascus in 1930, where a representative of the IAWSEC was also present.[36] At a follow-up meeting of the executive committee of the Congress of the Union of Oriental Women on 22 November 1930 at the home of its president in Beirut, one of its founding members, Nur Hammadeh, was said to have been invited to New York by the International Alliance of Women.[37] Turkey was also represented at the Congress of Oriental Women held at Teheran and Damascus in October 1932. The Congress started at Damascus on 14 October and after a few days and a ride of 26 hours through the desert continued on 24 October at Teheran.[38–40]

Turkish women and the government showed a keen interest in international contacts in order to widely spread the image of the New Turkish Woman on the international platform; the international organizations also got more interested in Turkey. News of the activities of Turkish women and other women in the former provinces of the Ottoman Empire was reported on a regular basis in the organ of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance.[41] It was also the Alliance which, upon the invitation of the Türk Kadın Birlği, decided to organize its 12th Congress in 1935 in Istanbul, Turkey, as a symbol of gratitude to Atatürk for his 'liberation' of the Turkish woman. This Congress was to mark the end of the first wave of feminism in Turkey.

The 12th Congress of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship

Upon the invitation by Latife Bekir, President of the Türk Kadın Birliği, who had in advance secured the approval of the Turkish government, and with the approval of the Greek society, the 12th Congress was to be held in Istanbul in Easter 1935.[42] In a press release the IAWSEC announced that '[w]omen from 40 countries will

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798705000578 Published online by Cambridge University Press

unite in a jubilant celebration of the recent political advancement of Turkish women, which gave them the vote for the first time, and resulted in the election of 17 women to the new Assembly.'[43]

At the opening speeches of the Congress, which took place at the palace of the former Sultan, Yıldız Palace, the room with space for 500 persons was overcrowded. Loudspeakers were placed in the corridors so that the people outside could also listen to the speakers. Both foreign and local press showed a great interest and the congress was widely covered in local and foreign newspapers and periodicals.

After the congress, the Türk Kadın Birliği was closed down by the Turkish government, because it supposedly had reached its goals. In reality, the state had appropriated the role of 'feminist'. The members of the organization were incorporated in organizations and institutions on which the state could exert more control, such as the women's auxiliary of the Republican People's Party.[44] This marked the formal end of the independent women's movement of the first wave.

Second Wave Feminism in Turkey

After the closure of the Türk Kadın Birliği, no independent women's organizations were left. The few organizations that continued their existence were mainly philanthropic, such as the *Yardımsevenler Derneği*, the women's branch of the Red Crescent. Mostly women just participated in mixed organizations in which men closely related to the ruling party were dominant.[45] Women were active, but under state control. A propaganda booklet of the Turkish government from 1948 or 1949 reports, for example, at least one woman present on Turkish delegations to international meetings, conventions and conferences.[46]

Between 1948 and 1970, the number of women's organizations increased rapidly again. However, almost all these organizations, too, were philanthropic and aimed at serving the society, rather than at creating opportunities for the individual woman to develop herself.[47]

When the Türk Kadın Birliği was re-founded in 1949, its aim was to make women 'self-denying wives, sacrificing mothers and responsible citizens'. Other women's organizations of these days did not have any different aims. Another organization founded in 1949 was the *Kadınlığı Koruma ve Sosyal Yardım Cemiyeti* (Organization for the Protection of Womanhood and Social Assistance). It dedicated itself to the support of widows and orphan girls. Another women's organization founded was the first club of Soroptomists in Turkey. The initiative for this organization was taken in 1948 by Müfide Ferid Tek, a distinguished author and wife of a diplomat and former ambassador to Great Britain. This first branch in Istanbul was followed in 1951 by another one in Ankara and more in other towns of Turkey in the subsequent years.[48]

Between 1970 and 1980, the women's organizations, like Turkish society as a whole, were strongly politicized. The women's organizations founded in this period were often not really independent ones, but merely political auxiliaries. This does not mean they were unimportant. One of the largest of these organizations was the *İlerici Kadınlar Derneği* (Progressive Women's Organization). It was founded in 1975 by members of the Turkish Communist Party, but another reason for its foundation was the announcement of World Women's Year by the United Nations at the instigation of the International Democratic Women's Federation. The İlerici Kadınlar Derneği was active from 1975 until the coup of 1980 and had close to 15,000 members spread over 33 branches. At some point, its periodical, *Kadınların Sesi* (Voice of Women), had a circulation of 35,000. The organization addressed the issue of women's inequality, but, faithful to its communist background, sought to find the solution in a change of labour relations rather than in a change in male–female relations. Consistently, its members rejected being called 'feminist'.[49–51] The fascist *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (Nationalist Movement Party), for example, founded a women's organization called *Ülkücü Hanımlar Derneği* (Idealist Ladies Organisation) or in short, *Ülkü-Han.* The activities of all these organizations came to a stop with the coup of 12 September 1980.[52]

After the coup of 1980, the possibilities to form women's organizations were limited. Under the influence of developments in the women's movements in the rest of the world, however, an increasing number of women in Turkey started to discuss the unequal position of men and women in society, mostly in informal, unorganized settings, since organizations with a possible political character were forbidden in the first years after the coup. When this prohibition was lifted, these groups got officially organized, although some, like the members of *Kadın Çevresi* (Women's Circle) remained suspicious. The *Kadın Çevresi* for that reason was founded as a company and not an organization out of fear of government control.[53] Due to their different political points of view, the members of these groups often fought like cats and dogs. In particular, there were controversies between the socialist feminists, who had a hierarchical form of organization in mind, and the radical feminists, who opted for a more egalitarian form of organization. Despite these fundamental differences, the groups also participated in joint actions in their struggle for a better society for women. In May 1987, they joined forces to successfully organize a large demonstration of about 3000 women to protest about the use of violence against women.. A few months later, in October, a festival was organized, and the joint women's organizations had a stand at the book fair in November of that year.[54] Another result of their joint efforts was the foundation of the Women's Library and Documentation Centre in Istanbul, which opened in 1989. The women's organizations also cooperated in the activities to change the Civil Code.[55–58]

Partially due to the geopolitical developments, including the fall of the Berlin wall and subsequently of the communist regimes, the decrease in political activitism in general, but also the changes that took place in traditional male–female relations, the leftist, more radical women's groups seem to have lost their vehemence by the 1990s. On the other hand, new women's groups started to organize themselves in the 1990s. The more liberal political atmosphere under president Turgut Özal allowed for the visible organization of 'ethnic' and 'Islamist' women. Kurdish women accused the Turkish feminists of not taken into account the specific problems of Kurdish women and founded their own organizations, publishing their own periodicals. Muslim women organized themselves and started to publish their own periodicals. They believed in the quintessential difference between man and woman and argued that the main duties of a woman lay between the four walls of her home. The names of the periodicals published by these women testify to this conviction: *Kadın ve Aile* (Woman and Family) and *Bizim Aile* (Our Family). In a reaction to these 'ethnic' and 'Islamist' feminists, the number of women's organizations defending the heritage of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk of a Turkish and secular nation-state also increased. The most important and influential exponent of these Kemalist feminist organizations was the *Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği* (Organization for the Support of Modern Living).[59–61]

In the 2000s, the number of women's organizations increased. While formerly women's organizations were concentrated in the main cities, the 2000s saw a growth of women's organizations, support groups, etc in all corners of the country. The end of the 'war' between the Turkish state and the Kurdish fighters created an environment of relative peace in the East of the country in which women could organize themselves. Literate women supported other, illiterate women and set up courses to teach them how to read and write, while also giving them information on their rights and encouraging them to use their rights. Other women got vocational training or were taught how to use their skills to generate an income to take care of their families if their husbands were absent, unemployed or did not earn enough to support their wives and families. The Ankara based *Uçan Süpürge* (Flying Broom) organized a survey of all the women's organizations in 41 provinces of Turkey and collected the information on a CD-Rom and in an online, searchable and regularly updated database. The women's organizations and their local branches in this database total over 350.[62] Such a database is a logical project for an organization which, founded in 1996, aimed at 'increasing the communication, cooperation and mutual support between women's organizations and persons interested in the women's movement, to transfer their experiences to a young generation and to create a national and international network of communication.'[63] The active use of the internet is another feature of the Turkish women's movement of the 2000s. The website of *Uçan Süpürge* is

extremely informative and up to date and contains an enormous amount of useful information about women-related issues in Turkey.[64] The same goes for the online newspaper *KAzete,* a play on the words *kadın* (woman) and *gazete* (newspaper).[65]

The organizations behind these websites had also been involved in writing a report for the monitoring body of the United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Theirs was an alternative report to the official combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of the Turkish government.[66,67]

Second wave feminism in Turkey in an international context

In the 1980s, the struggle for the rights of Turkish women was launched on an international platform. Both the Turkish government and women's organizations worked more intensively than ever within an international context and international networks. Organizations such as the Soroptimists, Uçan Süpürge and *Mor Çatı* (Purple Roof) had extensive international networks. The Soroptimists received permission to officially operate on a more international platform when the Board of Ministers allowed them in 1980 to become full members of the Federation of European Soroptimist Clubs.[68] Mor Çatı actively participated in the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, which is an international campaign originating from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute sponsored by the Center for Women's Global Leadership of Rutgers University in 1991. In the context of these days of activism it organized a series of panels and a TV discussion on the use of violence against women in 1992.[69] The Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR) NEW WAY from Istanbul was one of the co-organizers of a workshop on Sexual and Bodily Rights as Human Rights in the Middle East and North Africa held in Malta in May and June 2003.[70] The Turkish Women's Union has branches all over the world. These are only a few examples to show the international networks in which Turkish women's organizations operated. However, the civil Turkish Women's organizations were quick to grasp the opportunities opened by the activities of an international organization such as the UN in the field of equal women's rights.

The beginning of the last quarter of the 20th century was marked by the International Women's Year, adopted by the World Conference of the International Women's Year, held in Mexico City in 1975, and the official start of the United Nations Decade of Women. At that time, working groups within the UN Commission on the Status of Women started to work on the text of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). At the Copenhagen conference in 1980 at which the results of the work halfway through the UN Decade of Women were reviewed, the CEDAW was signed by 64 states, while two states submitted their instruments of ratification.

In August 1981, 31 member states had ratified the convention and 30 days later, on 3 September, it entered into force.[71] The date of receipt of the instrument of ratification from Turkey was 20 December 1985. Turkey did not sign without any reservations, because some of the articles were not completely compatible with the provisions of the Turkish Civil Code. A part of the reservations was lifted, however, on 20 September 1999.[72]

Based on the Convention and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985), the Turkish government established the General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women (GDSPW) in 1990. This body is affiliated to the Ministry of State, and responsible for Women's Affairs and Social Services. It officially represents the Turkish government for women-related issues at the United Nations, the European Union and European Council.[73] The GDSPW was established by a government dominated by a right-wing party. No women's organizations were consulted and its approach to male–female relations reflected the rather conservative stand of the government on this issue. It was heavily criticized by more progressive women's organizations.[74]

At the Fourth World Women's Conference at Beijing in 1990, Turkey committed itself to withdraw all the reservations it had to CEDAW, to diminish the number of deaths of mothers and children by 50% in 2000, to make education compulsory for eight years and to reduce the percentage of illiterate women to zero by the year 2000. To reach these goals a 'National Plan of Action' was prepared by a commission of Women's NGOs, academicians and representatives of relevant state institutions. It took six years to finish it and it was offered to the UN in December 1996.[75] Over the years, the GDSPW duly offered its reports on the progress made towards more equal women's rights to the international platforms.[76–79]

The activities of the Turkish government and its affiliated organizations were followed critically by the civil women's organizations. About a year and a half before the Beijing + 5 meetings, the women's organizations in Turkey started to prepare themselves to submit their reports on the (lack of) progress made. Six women's organizations joined forces in the *Eşitlik İzleme Platformu* (EŞ-İZ) (Platform for the Observation of Equality) amongst whom were Mor Çatı and the Soroptimists. EŞ-İZ got into touch with international women's organizations, while working on further informing local public opinion on Beijing + 5. At a meeting of several women's organizations convened by Uçan Süpürge in Ankara, it prepared a detailed report on the position of women in Turkey, which was distributed at the international platform. At the preparatory meetings, Turkish women's organizations were widely represented. At the official Beijing + 5 meeting of the UN General Assembly, representatives of four civil women's organizations were present as official representatives. At the special meetings for NGOs, even more Turkish women's organizations were represented.[80]

The activism of Turkish women on the international platform was rewarded. From 1997 until 1 January 2005, Feride Acar from Middle East Technical University was a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women of the Division for the Advancement of Women, a division within the Department of Social and Economic Affairs of the UN. From 2001 until 2003 she was vice-chairperson and from 2003 until 1 January 2005 she was its chairperson.[81]

Having a main player at such a central level did not mean Turkish women's organizations could relax. In 2004, 13 civil women's organizations joined forces again to write the alternative report for the members of the monitoring body of the United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women, CEDAW, mentioned above. Going through the articles of the CEDAW step by step it analysed the (lack of) success of Turkey in reaching the goals set. No need to say that this report was much more critical than that of the GDSPW.[82]

The decision taken in December 2004 regarding the possible start of negotiations regarding Turkey's accession to the EU in October 2005 also triggered the interest of the European Parliament in the position of women in Turkey. In the reports and recommendations of the European Commission on Turkey's progress towards accession, women's rights and gender equality were topics of concern. The reports recognize the advances made in these fields, but also made explicit recommendations to enhance the situation of women in Turkey further. On Wednesday, 15 December 2004, the European Parliament accepted a resolution, stating, amongst many other things, that it

> [w]elcomes the reforms which have strengthened the principle of gender equality and draws attention to the progress on women's rights embodied in the new Penal Code, but reiterates its concern that domestic violence and other forms of violence against women are still widespread, especially in underdeveloped and rural parts of the country, and urges the Turkish authorities to provide full legal protection and judicial and economic aid to victims, as well as shelters and similar facilities, and to support NGOs providing these shelters and similar facilities; calls on the Commission to support such efforts within the EU assistance programs; calls on the Turkish authorities to introduce programs to eradicate female illiteracy.

While recognizing the progress made the EP also '[c]alls on the Turkish authorities to engage in a constant dialogue with the European Parliament on women's rights in Turkey and to take note in this regard of the resolution on the role of women in Turkey in social, economic and political life, due to be discussed in 2005 in the European Parliament'[83]

To be able to discuss this issue, being well informed and based on recent information, one of the Members of the EP (MEP) and a member of the Commission on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) of the EP, Emine

Bozkurt, who is of Turkish origin, was appointed to report by March 2005 on the women's situation in Turkey. As such, she fiercely rejected the use of violence on 6 March against a group of women celebrating International Women's Day.[84]

Conclusion

The contacts on the international platform of the first wave feminists in the late Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Republic of Turkey remained limited. They seem to have not gone beyond merely individual contacts of women. The activities of women's organizations of these days were primarily nationally oriented, which is no surprise if we take into account that the Ottoman Empire was at war almost continuously at the time the women's movement gained momentum and the number of women's organizations was at its highest level.

The early Republic of Turkey marked a change in this respect. The end of the 'long war', as it was experienced by the new Turkish citizens, and the establishment of a new nation-state as a player in the international field, re-opened the doors to peaceful contacts in the international field. The wars had changed the position of those women in society who had been active in the women's organizations. The literate women of the better social strata had started to enter the professions during the war years. After the wars these women became symbols for the new secular and modern nation-state that had replaced the old, Islamic and backward regime. As these symbols, they were strongly encouraged, if not pushed, to show themselves on the international platform. In the context of the state control of the early Republican Period, however, the possibilities to enter that platform on their own initiative and beyond the control of the state was severely hampered.

This was completely different during the second wave. Although there was little space, literally and symbolically, to move around in the first years after the coup of September 1980, the liberalization which started under President Özal in the second half of the 1980s and still continues today, opened the borders for an increased interaction of women's activists on the international platform. The geopolitical developments of the period, during which equality between men and women got high on the agenda of international governmental bodies enhanced this development even further. The government of the Republic of Turkey today is held accountable for its policies vis-à-vis women, by the international community as represented in the international governmental organizations. Women's organizations in Turkey, however, have an active share in determining the goals and aims formulated by these organizations. Thus, completely different from their forebears, the women of today's Turkey, to the extent that they are represented in the present women's organizations, are able to exert a considerable influence over their government's policies vis-à-vis women – directly, through the activities within Turkey itself, but also indirectly through the international platform.

Acknowledgement

Some the materials I used for this paper, notably the materials on the International Woman Suffrage Alliance and on the 12th Congress of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship in Istanbul in 1935, I was able to collect during my stay in Summer 1999 at the Smith College Library using the Sophia Smith Collection as the recipient of 'Margaret Storrs Grierson Award for Research.'

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