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Rethinking the ‘Barren’ Decades of Women’s Movement in Turkey: Collective Memory and Intergenerational Conflicts

Abstract

Feminist historiography in Turkey has long dismissed the period between the 1930s and 1980s as the ‘barren period’ of the women’s movement. To understand the diverse and conflicted genealogies of Turkey’s feminism(s), we argue, it is necessary to critically engage with the notion of the ‘barren period.’ In the 1950s, ‘the discourse of indebtedness’ to Atatürk and the gender project of Kemalism became hegemonic through production of collective memory in which the women’s movement participated. Haunted by the radical struggles of Ottoman and early Republican feminists for equality, the mid-twentieth century women’s movement selectively remembered them in shaping this memory. Beginning in the second half of the 1960s, younger generations of women began to question women’s movement’s agendas and actions. This article focuses on two issues where the intergenerational conflict was particularly evident: (Anti-)veiling and (anti-)communism. These themes reveal that the discourse of indebtedness was unsustainable by the second half of the 1960s, when new political agencies emerged that did not assume the privileged saviour role of the women’s movement or positioned themselves as victims to be rescued. While the established women’s movement gradually acknowledged the history of radical autonomous struggle of Ottoman and early Republican feminists and their suppression by the early Republican regime, deep political and ideological rifts hindered the communication and transmission of this history to a new generation of women in the mid-1960s.

Keywords: Women’s movement, mid-twentieth century, collective memory, anti-veiling, anti-communism, feminist history

1. Introduction

The women’s movement in Turkey between the 1930s, when the feminist struggle for political rights was suppressed by the Republican ruling elite, and the 1980s, when a new independent feminist movement emerged, has been a neglected topic by feminist historians. An earlier generation of feminist scholars, who claimed that women’s organisations during this period did not challenge patriarchal discourses and instead operated within the boundaries set by male-dominated institutions, such as state structures or political movements, saw this ‘barren period’¹ as a time of stagnation, in which little or nothing was done for women’s liberation. According to this view, many of the women’s organisations aligned themselves with the official discourse on

1 Tekeli 1998.

women's rights as formulated by the Kemalist regime, which we call the 'discourse of indebtedness.' This discourse suggests that women's rights, including political rights, were granted by the Kemalist regime without women having to fight for them; therefore, Turkish women are indebted to the regime and Atatürk.

As recent feminist scholarship² challenges historiography that does not take into account the so-called periods of stagnation, we gain a clearer view of how the women's organisations negotiated with Republican institutions and their official discourses. To critically address the notion of a 'barren period' between two waves of feminism, this paper examines the women's movement of the 1950s and 1960s, whose vibrancy went beyond what could be called 'stagnant.' The women's movement in the 1950s was anything but radical in its demands and methods, but it sought greater equality and rights for women; at its height, it acted for a 'women's cause.' However, it also contributed to the discourse of indebtedness to become hegemonic through its politics of memory, definitions of womanhood and political agency, which were increasingly challenged in the following decade. In order to understand the multiple and contradictory genealogies of Turkey's feminism(s), it is crucial to shed light on the ruptures in the transmission of memory, the contradictory definitions of women's political agency and the encounters between different generations of the women's movement fraught with tensions.

To this end, we first look at the historical development and remobilisation of women's movement in the 1950s and demonstrate how it justified political mobilisation without challenging the discourse of indebtedness. The women's movement did not initially acknowledge the contribution of Ottoman and early Republican feminist struggle to the enhancement of women's rights and their suppression by the Kemalist regime; but it was haunted by the spectres of that struggle. We tried to map the complex terrain of collective memory formation which involved multiple layers of selective remembering, forgetting and distortion that interacted with one another through drawing on Derrida's, Gordon's and Halberstam's discussions. Based on one of the leading activists, İffet Halim Oruz's writings, we argue that the women's movement did not erase the memory of feminist struggles of earlier generations, but rather circumscribed and reified their legacy through selective remembering and forgetting. Secondly, we discuss how subsequent generations of women negotiated and challenged the discourse of indebtedness through articulation of womanhood and political agency in different ways. We, thereby, focus on two issues where the intergenerational conflict became particularly evident: (Anti-)veiling and (anti-) communism. Our analysis, based primarily on women's magazines and publications produced by women's organisations, begins in the 1950s, when there was a remobilisation of women through magazines and associations, and ends before the 1970s, when the women's movement gained new momentum due to radicalisation of both the left and right wings of the political spectrum, as well as the development of women's research and

2 Adak 2020; Azak and de Smaele 2016; Çağatay 2017; 2020; Sancar 2012; Sarıtaş and Şahin 2015; Şahin and Sarıtaş, 2017; Yaraman 2001.

mobilisation around the global agenda of gender equality, particularly in the context of the 1975 ‘International Year of Women.’³ We found it necessary to analytically distinguish the women’s magazines and associations founded in the late 1940s and 1950s from the newly emerging women’s political groups and organisations in the late 1960s. We referred to the former as the ‘established women’s movement,’ to designate their high degree of institutionalisation but also their inability to adapt to the demands of young, politicised women and the rapid socio-political changes of the 1960s.

2. The Rhetoric of Redundancy and Re-Mobilisation

Kemalism’s gender project, formulated by the ruling elite, was central to the Kemalist social, political, and cultural modernisation. It aimed to increase women’s public participation and visibility, entailed improvements in their social and legal status, and provided a partial response to early Republican feminists’ demand for equality. At the same time it demanded from women a desexualised presence in the public sphere, maintained patriarchal relations in the domestic sphere and the gendered division of labour that limited the access of the vast majority of women to the public sphere, and subordinated women’s interests to national interests.⁴ The authoritarian Kemalist regime with its top-down reform process was determined to curb any political rivalry, including that of feminists, and particularly their demand for political rights.⁵ The Republican ruling elite prevented the establishment of the Women’s People’s Party (*Kadınlar Halk Fırkası*, KHF) in 1923, which demanded an active political role for women in the establishment of the Republic, and later pressured the Turkish Women’s Union (*Türk Kadınlar Birliği*, TKB), which replaced the KHF, and its founder Nezihe Muhiddin to stop fighting for political rights.⁶ Muhiddin, determined to continue the suffragette struggle, was forced out of the TKB on corruption charges, and political rights were dropped from the Union’s agenda by its new administration. In the 1930s, some members of the TKB, such as İffet Halim Oruz and Latife Bekir Çeyrekbaşı, sided with the government and criticised the organisation for being too radical. In her book *Women in the New Turkey (Yeni Türkiye’de Kadın)*, Oruz claimed that there was no need for suffragism under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal.⁷ A year later, she resigned from the TKB because she no longer considered the organisation necessary (*lüzumlu*) after women were granted political rights.⁸ This rhetoric of redundancy led to the dissolution of the organisation in the end. Although the TKB’s activities at this time were largely limited to philanthropy, it was forced to dissolve itself in 1935 after the 12th Congress of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship

3 Adak 2020, 611.

4 Arat 1997; Çağatay 2017; Kandiyoti 1987, 76–9; Göle 2013.

5 Zihnioğlu 2003.

6 Zihnioğlu 2003.

7 Oruz 1933, 14–5.

8 ‘Kadın Birliği’ 1934, 1, 14.

in Istanbul. The TKB's chairperson at the time, Latife Bekir, declared they were dissolving the Union 'not with sadness, but with joy and happiness.'⁹

As Turkey moved to a multiparty democracy, the article prohibiting the establishment of gender-specific associations (*cinse dayalı dernekler*) was repealed in 1946,¹⁰ and the TKB was re-established in 1949. Other women's associations followed the TKB and, together with women's magazines with activist content such as the Women's Newspaper (*Kadın Gazetesi*), made the 1950s a vibrant period for the women's movement. The rhetoric of redundancy pushed the women's movement to justify its renewed mobilisation in associations and magazines without challenging the discourse of indebtedness. This justification was formulated as 'protecting women's rights.' In 1949, İffet Halim Oruz wrote in Women's Newspaper:

As democracy advances in our country, our women, who have the right to vote and be elected, shall protect this and other equality rights. From some recent publications and resolutions of debates, it appears that it is necessary to protect the Turkish Women's Revolution, one of the main pillars of the Atatürk revolution, from deterioration.¹¹

Oruz addressed the increasing conservative patriarchal voices about the role of women in society. Although Kemalism's gender project facilitated women's greater public participation and visibility, it gradually gave way to a more assertive traditional view of women's domestic role in the 1950s. In the relatively multivocal political atmosphere of the multiparty democracy in Turkey, these were a manifestation of previously suppressed grievances about women's increased paid work, as well as a gendered consequence of anti-communism, that condemned women's participation in paid work and portrayed the Soviet Union as the enemy of traditional family values.¹²

In this new formulation while the women's movement self-described the role of protecting the existing rights, it singled out the state as the ultimate guarantor of these rights. Thus, the paternalistic conception of the state was reinforced once and women's organisations' dependence on it was ensured.¹³ Although the TKB claimed to distance itself from partisan politics in its activities,¹⁴ its congresses were highly contentious since both civilian and military governments interfered in the election of its board of directors, and it remained mostly loyal to ruling parties until the 1990s.¹⁵ Mevhibe İnönü, wife of İsmet İnönü, the president during the single-party regime between 1938–1947, became one of the founding members of the organisation in 1949 alongside Latife Çeyrek and other female CHP deputies such as Makbule Dıblan and Mebrure Aksoley. Nazlı Tlıbar, a deputy from the Democrat Party (DP), became

9 'Kadın Birliği' 1935, 1, 9.

10 Ediz 1994, 40.

11 Oruz 1949, 1, 6.

12 Emen-Gökatalay 2021, 45–6.

13 İşat 2006.

14 Ediz 1994, 46.

15 İşat 2006, 55–7.

chairwoman in 1955 but was demoted from her position following the 1960 coup when she was tried in Yassıada along with DP leaders. In 1962, Günseli Özkaya, wife of Şükran Özkaya, who was one of the members of the junta that overthrew DP, was elected as the chairperson of the Union and occupied this position until the 1980 coup. While the women's movement fought against discrimination -especially in paid work- and for more female political representation, it rarely criticised the state and its institutions. This also meant that until the mid-1960s, it did not challenge the official discourse on women's rights as formulated by the Kemalist regime which held that women were granted civil and political rights without having to fight for them.

3. 'The Unforgetting Becomes Unforgettable': The Women's Movement's Politics of Memory

Having self-prescribed the role of indebted protector of rights, the women's movement had to deny the history of the radical struggle for suffrage in the 1920s as well as its traumatic suppression in the 1930s. The first issue of Women's Newspaper stated that since the Republican Revolution had given women a place among the developed nations, the magazine '[did] not want to deal with the problems of Turkish women in the past, in short, [did] not want to feel obliged to think about the cause of women's equality with men.'¹⁶ In this formulation, the struggle for equality was an issue of the past, something that had already been achieved and no longer needed to be fought for. However, the supposedly achieved state of equality was disturbed by the constant burden of women's debt to the Kemalist regime. Like any hegemonic discourse, haunting belongs to the structure of the discourse of indebtedness.¹⁷ The legacy of feminists who demanded – and performed – a more radical vision of equality during the 1920s took on a ghostly form in the 1950s.¹⁸ The 'problems of the past' were supposedly left behind, but the unarticulated experiences of trauma and suppression haunted the seemingly triumphant hegemonic discourse from claiming an unchallenged victory, expressed in designating equality as a taboo subject.¹⁹ But denying to talk about past

16 'Çıkış' 1947, 1. Oruz's words have been quoted by feminist historians of the 1990s as an epitome of women organisations' co-opted stance, being the voice of official ideology instead of women. See Kılıç 1998, 350; Durakbaşa 1998, 38.

17 Derrida 1994, 46.

18 Gordon 2008, 42. With the past declared the property of Turkish women, the presence of Armenian, Greek, Kurdish, and other minority women, and their struggle for gender equality in the late Ottoman period was also denied from the collective memory of the women's movement. Turkification of the women's movement did not begin in the 1950s. Turkish nationalism was integral to Muhiddin's definition of the ideals of womanhood (*kadınlık mefkûresi*) even in the early twentieth century unlike early Ottoman feminism. We know that the struggles of Ottoman Armenian feminists were remembered in the Armenian community during the period in question (Bilal, Ekmekçiöğlü and Mumcu 2006, 260).

19 Gordon 2008, 63–4.

issues is not equal to forgetting.²⁰ Despite Oruz's initial determination, the women's movement of the 1950s did talk about the late Ottoman and early Republican feminists, but in order to 'tidy up the disorderly history,'²¹ the ghosts of a radical struggle for equality were incorporated and contained in memory through symbolic gestures of remembrance. For example, although the TKB helped erase Nezihe Muhiddin from history by not honouring her as the founder of the Union,²² her name occasionally appeared in magazines and at events. The Women's Newspaper published several articles by Nezihe Muhiddin in the 1950s, as well as a short-lived autobiographical interview series with her, and the Istanbul branch of the TKB honoured her with an anniversary celebration. All of this was most likely the personal initiative of Oruz, who joined the TKB in the 1920s, but later disagreed with Muhiddin's suffragist politics in the 1930s.²³ After Muhiddin's death in 1958, Oruz paid tribute to her as the founder of the TKB in a radio address, but also emphasised the difference between the TKB's mission after its first founding in 1924 and second in 1949.²⁴

Oruz, by having supported the Kemalist gender project and the forced dissolution of the TKB in the 1930s, secured a position in the women's movement in the 1950s as the editor-in-chief of Women's Newspaper and the chairperson of the Istanbul branch of the Union. Just like Oruz, other activists who did not openly challenge the discourse of indebtedness, created a shielded and compliant space of remembrance for the feminists of the Ottoman Empire and early Republican Turkey in the 1950s. The Turkish Association for University Women (*Türk Üniversitesi Kadın Derneği*, est. 1949) awarded Halide Edip Adıvar, another prominent feminist, a medal of honor without acknowledging her political alienation by and from the Republican ruling elite due to her criticisms of the regime.²⁵ In 1955, a bibliography of books written by women was published by the Organisation for the Study of Women's Social Life (*Kadının Sosyal Hayatını Tetkik Kurumu*, est. 1953), which was followed by another bibliography on books written on women.²⁶ At a conference on the latter, although Ottoman and early Republican feminists such as Fatma Aliye, Emine Semiye, Halide Edip and Nezihe Muhiddin were reminisced, Atatürk was designated as the 'great protector of Turkish women' (*Türk kadının büyük koruyucusu*). The report on the conference included a picture of the librarian Neriman Duranoğlu with the caption 'the unforgetting becomes unforgettable' (*unutulmayan unutulmaz*).²⁷ The slogan summarises how these largely symbolic acts of memorialisation of late Ottoman and early Republican feminists

20 Halberstam 2011, 83.

21 Halberstam 2011, 15.

22 Zihnioğlu 2003, 259; İşat 2006, 45–6, 64.

23 'Nezihe Muhittin'in' 1952a; 1952b; 'Nezihe Muhittin' 1952; Muhittin 1952a; 1952b; 1953.

24 Oruz 1958a, 3.

25 'Halide Edip'e' 1960, 1.

26 Cunbur 1955; Duranoğlu 1959. In another book published by the association, Taşçıoğlu mentioned equality demands voiced in Ottoman women's magazines. See Taşçıoğlu 1958.

27 'Sosyal Hayat' 1958, 25.

were motivated to express a responsibility of loyalty (*vefa*) and a tokenist recognition without truly acknowledging how their struggles have contributed to Kemalism's gender project and were later suppressed.

Investments in memorialisation are shaped by a generational logic in which the arbitrariness of remembering and forgetting is organised by a logic of generational succession.²⁸ For the established women's movement, as the Ottoman and early Republican feminists struggle for equality and subsequent suppression faded into oblivion, the concern was to pass on the triumphs of the Kemalist regime to future generations. Atatürk's adopted daughter and the founder and the president of the Organisation for the Study of Women's Social Life, Afet İnan, was a staunch supporter of Kemalism, who wrote in a publication of the association: '(...) today's young generations cannot even imagine the absence of these rights. (...) [O]ur women's rights were not won through a struggle, as was the case in Europe in the last century.'²⁹ In the same book, Müjgan Cunbur commented on the transformation of social and intellectual lives of women as a consequence of how much Atatürk valued women.³⁰ She recognised Fatma Aliye as the woman who initiated the struggle for women's issues, and her sister Emine Semiye as one of the first women to be active in political life. All the while Nezihe Muhiddin's name was not to be found in the book.³¹ When feminist struggles were reminisced occasionally, it was always without a reference to the conflict between the feminists and the Republican ruling elite. On the occasion of the 19th anniversary of the constitutional right of women to vote, Mediha Gezgin, the founder and the chairperson of the Association for the Protection of Women's Rights (*Kadın Haklarını Koruma Derneği*, est. 1954), recalled a rally for the right to vote before the establishment of the Republic and said that this right – a necessity for a civilised nation – was later recognised on the grounds that women fought in the War of Independence.³²

From the mid-1960s onwards, the question whether women passively received their rights or struggled for them, became a controversial issue as new generations of women joined the women's movement, and the collective memory of the movement became a contested terrain. Jale Candan, who regularly wrote about women's issues in the left-leaning weekly *Akis*, claimed that Atatürk did not grant women's rights out of nowhere and that women such as Fatma Aliye, Halide Edip and Nezihe Muhiddin had to fight for them.³³ The TKB chairperson Günseli Özkaya called Candan's arguments as an aberration (*garabet*) and asked for a written proof of women's struggle for political rights.³⁴ During a radio debate celebrating the 30th year of political rights, the two were engaged in a heated discussion on the issue.³⁵ In 1965, Association for Progressive Women of

28 Halberstam 2011, 70.

29 İnan 1963, 3–4.

30 Cunbur 1963, 15.

31 Cunbur 1963, 27–8.

32 Gezgin 1954, 2.

33 Candan 1964, 25.

34 Özkaya 1964, 16–7.

35 'Bir Açık Oturum' 1964, 14–8.

Turkey (*Türkiye İleri Kadınlar Derneği*, TİKD), an organisation later described as a typical liberal women's organisation by some feminist scholars and a Kemalist leftist by others,³⁶ was established. Its chairperson Beria Önger, published a book titled *Atatürk's Revolution and Our Women*, which caused a stir among the different factions of the women's movement.³⁷ In response to the discourse reproduced by Önger, that women had gained their rights without a fight, this time it was Oruz who claimed that Atatürk had not done all the work from scratch and that women had waged a suffragette struggle under the lead of the TKB.³⁸ It is incongruous that she referred to Latife Bekir as a suffragette leader, since Bekir openly opposed Nezihe Muhiddin's suffragette movement,³⁹ which led to the latter's forcible expulsion from the TKB. Back in 1953, Oruz recalled the suppression of the TKB's suffrage campaign and the trial of Nezihe Muhiddin on false corruption charges as if it was a personal conflict between Latife Bekir and Nezihe Muhiddin. Oruz had emerged from this so-called personal conflict as a hero in her own narrative: Upon reading the sensational news about the incident, she claimed, she had decided to start a women's organisation to demonstrate that 'Turkish women could take their affairs into their own hands.'⁴⁰

We argued above how the members of the women's movement, such as Oruz, created a compliant space of selective remembering and forgetting by adhering to the discourse of indebtedness. Even though Oruz was able to challenge this hegemonic discourse in the mid-1960s in a space that was granted to her by the same discourse, it was an individual space of memory that was unaccountable for rewriting events, subjective interpretations, and self-indulgent distortions. Oruz's self-centred version of history became even more evident in her later narrative in the 1960s:

After we⁴¹ returned to Istanbul, we participated in typical suffragette activities with women in the TKB, of which I was general secretary. We organised meetings and demanded equal political rights. We went to Ankara and expressed our wishes to Atatürk... We waged this struggle using the Western currents as an example. In fact, it was not much appreciated in the political circles. It even led to the self-dissolution of TKB. Nevertheless, a great man led this cause on its own terms, relying on the existence of women. At the top of these terms was fighting for the cause with the men in the People's Houses,⁴² but not as a society of women. We have also chosen this path.⁴³

36 Ecevit 2007, 192; Kılıç 1998, 351.

37 Önger 1965, 20.

38 Oruz 1965a, 3, 13.

39 Zihinoğlu 2003, 250.

40 Oruz 1953, 1.

41 Sometimes the first person plural is used in Turkish to express a kind of (false) modesty, even though the subject is in the first person singular. Oruz's use of 'we' here is an example of this.

42 The People's Houses were centres established by the Kemalist regime in 1931–1932, with cultural and political functions to educate, guide and inculcate the masses through Kemalist principles.

43 Oruz 1966, 3.

As Oruz renegotiated the history of the women's movement and her own position in it, she acknowledged for the first-time women's autonomous struggle for suffrage as the cause of the TKB's forced dissolution, although she did not question Atatürk's authority to know what is best for women. Haunted by the TKB's autonomous struggle for equal rights and by Nezihe Muhiddin, who died alone in a psychiatric hospital in 1958, she selectively forgot her own involvement in the traumatic history of suppression and her opposition to Muhiddin's struggle for political rights. In 1969, she dealt more openly with this traumatic history, still without addressing her involvement, pointing out that this was the main reason for the low representation of women in the last parliamentary elections. In one of the last issues of the Women's Newspaper, she said that she occasionally told the story behind the forced dissolution of the Union in the pages of the newspaper, and if it were necessary, she would reveal the truth behind it, implying there was much more to it.⁴⁴

Just as Oruz explained her disappointment with women's low political representation, her gradual assertion of the suffragette politics, which she had disavowed three decades ago, is caused by a combination of several factors. The 1960s was a time when two generations of activists met in women's organisations and publications, as well as in other political and intellectual circles, and the older generation of women's rights activists from established women's organisations felt the need to pass on their experiences to younger ones. While for loyal defenders of the regime like Afet İnan it was a matter of passing on the official discourse on rights, for others like Oruz, this moment provided an opportunity to reassess the Kemalist gender project and rewrite their individual role in it. The traumatic effects of the violent history of suppression relatively lost force, not only because three decades had passed, but also because the post-1960 constitutional period allowed for a more liberal and multi-voiced public discussion of women's rights. The emerging student and labour movements, while still largely committed to Kemalist ideas in the 1960s, made criticism of the state more viable. This period of rapid socio-political transformation also saw changes in what is to be forgotten and remembered. However, although the established women's movement was more open to sharing the history of the feminist struggle, intergenerational encounters were now fraught with conflict as divergences on issues that had not been questioned by the movement in the 1950s became more apparent. We will discuss two of these issues in more detail, (anti-)veiling and (anti-)communism, which were not only important components of the women's movement's mid-century agenda, but on which intergenerational conflict also occurred.

4. Anti-veiling and the Emergence of '*Şulebaş*'

Anti-veiling campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s highlight how the discourse of indebtedness functioned in articulating different types of womanhood, while the emergence of a new kind of veiling in the late 1960s challenged the hegemony of this discourse.

44 Oruz 1969, 4.

The mid-century preoccupation with anti-veiling was hardly without precedent. Although the Republican ruling elite did not introduce a nationwide official ban on the veil,⁴⁵ they considered the abolition of the *çarşaf*, the outer cloak that covered the entire body, and the *peçe*, the face veil, as a necessary step toward modernising the country and a central element of Kemalism's gender project, and the image of the unveiled Turkish woman came to represent the 'modern' Turkey.⁴⁶ Some women, for example Oruz, were also mobilised in local anti-veiling campaigns in the 1930s.⁴⁷ The press and the Republican ruling elite portrayed unveiling not only as a sign of modernity and national identity, since the *çarşaf* was portrayed as primitive, foreign, and non-national, but also as a sign of loyalty to the Kemalist regime; in return for rights, women were to throw away their *çarşaf*.⁴⁸

In associations and magazines of the 1950s, *çarşaf* was identified as one of the major threats against women rights. Rural to urban migration in the 1950s increased the visibility of rural women wearing *çarşaf* in cities, challenging the long-standing synonymy of urbanity with Western-oriented modernisation.⁴⁹ However, activists refrained from identifying *çarşaf* with the rural Anatolia and rather placed the migrants in a liminal zone that was hard to identify. Oruz made reference to 'artificiality' (*türedi*) of women in *çarşaf* who were 'neither urban nor rural' and the need to purge them from Istanbul.⁵⁰ Nazlı Tılabar argued, *çarşaf* was not something frequented among Anatolian women, it was a foreign attire that was embraced only recently.⁵¹ They attempted to tactically distance *çarşaf* from rural women idealised as the Anatolian women epitomising unadulterated Turkishness and motherhood.⁵² Since the founding of the Republic, the Anatolian woman has been revered for her patriotic participation in the war of national liberation as a warrior and supporter.⁵³ Yet, although the Anatolian woman was rhetorically 'the essence, life, everything of Turkish woman,'⁵⁴ she also needed to be protected. The discourse of indebtedness burdened urban mid-

45 Local campaigns against veiling, which included propaganda, distribution of coats and headscarves, were occasionally complemented by local bans. Adak 2014; Metinsoy 2014; Yılmaz 2013.

46 Göle 2013; Libal 2014; Yılmaz 2013.

47 'Diyaribekir' 1935, 4 March, 7; 'Diyaribekir' 1935, 18 November, 3; Oruz 1953, 1.

48 Yılmaz 2013; Libal 2014. For an example see Güngör 1935, 5.

49 Akşit 2009, 14.

50 Oruz 1947, 1.

51 'Portre' 1955, 23. On the pre- and post-Republican discussions of *çarşaf* being a foreign practice see Yılmaz 2013.

52 For a more detailed discourse analysis of the women's movement of the 1950s on different types of womanhood and how they relate with the Republican discourses on the subject, see Sarıtaş and Şahin 2015, 638–44.

53 The idealised image of the Anatolian woman was especially useful in discrediting the struggle of for political rights in the early Republican years: According to this, it was the Anatolian women who deserved the rights for having fought at the war, not the upper-middle class urban women who demanded them (Zihinoğlu 2003, 161–2).

54 Oruz 1933, 51.

dle-class women with this responsibility since they owed the foundation of the Turkish Republic and thus their rights to the Anatolian women's participation in the war. This rhetoric was endorsed by the women's movement of the 1950s. Not protecting Anatolian women from Islamic reactionism and its materialisation in *çarşaf* was condemned as a rejection of their responsibility. Jale Candan was saying: 'Rage... When we see a woman in black *çarşaf*, that is our first feeling. But if we think about it, we have no right to be angry. What did we teach the naïve woman who came from her village [...]?'⁵⁵ Through protecting the Anatolian woman, who was both the 'saviour' and the 'saved' victims,⁵⁶ middle-class women would not only pay their debts to the Kemalist gender reforms, but they would also be exalted from the dangers of false modernisation such as immorality and self-indulgence.⁵⁷

The campaign to prohibit *çarşaf* was argued within the framework of victimhood rhetoric, as it was justified to protect women from the impositions of ignorant puritans and restrictive family members. The DP deputy Nazlı Tıbar proved to be an ardent opponent of *çarşaf*. Shortly after becoming the chairperson of the TKB, she, along with Aliye Temuçin and Edibe Sayar, proposed a bill to ban *çarşaf* in 1956, which failed. The TKB, and other organisations such as the Association for Combatting *Çarşaf* (*Çarşafı Mücadele Derneği*), also distributed headscarves and 'cheap and elegant coats' to poor women who were reported to burn their *çarşafs* away and 'happily' receive their new clothes.⁵⁸

The women's movement vacillated between a victim rhetoric and a rhetoric of betrayal in its attitude toward the *çarşaf* in the 1950s. A writer for the Women's Newspaper Hikmet Omay claimed that the women in *çarşaf* on the streets of Ankara and İstanbul are not migrants from the villages, but ungrateful women who dressed in modern clothes a few years ago.⁵⁹ Nezihe Muhiddin, who in the 1920s opposed the claim that the *çarşaf* prevented women from participating in public life and defended it as a national costume, took a contrasting position in the 1950s.⁶⁰ In one of her rare articles in Women's Newspaper, she said, 'Black masks off! Those who shun the light are suspicious people! Darkness is dangerous. A real Turkish woman does not hide her identity.'⁶¹ Through the metaphor of hiding behind a cloak, women who wore *çarşaf* were denied any authentic identity. *Umacılar* – fiends, a derogatory term for women with *çarşaf* – were accused of doing immoral things behind their veils, such as stealing and cheating; even men were claimed to disguise themselves with *çarşaf* to visit broth-

55 Candan 1956, 23.

56 Göle 2013, 64.

57 Tepe and Bauhn 2017, 145.

58 'Bahçeköylüler' 1960, 1.

59 Omay 1952, 1.

60 Zihnioğlu 2003, 113. As Zihnioğlu says, Muhiddin's defence of *çarşaf* may have been strategic.

61 Muhittin 1952, 2.

els.⁶² Urban middle-class women in *çarşaf* were vilified not only because they tainted the image of women as 'bearers of Westernisation,'⁶³ but also because they did not fit the role of either saviour or victim.

By the late 1950s, the established women's movement was aware that Islamic orders challenged its self-described saviour role and their monopoly on mobilising women.⁶⁴ By the end of the 1960s, younger generations of women who were mobilised through Islamism,⁶⁵ and largely through different Islamic orders and the fast-growing Nur movement, started to pose an even more visible challenge. In addition to rapid urbanisation and the loosening of control over Islamic religious groups under the rule of DP in the 1950s, the increasing participation of women in higher education, particularly religious education, also provided fertile ground for the Islamist mobilisation of women in the late 1960s.⁶⁶ The mobilisation that challenged the Kemalist gender project was characterised by 'the intertwined roles of secular and religious institutions,' such as institutions of higher education which were open to women.⁶⁷ In the spring of 1968 Hatice Babacan, a veiled theology student at Ankara University, alongside another male student, was expelled from the university; followed by the boycotts of around 100 students. These boycotts increased the visibility of young women with veils and other women followed their example. Newspapers reported that Babacan and her expulsion increased the number of veiled female students in theology faculties.⁶⁸ Although certain testimonies suggest that the incident discouraged other pious women from wearing the veil to universities at the time, the story of Babacan and others was passed on to pious women of a younger generation who campaigned for the freedom to wear the veil at universities in the 1980s.⁶⁹ As a result of this new, heightened focus on the issue of veiling and the controversies it triggered, religious conservative circles discussed women's rights in Islam in a new light, which included their right to access the public sphere.⁷⁰

Many of these women adopted a new style of veiling called '*Şulebaş*,' named after Şule Yüksel Şenler, and literally translated as the 'head of Şule.' Şenler, who previously wrote for the Women's Newspaper, became representative of the young generation of pious urban women mobilising under Islamism. Şenler started attending and organising meetings of the religious Nur movement and, along with other women, writing for

62 'İki Kat' 1952, 1–2; Hakçıl 1957, 1, 7; Oruz 1957, 1–5. Similar reports linked *çarşaf* with promiscuity. See Balcıoğlu 1956, 1–3.

63 Göle 2013, 14.

64 Oruz 1958b.

65 For a discussion of the analytical distinction between Islamic and Islamist see Akman 2011, 105; between Muslim and Islamist Yılmaz 2015, 14.

66 Aktaş 2004, 829; Şefkatli Tuksal 2020, 231.

67 Mahmood 2005, 66.

68 'İlahiyat' 1969, 3.

69 İlyasoğlu 2013, 113–4.

70 Aktaş 2004, 830.

Islamist newspapers such as *Bugün* and *Yeni İstiklal* in the second half of the 1960s.⁷¹ Coming from an upper-middle-class urban family, Şenler was not comfortable with the rural and lower-class associations of veiling,⁷² and invented the *Şulebaş* style, with which she claimed women could be both ‘elegant and headscarved.’⁷³ Şenler encouraged her female readers to veil by providing them with new fashions through publishing patterns, collages of Western models with headscarves which pointed to a self-confident Muslim femininity that was not at odds with modernity and attracted many young women to the Islamist movement.⁷⁴ This new identity, ‘the woman of propagation’ (*tebliğci kadın*), uprooted the binary between the urban, enlightened middle class saviours and the rural, backward and uneducated victims, on which the discourse of indebtedness was based. It might even be claimed that it reversed the binary through adopting the role of an Islamist saviour, protecting women from the so-called secular degenerated morality. Şenler, and a young generation of Islamist women, defined a female political agency that challenged the discourse of indebtedness and declared their autonomy from it.⁷⁵

In addition to her articles in the Islamist press, the crowded women-only public speeches on ‘Women in Islam’ made Şenler an influential Islamist figure. Addressing hundreds of eager listeners, Şenler was reported to criticise feminism’s claims of equality, to claim husbands’ right to use physical violence against their wives,⁷⁶ to declare Republican reforms morally corrupt, and to call for the veiling of all women.⁷⁷ The popularity of Şenler worried the established women’s movement. After her speech in Ordu, the chairperson of the city’s TKB branch called on the authorities to take action, which was reportedly unfruitful.⁷⁸ The TKB had already filed a complaint about Şenler in 1967 because of an article she wrote in defence of veiling.⁷⁹ Two women’s organisations⁸⁰ issued a joint statement claiming she was trying to stir up

71 Aktaş 2004, 830; Tezcan 2007.

72 Tezcan 2007, 48–9.

73 Şenler 1970, 6.

74 Altınay 2013.

75 Their politics were not autonomous in relation to the Islamist political organisations and groups in which they participated, as they did not challenge male leadership or patriarchal interpretations of Islam, unlike the more critical voices within Islamist politics in the 1990s (Yılmaz 2015, 19).

76 Şenler cited a hadith that violence can be used against ‘evil and wicked’ women as a response and asked her critics in the established women’s movement if they were so (Şenler 1968c, 2–7).

77 ‘Devrim’ 1968, 1,7; Soner 1968.

78 ‘Devrim’ 1968, 1,7.

79 Tezcan 2007, 53. While she was acquitted in this initial lawsuit, in 1969 she was sentenced to one year and one month for an article she wrote about the Pope’s visit (‘Konuşmacı’ 1968; ‘Şule Yüksel’ 1969, 1; ‘Kara Demirler’ 1971, 1).

80 Association for the Protection of Women’s Rights (*Kadın Haklarını Koruma Derneği*) and Turkish Council of Women Istanbul Centre (*Türk Kadınlar Konseyi İstanbul Merkezi*).

trouble in Turkey.⁸¹ In Women's Newspaper, Oruz wrote that Şenler was a bigot who tried to divide women by positioning Islam and nationalism as opposites.⁸² When the women's movement claimed Şenler was divisive of the unity it claimed under the hegemonic definition of womanhood, Şenler responded by questioning the movement's ability to represent Turkish women, who she claims are devout Muslims, and deriding women's organizations' annual routine teas, balls, and awards ceremonies where alcohol was consumed.⁸³ According to Şenler, the TKB and others panicked at the 'awakening of Turkish women and their turning to their true selves' as she travelled throughout Turkey to establish a genuine women's union.⁸⁴

Although Şenler was a regular writer for Oruz's Women's Newspaper in the early 1960s,⁸⁵ the two generations increasingly diverged in the polarised political climate of the following years. The women's movement's ability to represent all women was increasingly challenged by women who mobilised through Islamist politics and defined an Islamist womanhood that challenged the victimhood rhetoric and the discourse of indebtedness. Meanwhile rising socialist and student movements were taking a stand against Islamist women and their actions, too. While students from leftist organisations declared their support for the dean of theology, who was allegedly attacked for expelling Hatice Babacan,⁸⁶ the left-leaning *Cumhuriyet* reported that a group of women 'from revolutionary organisations and housewives' protested Şenler's public speech in İzmir.⁸⁷ Contrary to what this account might suggest, women from socialist and student organisations and established women's organisations rarely worked together, and because the latter were decidedly anti-communist, these two groups often found themselves in opposite camps of the political spectrum in the late 1960s.

5. Anti-Communism and the Socialist Women of '68

The youth of 1968 in Turkey, like their counterparts around the world, mobilised to demand radical systemic change for justice, equality, and greater freedom, especially in the context of socialist thought clubs at universities and radical actions such as boycotts and university occupations. While initially focused on university reform, their socialist leanings led them to expand their agenda to include anti-imperialism in a relatively short period of time, and they forged close ties with working-class and peasant

81 'İki Kadın' 1968, 7.

82 Oruz 1968, 1.

83 Şenler 1968a; 1968b; 1968c.

84 Şenler 1968a, 2.

85 Later Şenler described the newspaper as left leaning and militant. She recalled Oruz's objections to her religious articles and expressed her surprise in her engagement in ultra-nationalist right politics (Tezcan 2007, 38).

86 'İlahiyat Fakültesinde' 1968, 2.

87 'Gericiliği' 1969, 7; 'İzmirli' 1969, 4.

protests throughout Turkey, making the movement more massive in the process.⁸⁸ As socialist organisations among students and labour movements in Turkey grew stronger in the second half of the 1960s, right-wing groups also organised. Under the conditions of Cold War polarisation, the left and right groups quickly became embroiled in escalated armed conflict as Turkey entered into the 1970s. Women's Newspaper celebrated the founding of both the left leaning Association for Progressive Women of Turkey in 1965⁸⁹ and the ultra-nationalist anti-communist Nationalist Turkish Women's Association (*Milliyetçi Türk Kadınlar Derneği*, MTKD) in 1967.⁹⁰ This gesture, however, was not an indicator of the magazine's neutrality. The established women's movement was not exempt from polarisation, as evidenced by its leading names such as Oruz and Halide Nusret Zorlutuna,⁹¹ who turned to the anti-communist nationalist right political spectrum in the late 1960s. Their different ideological and political stances increased the distance between them and the younger generation of socialist women who later participated in the emergence of post-1980 feminism. For these young women, the established women's organisations were superfluous charities composed of upper-middle-class women.⁹² As Beşpınar suggests, although the women of 1968 had a similar social background to the well-educated and upper-middle-class activists of women's organisations, they also represented a breakthrough in terms of their political and sexual agency, ideas on marriage, femininity and sexual mores, which prepared the ground for the emergence of feminism after 1980.⁹³ The lack of a common base and a common language, among other things, meant that the established women's movement was unable to pass on the history of Ottoman and early Republican feminists.

Although organisations such as the MTKD were founded primarily because of the fears triggered by the rise of the student and socialist movements, culminating in the electoral success of the socialist Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TİP) in 1965 and 1966, anti-communism was already on the agenda of the established women's movement since the 1950s. As Turkey came under the influence of post-war Americanisation,⁹⁴ images of happily married middle-class women in 'free' and 'democratic' American society, stories about their professional achievements, high standard of living, and 'civilised' domestic relationships flooded women's magazines. In contrast, Soviet women were portrayed as unhappy, suffering, neglected, and frightened. They lived and worked in harsh and poor conditions in a society where families

88 Lüküslü 2015, 46–60; 65–71.

89 Oruz 1965b, 3.

90 Oruz 1967, 1.

91 Zorlutuna was also a member of the TKB and was the main figure behind the foundation of the MTKD.

92 Akal 2011, 129.

93 Beşpınar 2021. Kandiyoti's 1977 study of female students at the prestigious Boğaziçi University in Istanbul and their mothers provides similar conclusions. See Kandiyoti 1977, 316.

94 Alkan 2015; Bora 2002, 150–7; Cantek 2015, 426–34.

were disintegrated and people were treated as 'simple work tools like robots' under a despotic government.⁹⁵ The positioning of the pro-American DP government in the Western Alliance was also openly supported through extensive and applauded coverage of events like the sending of troops to the Korean War (1951)⁹⁶ and the NATO membership (1952),⁹⁷ president Celal Bayar's visit to the United States (1954),⁹⁸ and Eisenhower's visit to Turkey (1959).⁹⁹ In line with these reports, Oruz declared that the Women's Newspaper, as the representative of Turkish women, was dedicated to the fight against communism, and the CHP deputy and member of several women's organisations Hasene Ilgaz, called on Turkish women to take relentless action against communism.¹⁰⁰ The organisation of the 1952 Congress of the International Federation of Women Lawyers in Istanbul seems to be a product of the connections Süreyya Aġaoġlu had made in the United States in 1946.¹⁰¹ Azak and de Smaele's study shows the persistent attempts of the International Council of Women (ICW), a United Nations-affiliated non-governmental organisation, to establish a Turkish branch since the 1950s, and the manner in which this was achieved in 1960 should be read as an example of the Cold War dynamics that shaped the women's movement in Turkey.¹⁰² The TKB chairperson Nazlı Tlabar's participation at the Third Congress of Asian People's Anti-Communist League (APACL) in Saigon in 1957, and presidency at the congress in Seoul in 1959, were examples of women's movements activists' involvement in international anti-communist activities.¹⁰³ In Saigon, as the chairperson of the Turkish delegate, she declared communism was outlawed in Turkey as well as at the hearths of the 24 million Turks: 'For us' she continued 'a communist cannot be a Turk, we consider it to be shamefully degrading to be slave to a butcher.'¹⁰⁴

The DP government also controlled the international connections of women's organisations by promoting cooperation with the Western Alliance and preventing the activities of left-leaning international women's organisations in Turkey.¹⁰⁵ While official approval for the membership of the Turkish American Women's Culture Foundation in the Washington-based General Federation of Women's Clubs and the Association for Women's Solidarity (*Kadınlar Dayanışma Derneği*, est. 1960) in the ICW were easily granted, the publications of the Soviet-oriented Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) were banned by a Council of Ministers decision in 1952. Among the resolutions of the TKB's 1954 Congress that followed the decree,

95 Ömür 1948, 1, 2; 'Rusya'da' 1948, 1, 2.; 'Sovyet' 1949, 1, 2.

96 'Kahraman' 1951, 1,8; 'Koreden' 1951, 1, 7.

97 Oruz 1952, 1.

98 Oruz 1954, 1; 'Bayarların' 1954, 1.; 'Kongre' 1954, 1,2; 'Sayın' 1954, 1, 7.

99 'Eisenhower' 1959, 1.

100 Ilgaz 1951, 1, 7; Oruz 1951, 1, 2.

101 Aġaoġlu 1975, 114–5.

102 Azak and de Smaele 2016.

103 Güveloġlu 2016, 24; Wilson Center Digital Archive 1957.

104 Wilson Center Digital Archive 1957, 86.

105 Aydın and Yıldız 2017, 60–5.

there was a disclaimer about Alice Kevork Hamparsomian's participation in the 1953 Copenhagen Congress of WIDF as the Turkish delegate.¹⁰⁶ It is worth noting that the resolution belonged to the congress where the TKB elected Nazlı Tlabar, a DP deputy active in international anti-communist networks, as its chairperson. Another important indication of the differences between the established women's movement and the socialist women of the subsequent generations is that one of the most widespread socialist women's organisations in Turkey, the Progressive Women's Association (*İlerici Kadınlar Derneği*, İKD, est. 1975), became a member of the WIDF in 1978. It reported on the WIDF in its magazine and celebrated its connection to WIDF in 1979 with a banner on 8th of March that read, 'Viva WIDF, Viva İKD!'¹⁰⁷

With the radicalism of the 1968 youth and in the face of growing socialist ideals, the anti-communism of established women's organisations shifted from the international to the local level. Already in 1953 the TKB was one of the founding members of the National Union of Solidarity (*Milli Tesisat Birliği*), which was composed of nationalist organisations and mobilised against the 'threats' of communism and religious reactionism.¹⁰⁸ In 1964 its official publication Union (*Birlik*) published a declaration of 'Atatürkist associations' against religious reactionism as well as the 'servants of Moscow' (*Moskof uşakları*), a derogatory term for Turkey's socialists and communists.¹⁰⁹ Some of the leading names in these organisations engaged in anti-communist ultra-nationalist right in the late 1960s and sought to mobilise women as mothers against the 'communist inculcation' of their children by teaching them 'national values' through associations and magazines. While in 1966, the Women's Branch of the Nationalist Teachers' Union was warning Turkish mothers against the communist threat that would destroy the family and turn women into incubation machines,¹¹⁰ the following year saw the establishment of the Nationalist Turkish Women's Association (MTKD) by a group of women, including Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, who was a TKB member and a well-known figure in the women's movement. As mentioned above, Oruz celebrated the founding of the organisation while she herself was running for the Senate in 1966 for the ultra-nationalist Republican Peasant Nation Party (*Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi*, est.1961) and three years later professed support for the 'Nine Lights Doctrine' introduced by Alparslan Türkeş, the founder of the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Movement Party.¹¹¹ In 1969, a year after the joint declaration in which the TKB had participated, a number of newly established women's organisations including the MTKD and the women's sections of nationalist and right-wing parties and organisations, issued a joint press statement against communists and those who spread communist ideas among youth in universities, saying they were ready

106 'Türk Kadınlar' 1954, 7.

107 Akal 2011, 177, 218.

108 'Milli Tesisat' 1953, 1.

109 'Devrimci' 1964, 8.

110 Tepe 2017, 39.

111 Oruz 1969.

to protect the Turkish state.¹¹² While they strived to restore the patriarchal family against communism and prevent the youth from becoming socialists, they scorned the latter: 'Turkish youth! In our country, every new day brings a new disturbance of peace. Usually, you are the one who causes these incidents. What do you want to achieve?',¹¹³ declared the MTKD, proving its detachment from the youth.

Although women's organisations in the 1950s fought against exclusion of women from paid work, advocated for the promotion of women workers to managerial positions, and to have childcare in the workplace, they related to working-class women on unequal and patronising terms. They met with working-class women in the factories to learn about their needs and to improve their conditions but also set in motion mechanisms to control their bodies and sexualities through monitoring their leisure activities, arranging marriages for single and widowed workers, constantly reminding them of their domestic and family duties, and offering them home-economy courses.¹¹⁴ Their repertoire of action and rhetoric could not meet the demands of the rapid socio-political changes of the time, as their efforts on behalf of professional and working-class women waned as the 1960s progressed. Despite their predominantly middle-class background, socialist women of the 1960s did not want to take on the patronising saviour role that the established women's movement assumed *vis-à-vis* rural and working-class women, and were able to meet the women of these classes on a more equal and solidary level when they supported their protests, boycotts, and strikes.¹¹⁵ Young socialist women's grassroots mobilisation, their zeal to openly criticise the state, and their revolutionary politics challenged the 'conservative modernisation' that Sancar describes for the period of Turkish politics between 1945 and 1965 and to which, the women's movement also adhered.¹¹⁶

During the 1960s, Beria Önger, who later presided over the IKD during its establishment in 1975, made efforts to establish a common and broader front for women struggles in Turkey. Criticizing women's organisations indifference towards women's issues, she called for a federation of women's organisations and a national congress of Turkish women, which would bring politically active and mobilised women together to better fight against the patriarchal family and its gender discriminating legal structure.¹¹⁷ Önger's call for a joint collective action went unanswered by the established women's movement, and her proposals against gender discrimination were not welcomed. Günseli Özkaya, the president of the TKB at the time, argued against introducing positive discrimination for women in politics¹¹⁸ while Oruz defended the primacy of their familial roles in her critical reply to Önger's call for women's increased political

112 'Türk Kadını' 1969, 10–1.

113 Milliyetçi Türk Kadınları Derneği 1969, 1.

114 Duru 1948a, 1, 8; 1948b, 1,7; İlgaz 1948, 1, 2.

115 Akal 2011, 108; Akkaya 2011.

116 Sancar 2012, 232.

117 Önger 1967, 7–8.

118 Özkaya 1965.

participation.¹¹⁹ Although Önger explained the oppression of women by the relations of production, her demands for legislative reform, increased political participation, and education for women did not find favour among socialist women either – most of them were arguing that women would be emancipated only through socialism, thus there was no need for an autonomous women’s struggle.¹²⁰ In her response to Önger, Ayperi Akalın took this view, contending that socialism would be achieved through the collective revolutionary struggle of men and women together.¹²¹ It seems that Önger’s proposals were perceived as either too radical by the established women’s organisations or too liberal by the socialist women of 1968, which testifies to the gap between the political and ideological inclinations of these two groups of women.

6. Conclusion

Studying periods of discontinuity, gaps, and ruptures in history not only challenges the grand teleological narratives of emancipation, but also strengthens the capacity of critical movements and thought to embrace discontinuity.¹²² It cultivates an understanding of societal transformation that is not necessarily oriented towards linear progress. In this article, we aimed to contribute to recent efforts to map the conflicted genealogies of feminist politics in Turkey by tracing intergenerational relations, the ruptures, and discontinuities within the movement as well as continuities within these ruptures and discontinuities, changes, and challenges to hegemonic definitions of womanhood and agency, thus complicating the wave model of feminist historiography. We have found that the women’s groups and associations of the 1950s remembered the struggles of the early Republican and Ottoman feminists, albeit selectively, investing in symbolic acts of memorialisation on the one hand and contributing to amnesia about the radical struggle for suffrage and its suppression on the other in perpetuating the discourse of indebtedness. When young women were mobilised by Islamist and socialist politics in the mid-1960s, their definitions of womanhood and political agency differed radically from those of the established women’s movement. While the established women’s movement gradually acknowledged the history of the radical autonomous struggle of Ottoman and early Republican feminists and their suppression by the Kemalist regime, deep political and ideological rifts hindered the communication and transmission of this history to a new generation of women in the mid-1960s.

Although women in the late Ottoman Empire and early Republican era actively fought for equality and freedom, their struggles were largely unknown to feminists of the post-1980 coup era. It was through the work of feminist historians such as Serpil Çakır and Aynur Demirdirek that the term ‘Ottoman feminism’ shaped the newly forming feminist memory in the 1990s. Discovering the associations and publica-

119 Oruz 1965a.

120 See Akkaya 2011.

121 Akalan 1965, 97–104.

122 Scott 2004, 13.

tions of Ottoman feminists and their demands for equal rights in education, work, and domestic spheres was inspiring for the 1980s feminist movement and became an integral part of their feminist consciousness and struggles.¹²³ Yet there was still a big gap in feminist historiography with regards to the period between 1930–1980 which has also overseen the women's activism of the 1950s and 1960s. Studying the generation 'between' the Ottoman feminists and the post-1980 feminists, meant confronting the ghosts that haunted the overtold narratives of barrenness and stagnation. Our research showed that there was a vibrant movement in those years fighting for various women's causes, such as the elimination of gender discrimination and sexist discourse in the workplace, promoting women's economic independence and greater political representation for women. Our surprise was perhaps similar to that of the feminist historians of the 1990s when they discovered the late Ottoman and early Republican feminists. As feminists who live, work, write, and make politics in times when feminist and queer politics are under attack, when everyday life is marked by co-optations and compromises, when forgetting and inventing new ways of remembering¹²⁴ become a means of survival, we were astonished at what we found, especially once we stopped looking only for truthful remembering and inspiring heroines in history. As Gordon says, ghosts do not speak to everyone in the same way.¹²⁵ The ghosts of the women who were active in the associations and magazines of the 1950s and 1960s, who struggled and capitulated, who were co-opted and sometimes challenged by state structures, who selectively remembered and forgot, spoke to us in ways that are perhaps different from the ways in which they spoke to the feminists of the 1980s and 1990s – with whom we were lucky to meet through their publications, our readings in gender studies courses or in person through various feminist organisations. As we tried to keep these ghosts close to listen to them,¹²⁶ we realised that, just like the feminist historians of the 1990s and the mid-century women's movement, we too had to selectively remember and forget. And our choice of ghosts, just like those of others who have listened or been haunted by other ghosts, albeit involuntarily, will haunt and upset any linear and progressive narrative of history.¹²⁷

The failure of the established women's movement to smoothly pass on accumulated knowledge and experience to subsequent generations provided us with an opportunity to question the value of intergenerational memory transmission. We asked whether generations should be bound to each other in a lineage of heteronormative temporality that equates the future with reproductive succession. The unquestioned valorisation of memory, transmission, continuity, and inheritance can blind us to the values that forgetting brings, such as a greater openness to knowledge that comes from elsewhere¹²⁸ or the pursuit of ghosts that differ from those of our ancestors. To

123 Demirdirek 2020.

124 Halberstam 2011, 82.

125 Gordon 2008, 24.

126 Derrida 1994, 109.

127 Derrida 1994, 109.

128 Halberstam 2011, 62.

conclude this article with the assertion that absolute memory is never possible, and that we, individually and collectively, intentionally, or unintentionally, both forget and remember, would perhaps be to reiterate common sense. And Halberstam is right to remind us that forgetting can serve opportunistic functions for the privileged,¹²⁹ as it did for the privileged Turkish middle-class, educated activists of the women's movement in the mid-twentieth century. Nevertheless, they have helped us explore a feminist historiography that does not impose a normative narrative of progress and inheritance, that remains open to being constantly haunted by discontinuity as well as the contingency of remembering and forgetting to imagine a future that is not bounded by – most likely heteronormative – lineages.

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129 Halberstam 2011, 61.

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