



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Women's Studies International Forum

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/wsif

State of the state in their minds: Intersectional framework for women's citizenship in Turkey



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ARTICLE INFO

Available online 28 November 2014

SYNOPSIS

Based on Crenshaw's (1991) structural and political intersectionality, this paper analyzes women's perceptions of, relationship to, and distance from, the Turkish state as well as their engagement in politics through interviews with women in different social locations in Turkey. Structural and political intersectionality framework is helpful to analyze obstacles and challenges that block an individual's enjoyment of rights as a democratic citizen. Structural and political intersectionality also shows how the Turkish state's treatment of intersectional identities fuels tensions and cleavages among social groups and individual citizens. This paper argues that using intersectional analysis will contribute to understanding the relationship between the Turkish state and its citizens and will allow an examination of identity from a distinct angle.

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Introduction

Democratic citizenship is “full membership in one's community” (Marshall, 1950) and full participation in the realm of politics; “culture and society are necessary contexts and conditions for its practice” (Friedman, 2005: 4). Women's low participation in economic and political life in Turkey indicates that their democratic citizenship is not fully actualized there. Using Crenshaw's (1991) concept of political and structural intersectionality, this paper analyzes women's perceptions of, relationship to, and distance from the Turkish state as well as their engagement in politics. Intersectionality framework is helpful to analyze obstacles and challenges that block an individual's enjoyment of rights as a democratic citizen. This study is critical to the Turkish state in order to recognize complex obstacles that citizens face because of their multiple identities. Additionally, I argue that the Turkish state apparatus enforces cleavages and tensions within and among groups. Rather than formulating social policy through the recognition of the needs of intersectional identities, the Turkish state forces individuals and groups to compete for rights that should be readily available to all.

The next section discusses intersectionality in Turkey; a brief note on methodology follows it. After methodology, women's voices are presented in two different parts. The first part demonstrates structural intersectionality and how women are marginalized in the system through their intersectional identities. The second part shows how political intersectionality uniquely affects women and demonstrates the challenge of prioritizing one political identity over another.

Intersectionality and Turkey

Feminist arguments regarding women's citizenship and their relationship to the state have been widely applied to Turkey. Some discuss the state's construction of a unified “Turkish woman” and the status of women in the nation building project of the Republic and role of Islam (Z. Arat, 1998; Kandiyoti, 1989, 1991; Parla, 2001). Other studies investigate women's gender views on nationalism and the implications of Islam on women (Altan-Olcay, 2009; Altınay, 2004; Kandiyoti, 2003). Part of the literature compares women's distance from the Turkish state through their political and ideological identities, such as Islamist and secular (Y. Arat, 1998, Y. Arat, 2005; Marshall, 2005; Secor, 2005; White, 2002), while other literature describes and analyzes the experiences and challenges of Islamist women in society

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(Göle, 1996; Ilyasoğlu, 1998; Jelen, 2011; Saktanber, 2002, 2006). Some studies focus on women's political movements and activism (Arat, 2010; Arat-Koç, 2007; Coşar & Onbaşı, 2008; Ecevit, 2007; Turam, 2008); other studies analyze women's engagement with modernity, rural women's experiences of migration, female labor participation in neo-liberal economic structure and state role on reducing domestic violence (Acar & Altunok, 2013; Dedeoğlu, 2013; Elveren, 2013; Erman, 1998; Göksel, 2013; Gül, 2013; Gündüz-Hoşgör & Smits, 2008; Tekeli, 1995). By focusing on ethnic identity, other studies offer impressive ideas on the complex relationship between Kurdish women and the Turkish state (Çağlayan, 2007; Gökarp, 2010; Yüksel, 2006).

Intersectionality has become an analytical tool used transnationally to understand the experiences of the “multi-marginalized”, examine the matrix of domination and observe the challenges of those who face oppression (Choo, 2012; Collins, 2012; Geerts & van der Tuin, 2013; Hancock, 2011; Kim-Puri, 2005). This paper shows the need to recognize citizens' intersectional identities, which would open up new possibilities for policy making. Moreover, this study emphasizes how the state antagonistically approaches the intersectionality of identities and forces people to prioritize one right over the other. This antagonism leads to disconnected and fractured politics where people experience a lack of solidarity necessary for democratic transformation.

Intersectionality focuses on the interaction of multiple identities and how such multidimensional subjectivity shapes individual experiences (Crenshaw, 1991; Nash, 2008). There are multiple ethnicities, religions, and cultures that exist in Turkey, and the denial of the “multidimensionality of subjectivities” makes it a challenge to create policies that open up social and economic spheres to complex individuals. “Ultimately, intersectionality seeks to demonstrate the racial [ethnic, religious, sexuality, class] variation(s) within gender and gender variation(s) within race [ethnicity, religious, sexuality, class] through its attention to subjects whose identities contest [these] categories” (Nash, 2008: 88–9).

Crenshaw (1991) differentiated structural, political and representational intersectionality in analyzing the situation of black women in U.S. society. I will particularly focus on structural and political intersectionality in this paper.

Structural intersectionality explains how intersections of gender and race make experiences of discrimination or any other human rights violation for women of color different than white women (Crenshaw, 1991: 1245). In Turkey, the experience of ethnic and religious minority women in the institutions of education, employment and health care and their experience of domestic violence differ from the experience of women in privileged positions. Structural intersectionality suggests that the “experience of membership in a category varies qualitatively as a function of other group memberships one holds” (Cole, 2008: 444; Crenshaw, 1991: 1245). Hence, privileged women are primarily upper-middle-class, ethnically Turkish women. Prior to the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government, secular women had more access to social, economic, and political rights. Today, Sunni women in upper-class positions are also included in the privileged group. Structural intersectionality “reflects the ways in which the individual's legal status or social needs marginalize them” (Shields, 2008: 304). Put differently, individuals with intersecting

identities fall into marginalized positions due to the structural problems they face, such as poverty and language barriers (Manuel, 2007). As an example, Crenshaw discusses how women of color may receive more limited counseling for rape than racially and economically privileged women (Shields, 2008). In Turkey, Kurdish girls in rural areas are less likely to receive education than Turkish girls because of language barriers and a lack of infrastructure, and Kurdish women have much less access to health care than the dominant group, namely, Turkish women.

Political intersectionality “refers to being situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas” (Crenshaw, 1991: 1252; Manuel, 2007: 182) or women are “overlooked by these movements entirely” (Cole, 2008: 444). Political intersectionality stresses that “identity politics frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (Crenshaw, 1991: 1424). As an example, Crenshaw (1991) discusses the domestic violence faced by black women and how both feminists and anti-racists marginalize this issue; anti-racists focus only on racial issues, and feminists focus only on issues of white women (1245). Women who identify themselves as Islamist feminists in Turkey find themselves in between two different political positions, namely, seeking women's rights and seeking religious rights. While the headcover issue concerns both Islamists and seculars, dress choice is not a practical issue for Islamist men or secularly dressed women beyond being a political statement. Neither Islamist men nor secular women face the practical political implications of dress choice. Islamist women endured the burden of Islamic identity politics because they were prevented from continuing their education and rejected from public service due to their dress choice (Ilyasoğlu, 1998). While women face these burdens, Islamist men are “able to work in... state institutions and move up the bureaucratic ladder...while Islamist men are able to blend in or assert themselves, the women who observe *tesettür* are more restricted and have less room for political maneuvers” (Ilyasoğlu, 1998: 250).

Kurdish women face similar challenges, as the Kurdish struggle and the women's movement are two separate political positions. Çağlayan (2007) explains that Kurds have a strict gender hierarchy. Women's labor and sexuality are controlled by a patriarchal system, and the key to this control is honor. Çağlayan's field research indicates that the main reason why women cannot continue their education after elementary school is due to poverty. In addition to poverty, family structure, and the amount of work women have in the household are reasons for this discontinuity (Çağlayan, 2007: 48). She also argues that state development programs are not gender sensitive; thus, these programs perpetuate the continuation of traditional roles for women (Çağlayan, 2007: 41–43). Structural intersectionality notes that programs are not only gender insensitive but also insensitive to regional and local realities. For example, women's funerals (*Kadın Cenazeleri*) in Diyarbakır are carried out single-handedly by women for females of “honor killings” (*namus cinayetleri*). They are called women's funerals as protests for women by women (*Kadınlar için Kadınlarla birlikte bir protesto*) (Çağlayan, 2007: 221). Çağlayan argues that the women's political agenda for these funerals was purely about their real and everyday problems, not other political subjects or events. For this reason, she claims that women's funerals helped to develop the women's

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