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TURKEY'S RESPONSE TO THE GLOBAL GENDER REGIME

Nüket KARDAM

I . Introduction

Most would agree that a global gender equality regime has been established, but it is less clear how those global gender equality norms 'travel' to different localities and interact with local politics, cultural and religious norms. After all, without an understanding of how global norms are interpreted, received, redefined, we are mostly in the dark about the effectiveness of the global gender equality regime. In this paper, I first investigate the

nature of the global gender regime. This is because it is important to know how this regime came into being, who promoted it, what the contested issues are and the existing compliance mechanisms. Then, I turn to Turkey and explore its interactions with this global regime, making sure to pay special attention to its historical, political, religious and cultural context.

II . What Is the Global Gender Equality Regime?

Since the early 1980s, gender equality has received unprecedented attention at international forums. There is a growing international understanding that gender equality is prerequisite to achieving human and sustainable development. Gender equality is now embodied in an international legal instrument, the *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), which entered into force and has been ratified by 186 countries. I have argued elsewhere that a

global gender equality regime has now emerged as defined by these four components (Kardam, 2004). The first one is a set of explicit rules that states agree to and are embodied in treaties and other documents such as platforms for action. The rules are the legal instruments that formalize and implement the principles and norms of an international regime. In this case the definitive legal instrument on gender equality is CEDAW, sometimes also called the women's human rights

regime. CEDAW, the convention for gender equality is legally binding once the appropriate decision-making body of a ratifying state passes them. Governments are obliged to identify and eliminate obstacles to gender equality in constitutional, legal, political and bureaucratic realms.

The other three components of a regime are a) a set of principles b) norms and c) monitoring mechanisms to oversee compliance. The basic principles that underpin the gender equality regime are the prohibition of discrimination against women and the active promotion of equality between the sexes. CEDAW defines ‘discrimination against women’ as: “any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field” (Cook 1997: 188).

The norms of a regime, on the other hand, define the rights and obligations of actors by establishing standards to overcome discrimination. The *Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies* (1985)

and the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995) both define the rights and obligations of governments and of international and regional organizations based on principles of equality and discrimination. For instance, governments are urged to translate the platform for action into national strategies with time-bound targets and benchmarks to monitor progress. International organizations are urged to increase development assistance for women, and engage in gender mainstreaming.

Regimes would be incomplete without decision-making procedures that reflect their norms and principles. And these include supervisory and monitoring mechanisms to formulate and enforce the rules, including a variety of commissions, courts and expert groups who monitor compliance and sometimes apply sanctions. The Commission on CEDAW is entrusted with monitoring compliance by ratifying states. Various other United Nations bodies act as monitors. The Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) and its Secretariat, The Division for the Advancement of Women, monitor and review progress at all levels. Governments file reports to the Commission on their progress, as well as Specialized Agencies of the United Nations.

III. What Are the Explanations for the Emergence of a Gender Regime?

I suggest three sets of explanations: a) the leadership of a global women’s movement and its associated NGOs in alliance with b) the United Nations system which provided forums for agenda-setting, negotiation and norm development, accompanied by c) funding and other types of support the Canadian and some European governments and their bilateral aid agencies and Western liberal foundations. These actors took

advantage of the window of opportunity provided by the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the world focused on democratization and human rights to bring attention to women’s human rights.

The emergence of a global gender regime owes a great deal to the leadership of a global women’s movement and its associated NGOs, which exercised leadership. Overall, thousands of women representing every hue in the ideological

rainbow—secular, religious, radical, grassroots and elite—were mobilized around the world. They were local, national, regional and international, and their goals were to bring women together to share information, resources, and strategies and to create alternative spaces in which to practice organizing, lobbying and legislating issues at all levels. As time went on, global women’s networks became more skilled in policy advocacy. As one observer comments: “But this (success) in no small measure has been due to the pressure that individual activists, women’s groups and NGOs have brought to bear on power holders, even under difficult circumstances in authoritarian and exclusionary regimes. At the recent global conferences, one could not help but notice the growth of an astute and regionally diverse cadres of advocates skilled in navigating the murky waters of global and regional policy and in moving through the circuitous corridors of influence” (Razavi 1999: 24). Representatives of women’s NGOs from Turkey also traveled to the global conferences and increased their awareness of global gender issues. Once they returned home, these NGOs set up workshops and conferences to disseminate CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and other documents. They prepared a *Plan of Action for Turkey* and submitted it to the government and prepared Shadow Reports and presented them to the Committee on CEDAW. In other words, they used what they learned at global forums to lobby the government for change.¹

These accomplishments were clearly aided by United Nations agencies. United Nations conferences and forums were largely responsible for providing the context, space and an infrastructure that served as the basis of an international gender equality regime. In fact, the chronology of the international women’s movement is largely a collection of United Nations conferences in Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi,

Vienna, Cairo and Beijing. These conferences certainly legitimized the issues and brought together unprecedented numbers of women from around the world. The UN agencies such as UNIFEM acted as allies of global women’s networks, allowing women from around the world to participate more fully in the official conferences pressing governments to be more receptive to NGO proposals. Targeted bilateral and multilateral agency and foundation funding enabled NGO leaders to come to these UN meetings. In short, foundations such as the Ford Foundation and Canadian and Northern European governments were key supporters of the organizing efforts that made women’s groups a powerful presence at conferences such as the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, the Cairo Population Conference and the Beijing Women’s Conference.

Women’s NGOs in Turkey also received funds and technical assistance from international donor organizations, such as the bilateral donor agencies of Europe, the EU and the UN to promote gender equality, to train women’s NGOs in leadership and advocacy. It is important to point out that international funding for gender equality became a double-edged sword as many NGOs as they became dependent on this funding for their projects, and followed the priorities of this funding rather than their own priorities. They competed with each other for funding, and some have complained that women’s movements have turned into ‘project feminism’.

IV. How Effective Is the Global Gender Regime?

A major outcome of the Gender Regime is that it has led to the establishment of further principles and norms at the global level. For example, in 1990, the issue of violence against women was one around which global women's networks coalesced. This new focus on violence in the private sphere forced a reconceptualization of the boundaries between public and private. Violence against women in the home, was no longer viewed as private. At the same time, the states' violence against women in the public sphere, such as when rape is used systematically as an instrument of war, was exposed. These led to the establishment of new principles and norms such as *Vienna Declaration of Elimination of Violence against Women* (1993) and the *Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security* (2000). At

the UN level, a Special Rapporteur was appointed on violence against women. Again, women's NGOs from Turkey were very active in the debate on violence against women and were centrally involved in passing a *UN General Assembly Resolution 59/165 on Crimes of Honor*. The global gender regime also helped to open a domestic debate and put gender issues on the agenda around the world. National women's movements learned how to hold their governments accountable. States that ratified CEDAW established National Women's Machineryes. Legal reforms were enacted in line with CEDAW. Progress Reports are filed to the Committee on CEDAW. Multilateral and bilateral donor organizations began to focus on gender issues.

V. Remaining Challenges

1. Ambiguity of Norms and Lack of Agreement

To have agreement on global norms means that they need to be stated in vague terms in order to elicit agreement. This means that they can only provide very general guidelines, and the main onus is on the national and local actors to translate these norms into local contexts where they can become meaningful. I will discuss this issue further as I explore Turkey's response to the Global Gender Regime. How do these global norms interact with local contexts? How do these norms 'travel' as one observer has asked?

Whether or not global norms are stated in vague terms, agreement on the value of gender equality and women's rights is still not widely

shared. Tensions and contradictions among normative principles in international life will persist since there are competing values and understandings on what is good, desirable and appropriate that form the basis of politics. The gender equality regime is no different; it is a story of debate, contestation and dissent in norm development. In Mexico in 1975, a major division was revealed when the conference disintegrated into a heated debate, largely between women's groups from western countries, who stressed discrimination, and those from the developing world who wanted to focus on the more pressing issues of development and justice that affect both women and men. Another area of disagreement is on civil and political rights versus economic, social and cultural rights of women. CEDAW

entitles women to equal enjoyment with men not only of civil and political rights, but also of economic, social and cultural rights. It is fair to say that gender equality claims have put down stronger roots in political and legal rights than in economic rights. Economic rights have found less support in a neoliberal environment. Global economic institutions such as the World Bank still search for ‘business reasons for gender equity’, and have been much more comfortable with providing resources for women’s education, family planning and microcredit, all justifiable in ultimately serving market based economic growth and efficiency norms (Goetz 2001).

A further contested area arose at the Beijing conference between conservative forces, who reacted to the challenge to traditional gender power arrangements, and local and global feminist activists. Baden and Goetz suggest that conservative opposition to the concept of gender at the Beijing process expressed a second-wind reaction after the failure to prevent agreement at the *International Conference on Population and Development* in Cairo on a broad definition of women’s reproductive health rights. They also explain the conservative fixation on gender by the perceived greater influence and presence of feminist NGOs, the greater visibility of lesbians in NGOs, and the inclusion, for the first time in the UN series of conferences on women, of very open language on sexual and reproductive rights (Baden and Goetz 1997: 23).

2. Monitoring and Compliance

Issue areas which propose changes in the relationship between the state and its subjects, such as women’s human rights, are especially sensitive because they challenge a state’s sovereignty. For effective monitoring, we would

need effective monitoring mechanisms. Most observers agree that enforcement of CEDAW has not been adequate. The reports that governments submit to the Committee on CEDAW do not always comply with CEDAW guidelines. They are sometimes quite short, sometimes overdue, and rarely self-critical. CEDAW, like other human rights treaty commissions, has adopted the practice of ‘constructive criticism’ in the examination of reports by state parties, since it is able to apply only the sanction of public scrutiny. These reports are discussed in public sessions and the representatives of the state that introduced the report respond to questions from the committee. As Tomasevski points out: A particular manifestation of this avoidance of collective pronouncements is the fact that CEDAW has never formally denounced a state party to be in violation of the Convention, even though the members have clearly felt that some states have failed to carry out their obligations (1993: 119).

It is obvious that the Committee prefers to keep the dialogue going even with states that violate their obligations or file reservations that may be in clear conflict with the norms of CEDAW rather than exclude them completely since one form of influence is to continue dialogue. It is also worth noting that the Committee on CEDAW is not the only committee that monitors advances on gender equality. The Human Rights Committee and other committees monitoring human rights instruments also cover issues of concern to women in their reviews. But this may be as much part of the problem as it is part of the solution:

There is a great deal of duplication and overlap in what the different committees have to say about women’s human rights. States—and individuals—have limited capacity and resources to monitor and implement. There is room for a more integrated approach to monitoring progress and supporting

technical assistance to avoid waste of time and resources...There is not yet a circle linking the instruments and mechanisms on gender equality and women's rights—CEDAW and its monitoring committee—to technical assistance to promote these rights, as there is in the case of the rights of the child (Hijab 1999: 7-8).

A recent successful example of monitoring comes from UNICEF's experience in the area of children's rights, which constitutes an interesting example even though it is not centrally related to gender equity. UNICEF is directly involved in the monitoring and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It works closely with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which receives reports from states parties to the Convention. These reports then are fed into UNICEF's National Plans of Action at the country level, and into its technical assistance programs. In this way, its country programs become vehicles to promote and monitor the convention.

It is, then, a very timely development that the UN has just established a body called UN Women to be the central body to promote and monitor women's rights. It brings resources and mandates for greater impact and merges United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Women (OSAGI), International Training and Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), and the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) into one entity called UN Women. Part of the problem with monitoring and compliance of the gender quality regime, in my view, has been the multiplicity of actors and lack of one specific body like UNICEF to both monitor and implement CEDAW.

3. State Level: Signing and Ratifying Does Not Necessarily Mean Implementation

Formation of a regime is one thing, its maintenance and implementation another. States have much less incentive to actually 'do' something about gender equality by allocating budgets, staff, targets and deadlines, in other words, 'put their money where their mouth is' for a variety of reasons. First, government elites and bureaucracies are frequently hostile to gender mainstreaming efforts because they are seen as externally imposed political agendas. Why do they attend international forums, and sign and ratify CEDAW then? Because it makes them look good and contributes to their 'international image' as elites see it, and it may be perceived as relatively costless. Why is that the case? As one expert on international regimes says, the lack of well entrenched and properly financed international organizations ensures that international regimes must rely heavily on the ability and willingness of individual members to elicit compliance. As Cook (1997) suggests, UN instruments and institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights offer women an opportunity for recognition that the wrongs done to them are violations of human rights, but the UN system cannot guarantee their rights or offer women the security that their rights will be safeguarded.

In short, even though there is a global gender regime in place, we saw that external incentives for compliance are not sufficient for effectiveness. A country may be party to CEDAW, its laws mostly in alignment with it, yet what we may still see are contested or competing gender norms justified on the basis of traditions, religion, ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Understanding how global gender norms interact with local contexts means going beyond UN interaction with

member states. It means exploring how global norms are ‘interpreted, filled in, responded to and shaped’ at local levels. As the case study on Turkey reveals, gender norms and identities are socially constructed, defined, contested, and interpreted in different socio-political and institutional contexts.

Every culture, institution, society, historical epoch constitutes and interprets sexual difference in a certain way. Turkey constitutes an excellent case study for how women’s human rights are debated and contested.

VI. Global Gender Regime and Turkey’s Gender Politics

1. Response to CEDAW

Turkey, since its inception in 1923, has proclaimed gender equality as a strong symbol of the Westernization process. But the Westernization process and its concurrent secularism did not permeate the whole society and remained limited to the big cities and to the Western regions of the country. There has always been an uneasy tension between a woman’s communal identity as wife and mother in the family and community versus her individual identity as a citizen, with rights to employment, education, political participation etc. This tension can also be viewed as whether women should be primarily part of the private sphere, that is the family, versus the public sphere where men traditionally dominate. Finally, Turkey’s Westernization and secularization process has pitted Western values and Muslim values as opposites and placed women’s rights and freedoms squarely in the Western and Secular camp, implying that Islam is detrimental to women’s rights. Turkey’s interaction with global gender norms should be viewed through these tensions and ambivalences.

Turkey’s involvement with CEDAW originated on the initiative of the Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministry who regarded it as compatible with the state’s long standing commitment to gender equality on the basis of its secular and modernist

orientation. Yet, CEDAW was ratified in 1985 with reservations:

“Reservations of the Government of the Republic of Turkey with regard to the articles of the Convention dealing with family relations which are not completely compatible with the provisions of the Turkish Civil Code, in particular, article 15, paragraphs 2 and 4, and article 16, paragraphs 1 (c), (d), (f) and (g), as well as with respect to article 29, paragraph 1. In pursuance of article 29, paragraph 2 of the Convention, the Government of the Republic of Turkey declares that it does not consider itself bound by paragraph 1 of this article” (Womenwatch 1999).

While gender equality norms as embodied in CEDAW were overall acceptable, at the same time, CEDAW’s claim that men and women are equal in the family was not compatible with the family law in Turkey that proclaimed men as the head of the family. Following ratification, a public petition campaign to encourage compliance with CEDAW and for the lifting of reservations was organized in 1987 by the women’s movement. Initially, these leaders of the women’s movement came from the leftist groups who had been crushed and either sent to jail or exiled by the military coup in 1980. In the 1990s, we see a rise in the influence of Islamist politics, and concurrently, of Islamist women who dressed in coats and scarves that cover their hair and neck in the big cities. The call back to

Islamic values has usually meant a search for an authentic identity that is not influenced, dominated and shaped by the West. In fact, many have seen the process of Westernization and globalization as turning women into commodities for a consumer culture. Thus, covering partly became a sign of resistance to what was perceived as the immoral use of women's bodies in various contexts such as advertising and magazine journalism.

The 1990s and early 2000s constituted a successful period for women's movements in Turkey to demand legal reforms and voice their concerns. At the beginning, the concerns of each group were different: For secular women, they were the enactment of legal reforms in accordance with CEDAW, while the Islamist side was more focused on the right to cover their head as students in public universities or employees in public offices, as they were banned from these spaces unless they gave up their scarves. At the policy and institutional level, the competing discourses of individual women's rights versus women's place in the family led to strangely worded laws or the establishment of parallel organizations. For example, in 1998, the law on domestic violence was adopted but it was called Protection of the Family Law. In 1990, Turkey established a National Women's Machinery in accordance with CEDAW, called the General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women. But it competes for resources with another bureaucratic unit in the same building, called the Family Research Organization.

In 1999, the reservations to CEDAW were lifted, and in 2002, a new Turkish Civil Code was adopted. This represents a significant step forward in bringing Turkish laws in line with CEDAW. The new Civil Code abolishes the supremacy of men in marriage, establishes full equality of men and women in the family, and removes the final say over the choice of domicile and children from

men. It sets the equal division of property acquired during marriage as a default property regime, assigning an economic value to women's hitherto invisible labor. It changes the legal minimum age for women's marriage from fifteen to eighteen. Furthermore, Article 159 of the Civil Code was annulled by the Constitutional Court, which had stated that women needed their husbands' consent to work outside the home. Article 438 of the Criminal Code was repealed which had provided for a reduction of one-third rape if the victim was a sex worker. A new Penal Code was passed by the Parliament in 2004, which makes unprecedented changes in improving women's human rights (see WWHR). Accordingly, provocation will no longer be a defense in honor killings. It will also see that rape in marriage and sexual harassment are treated as crimes. These legal reforms clearly represent responsiveness to and compliance with CEDAW.

What factors serve to explain these very important reforms? I would argue that these reforms are not as much the result of pressure from the global gender regime on the Government of Turkey, as more direct pressure from the European Union, as Turkey applied for full membership, to fulfill the Copenhagen Criteria. Also, an increasingly strong women's movement in Turkey has acted as advocates and lobbied the government for these reforms. No doubt, the women's movement in Turkey also learned from the global women's networks and UN conferences. Even though there are strong differences of opinion between secular and Islamist women's networks, they were able to coalesce around issues like violence against women and honor crimes. Without the advocacy and lobbying efforts of the women's movement in Turkey, these important reforms would not have taken place.

While women and men may be proclaimed to be legally equal, there are, of course, some serious implementation issues. For example, there are still

instances of men taking several wives, one with a civil ceremony, and another under a religious ceremony. The honor crimes have not stopped, in fact, there have been allegations that young women who have ‘defamed the family’ are being forced to commit suicide because jail sentences for male relatives who murdered their female relatives have gone up. Women’s employment has not increased and in fact, decreased. The Prime Minister has publicly encouraged women to have three children. Women who suffer from domestic violence are still afraid to go to the police or courts or may be turned away by them, being told that family is important and that they should go make up with their husbands. Social norms demand that what happens in the family should remain in the family. Social norms still put more value on giving birth to boys, restricting the movement of girls, and sending boys to school first.

In short, the opposing views on women’s human rights is still a central theme in the conflict between secularist and Islamist elites. Thus, a brief discussion of the polarities and dualisms that prevent effective dialogue may be useful.

2. Women and Islam

A discussion of women and Islam cannot be separated from the historical context of Western influence and constant colonization of most of the Muslim world. Although Turkey as the inheritor of the Ottoman Empire escaped colonization, it did not escape strong Western influences. The reasons this is important is because rights of Muslim women have generally been perceived through the dualism of Western civilization and values versus Islamic civilization and values, framing the dialogue in terms of inter-religious and inter-cultural conflict. This perceived opposition has had some unfortunate effects that we must still face

and deal with today. The rise of industrialization and capitalism along with the principles of Enlightenment focusing on reason, rationality and individualism are products of Western culture and Christianity, often spread throughout the world through colonialism. The reason and rationality principles, are, in fact, upheld in Islam, while Arab philosophers such as Avicenna helped transmit Greek philosophy to the Europe of the Middle Ages. Although the dualism between the West and Islam is obviously questionable, the politics of ‘us versus them’ has produced a view of the Orient and Islam in stark contrast to Western civilization and values. As Edward Said has pointed out, the West perceives the East as its shadowy, darker “Other” (Said 1979). The West is thus defined as the cradle of modernity, human rights (including women’s human rights) and superior civilization, while the world of Islam is juxtaposed as being traditional, backward and in need of ‘progress’.

Two major points can be made regarding this analysis: first the experience of being on the receiving end of Western influence and various degrees of colonization meant that modernity, Western dominance and colonization merged into one in the minds and psyches of Muslim communities. Second, that human rights and especially women’s human rights are considered by many Muslims as part of modernity and Western dominance, that is, something to be shunned and to defend oneself against since this historical experience inevitably created a great deal of resentment and defensiveness, along with a search to assert some form of superiority. It is therefore not possible to discuss women’s rights in Muslim majority countries without understanding this historical context and the politicization of gender issues viewed through the lens of Western domination and Western criticism of Islamic cultures. In other words, the colonial powers used the position of women in Islam as a demonstration

of the cultural superiority of the West. In the Ottoman Empire's last days, women's position also became part of this debate.

After the Republic of Turkey was established, the position of women again became the centerpiece of the rhetoric of independence, as in other newly independent countries. Ironically, as Turkey was trying to free itself from Western domination and influence, Ataturk was still employing Western rhetoric to define the nation state and the position of women. This is because the legitimacy of the nation state derived from the rule of the majority with respect to the individual rights of people, including women. And the elite were mostly educated within the framework of Western institutions that valued equal individual rights, Ataturk having been educated in the Western Young Turk tradition and influenced by the ideas of the French Revolution. Yet traditionally and even after independence, women's identities continued to be defined by their familial identities, and men's identities by the upholding of their honor and protection of the virtue of the women in their families.

In short, Islam and Islam's view of women have been associated with backwardness, traditions and women's oppression while women's rights, secularism, Western values all go together. This forces women to choose one side or the other. Thus secular women have not until recently explored their religious identities, or read the Qur'an, while 'religious' women have accused their secular sisters as 'alien to their own culture and religion'. As one Iranian female author claims, in Iran, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, women who acquired a feminist consciousness in either a Western or an indigenous form have always faced a tension between conflicting components of their identity—their Muslimness perceived as backward and oppressed, yet authentic and innate; their feminism as progressive and emancipated, yet

corrupt and alien (Mir-Husseini 1999).

The dualism that is most difficult to break down is individual versus collective identities and this is not directly related to Islam. How will women's individual rights be protected in a country where traditionally women's identity (including chastity and honor) is integrally linked to that of the family and the community? The fear to accord women their rights as individuals must first be investigated in the deep underlying identities that shape what masculinity and femininity mean. The link of masculine identity to the control of women's sexual behavior and men's honor linked to women's chastity are not limited to any specific religion. We know, for example, that honor crimes occurred in Greece, or that until 1978 when the law was changed, men did not receive a jail sentence for murdering their wives in crimes of passion in Spain.

3. Turkey in the Twenty-First Century

In the Turkey of the 21st century, there are some very interesting developments. The AK Party, which is identified with moderate Islam, has been in power since 2002 and many see a strong competition between military and secular elites on the one hand and AK Party and its allies, including the powerful Gülen movement, on the other, to shape Turkey's future. Their viewpoints are presented as black and white, one or the other, and women's position is considered pivotal to which of these will prevail. Yet, upon closer investigation, AK Party's policies defy being pigeonholed into Western or Islamist, as it is not just continuing negotiations with the EU but at the same time building strong partnerships with its neighbors, Syria, Iran, Lebanon, and Jordan, as well as with Russia and Central Asia and China. Much seems to be at stake as Turkey, with its strong economy

and trade ties, is being looked up to by the Muslim world as a potential leader. While some see Turkey as a bridge between West and Islam, others fear that it is tilting towards Islam away from the West and claim that it must make up its mind.

The secular side in Turkey is very fearful that any subscription to Islamic values may bring about a loss of women's freedoms (ultimately turning Turkey into a shariat ruled state) and thus has banned covered women from most public universities and offices. The women's groups who espouse Muslim values and attires, on the other hand, are denouncing these bans on the basis of individual rights, including the right to freedom of dress, right to education and employment, and using Western institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights to seek redress to what they see as violation of their individual rights. After winning a referendum in September 2010, the ruling AK Party vowed to support any student who was disciplined for wearing the headscarf on a university campus. Following this, the head of the Turkish Higher Educational council (YÖK), Yusuf Ziya Özcan, announced that instructors in universities may no longer take action against students wearing the headscarf. While this goes against the Constitutional Court ruling of 2008, most universities have started permitting students to wear the headscarf on campus (Hurriyet Daily News 2010).

How do we break free of this dilemma, these rigid dualisms and black and white worldviews that obstruct our understanding of the complexities and multiple realities inherent in the construction of women's identities? How might greater dialogue on women's rights be promoted among parties with opposing views? How might global women's human rights norms be reconciled with local realities?

4. Strategies for Dialogue

According to Ertürk, multiple levels of intervention and multiple discursive frameworks need to be employed (2004). At the state level, CEDAW may be invoked and Turkey must observe due diligence to protect, investigate and punish by law violators of women's human rights. Pressure from the international system, by means of international law, international networks and donor assistance has been highly useful in this area, while civil society advocacy—women's networks—has maintained local pressure on the government. At the community level, involving families and other non-state actors can further legitimize the human rights and gender equality approach with a cultural or a social convention discourse examining the root causes of women's oppression, including definitions of masculinity. In such discussions, the oppressive nature of certain practices in the name of culture must be flagged. But since change has to come from within the culture, the positive elements of culture and alternative masculinities that are respectful of women's rights should be highlighted. As Ertürk points out, here civil society actors, academics, media, national and international NGOs can play a critical role in collaborating with the state (2004: 15).

A good example is the UNICEF campaign in collaboration with the Ministry of Education conducted in early 2000s which succeeded in increasing the number of girls going to school. A multilevel strategy was devised—national media campaign, garnering support from local bureaucratic, political and religious leaders, going from home to home, and monetary incentives to families sending their daughters to school.

Another example is the multilevel strategies to reduce violence against women, which again included a media campaign with support from

major newspapers and TV stations, women's human rights training programs offered in partnership with state community centers and their social workers, and women's NGOs, religious leaders. For instance, the imams were instructed to point out in their Friday sermons that honor crimes are not condoned in Islam. Women's activists have lobbied at the United Nations, including successful efforts in bringing honor crimes to the international agenda and into UN resolutions. At local levels, workshops are being organized where 'masculinities' are being questioned, including ways in which men can maintain their 'honor' without resorting to violence. As women's human rights activist Pervisat notes:

"In order to prevent honor killings, it is crucial to redefine the concept of honor within the community. ... When talking to families, a cultural discourse proves to be very effective. We believe that male members are also victims of the concept of masculinity—they suffer throughout the decision-making process. We try to give men what I call cultural and psychological space where their masculinity is not challenged and they do not feel forced to kill in order to cleanse their honor. To do this, and in order to create space for long-term change, we take advantage of some positive aspects of Turkish culture to offer individual men an excuse to avoid violence. These include special occasions and gatherings where nonviolence negotiations are encouraged or where authority figures can act as intermediaries, in which we can make use of traditions of hospitality towards guests or respect for elderly people's recommendations as tools to prevent these crimes" (2003: 31).

A further strategy is to focus on common problems across ideological or cultural divides: Islamist women's organizations are working together with secular women in the area of violence against women, honor killings, the establishment of women's shelters, promoting

reform of the Civil Code. The efforts of the Capital City Women's Platform to establish a bridge between secular and religious women's organizations and to develop relationships focusing on particular problems is highly meaningful in terms of overcoming the secular-Islamist polarization in Turkey for example. Secular and religious women's organizations have begun to learn from each other so that the former emulated the effective grassroots organizations of the latter, and the religious women began to fight for their individual rights, including the right to cover their heads on university campuses and government offices, while employing lobbying tactics at national and international levels (such as appealing to the European Court of Human Rights).

Women from across ideological divides have begun to work together in common areas of concern, and further possibilities of confluence and dialogue are ripe for exploration. Women's human rights based on individual human rights need to be reconciled with the kinship and family systems, community values and collective identities in which many women conduct their lives. New alliances with liberal Islamic intellectuals and community leaders, as well as human rights activities must be explored. Furthermore, the shaping of masculine identities that encourage the control of women's freedom of movement and sexuality need to be examined carefully and redefined within the local communities themselves so that they have cultural legitimacy.

VII. Conclusions

As this discussion of the interaction between the global gender regime and Turkish gender politics shows, simultaneous action on all levels, international, national and local, seems to be quite effective, but the various strategies have to be tailored accordingly. While support from international actors is necessary, and national level commitment in the form of new laws, policies and pronouncements by political leaders is important, long term change and dialogue ultimately requires change from 'within' the culture at the local level. Thus, learning to speak the language of the relevant culture/religion is vital. Basic education programs focusing on literacy, human rights, communication and organizational skills can make a big difference in promoting dialogue and conflict resolution at local levels. But such programs need to be nondirective, participatory, and based on proper respect for others.

It is also clear that the dualisms (*between the West and Islam, secularism and Islam, universal human rights and rights based on culture and religion*) all encourage black and white worldviews, which does not reflect the reality of women's lives. I have seen in Turkey many situations, where women dressed in tight blue jeans clutching their i-Phones, and kissing their boyfriends on the street, but their heads are covered. I have seen covered and uncovered women walking arm in arm together. I know for example a family where the female members of the family represent the wide array of female identities—from completely covered in black, to a headscarf, to a suit and briefcase. Most interesting is one case of a woman in beautiful high-heeled shoes, with expensive scarf, who sat next to me on a ferryboat, and as we started talking I found out that she was the manager of a hotel going

home from work. The reality is much messier, richer and different than the black and white views imposed on it.

As Navaro-Yashin notes: "I argue that there is no inherent conflict or necessary difference between Turkey and Europe, Islam and the West. ... It is not possible, in the context at hand to distinguish native from Western points of view because there is no space where they have not been integrally and historically engaged with one another" (2002: 9). She further notes that 'westernization' as a category of historical analysis is a positivist notion that assumes an original distinction between a constructed East and West (2002: 9). The very president of Turkey, Turgut Ozal, who led the country into the liberal capitalist world economy and integration with the West in the 1980s, was also known to be a practicing Nakshibendi, a Sufi Organization. Islamist groups have claimed modernity, they have embraced capitalist practices, but also incorporated the element of 'social relatedness' and 'trust' into the way they do business (Yavuz 2003). The political party in power, the AK party with its Islamist roots, has enacted more legal reforms on human rights, in an effort to satisfy the Copenhagen Criteria, than any other government before it. The Family Research Organization, has just completed a study on gender-based violence. The various women's empowerment programs at local levels bring together women from diverse backgrounds and ideological persuasions with little problem. Hidayet Tüksal, a headscarved teacher of religion urged women to seek education and insist on their rights. Tüksal started a joint education project with secular feminists and the Religious Affairs Directorate that involved training 3,000 state-employed female preachers and Qur'an instructors

to propagate women's education, also publicizing recent changes in the Penal Code. (Economist 2004).

There is room for greater dialogue and exploration of women's human rights in Turkey once the dualisms are transcended to reveal the multiplicity and complementarity of views. It is also clear that masculine superiority has been perpetuated in Turkey in cultural, religious, economic and political institutions. Without a clear understanding on how masculine and feminine identities are shaped in relation to each other, and how masculine superiority is perpetuated, we cannot begin to explore change strategies. Tripp argues that such practices (and identities) defended in the name of traditions, customs or religion are also often seeking to protect certain political and/or economic interests (2002: 414). This means that ultimately practices, which hurt women, have also to be addressed as a political problem primarily by actors within that society itself. This is exactly what is happening in Turkey at the same time as external incentive structures (both CEDAW and EU criteria) are encouraging greater attention to women's human rights. The globalization process is creating new cultural identities, practices and patterns, which creates dissonance but also greater space and opportunity. As Turkey redefines its interaction with the world, a continuing reinterpretation of women's identities and rights will be inevitable.

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Note

- 1 See, for example, www.wwhr.org or www.ucansupurge.org. Websites of two prominent women's NGOs in Turkey for more information on these activities.

