

## “Post-Gezi Islamic Theology: Intersectional Islamic Feminism in Turkey”

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### Abstract

The legacy of the 2013 Gezi Park protests has been controversial and its impact on Turkish politics difficult to assess. At the same time, there has been little reflection on contemporary Islamic feminist thinking in English sources. This essay argues that one important political and intellectual legacy of the Gezi movement has been the development of certain intersectional discourses in Islamic feminism in Turkey, whereby the shared experience of marginalization felt by pious Muslims, women, ethnic and religious minorities, and the LGBTIQ community has begun to broaden and complicate the scope of Islamic feminist discussions of liberation and social justice. By delineating and linking some important connecting threads of Islamic feminist theological thought in Turkey of the past 30 years, this essay will attempt to summarize key developments in the history of Islamic feminism in contemporary Turkey, demonstrating how they have led to new strands of intersectional feminist thinking in the post-Gezi era of Turkish politics.

**Keywords:** feminism, Islamic feminism, feminist theology, Gezi Park, politics in Turkey

**T**hough Islamic thought in contemporary Turkey features vibrant strains of feminist theological thinking, recent developments in these discourses during the 2000s have received little exposure in non-Turkish language scholarship. By describing some of the ways in which Turkish Islamic feminism has begun to elaborate a theoretical project beyond the headscarf debates of the 1980s and 1990s, this article attempts to open a conversation on new trajectories in Islamic feminist thinking in Turkey that have seen renewed strength after the protests in Istanbul’s Taksim Gezi Park on 28 May 2013. This essay will argue that one important feature of Islamic feminist theological thinking in Turkey is the emergence of intersectional discourses, whereby the shared experience of marginalization felt by pious Muslims, women, ethnic and religious minorities, and the LGBTIQ community has begun to broaden and complicate the scope of Islamic feminist discussions of liberation and social justice. Examples of this shift in Islamic feminist discourses in Turkey include political and activist language used at Gezi Park and by the HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, Peoples’ Democratic Party), as

well as feminist theological arguments elaborated by a new generation of Turkish Muslim feminist thinkers.

The widely cited feminist theoretical notion of “intersectionality” (brought into prominence by the work of Kimberle Crenshaw) emerged as an important intervention into feminist theory that draws attention to how women’s experience of gender-based oppression cannot be considered separately from their experiences of racism, classism, or other forms of structural oppression and marginalization. Marginalization and violence can therefore be experienced in different ways based on one’s own specific social positioning and identity relative to established forms of privilege. Throughout this essay, I use the term “intersectionality” to refer to new formations of Islamic discourse in contemporary Turkey that attempt to critique gender-based inequity while at the same time critiquing and implicating other systems of oppression. Though this term is not necessarily used by the writers I am considering, I apply the term (as with my usage of the term “Islamic feminism”) as a description of an important theoretical conversation emerging in contemporary Turkey.

Beginning in the mid-late 1980s, organized “civil feminist” activist groups emerged in Turkey (Tuksal 2014, 24). In contrast with the state feminism of the early Kemalist period, these initially secular civil feminist groups began to elaborate a critique of patriarchy at all levels of Turkish politics and society. During the same period, political Islamists began to elaborate their vision of a pious and socially conservative state and society. From within the broader Islamist movement, groups of pious Turkish women took the first steps toward creating a systematic Islamic feminist language through their advocacy for the civil rights and public visibility of headscarf-wearing women (*başörtülü kadınlar*) in Turkey. Though initially at odds, secular feminist currents of thought and Islamic (or in some cases Islamist) feminist currents of thought began to converge in systematic theological and philosophical reflections in the 1990s and 2000s, as exemplified by the pioneering work of Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal.

As with other civil society causes, Gezi Park exhibited the influence of these emerging Islamic feminist discourses that combined feminist critiques of patriarchy with a rereading of Islamic sacred texts. The side-by-side participation of pious women and secular feminists at Gezi and subsequent protests helped solidify these potential alliances, and gave new political strength to them. To date, the fullest ideological and political impact of Gezi Park has been demonstrated in the success of the HDP, whose campaign rhetoric clearly refers to the ethics, vision, and political coalition-building “spirit of Gezi” (*Gezi ruhu*). Part of the HDP’s commitment to the spirit of

Gezi is its explicit commitment to feminist causes, and its open embrace of religious faith as a legitimate and respectable form of personal identity. In other words, the hermeneutics of Islamic feminism has—evidenced in the examples of the political agitation of Gezi and the political rhetoric of the HDP and some of its prominent members such as Hüda Kaya—emerged as a significant ideological force in contemporary Turkey.

### **Civil Feminism, Islamist Activism, and the Headscarf Movement in 1980s and 1990s Turkey**

Feminist causes, such as female suffrage and participation in the workforce and government, had been centerpieces of the Kemalist state's social modernization projects of the 1920s and 1930s. While state-led reforms did construct the social, institutional, and intellectual foundations of later social activism, the authoritarian nature of their implementation often precluded the development of grassroots activism. After the 1980 military coup, as many scholars have noted, the widespread growth of privatized media and other liberal economic reforms resulted in a plurality of voices in Turkish debates over the definition of national identity, social reform, gender roles, and the role of the state in civil society (all areas of debate previously monopolized by state-centered Kemalist discourses). The political significance of plurality and difference came to be emphasized in the post-1980 period (Timisi and Ağduk Gevrek 2002, 14). Feminist politics in Turkey entered a new period of consciousness-raising (*bilinç yükseltme*) during which women's experiences of oppression in both the public and private spheres became subject to critical evaluation (Timisi and Ağduk Gevrek 2002, 14–15). In other words, the importance of the initial Kemalist reforms notwithstanding, Turkish feminism in the post-1980 period has been driven by civil initiatives, diverse political and intellectual concerns, and grassroots activism.

The emergence of grassroots “civil feminist” activism was one of the most important outcomes of this proliferation of intellectual voices in the 1980s (Aldıkaçtı-Marshall 2005, 104; Tuksal 2014, 24–25). This new current of Turkish feminist activism and thought had its roots in Turkish socialist women's movements, but came to include a wide variety of ideological inclinations, including liberals, Kemalists, and secularists more generally. These activist groups also began to incorporate international feminist theorizing and terminology into discussions of local concerns in the Turkish context (Timisi and Ağduk Gevrek 2002, 14–15; Tuksal 2014, 24–25). The translation and study of feminist theory and theoretical vocabulary during this period would also have momentous impact on Islamic discourses some

years later, as feminist concerns began to be debated in pious Muslim contexts.

During the same period, political Islamism emerged in Turkey as a formidable political and social movement. The political Islamist movement in Turkey (in contrast with the conservative democratic platform of the AKP—*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party) reached the peak of its political power in the mid-1990s with the success of the RP (*Refah Partisi*, Welfare Party), which was subsequently closed down by the Turkish military in 1997. Islamist activism gained social traction with its emphasis on social justice, an anti-corruption agenda, and a strong emphasis on conservative gender roles and family values (White 2002, 213).

Within the broader Islamist movement of the 1980s and 1990s, pious Muslim women began to demand equality and recognition of covered women in Turkish society. Throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, headscarf-wearing pious women have encountered intense stigmatization and discrimination (White 2002, 12, 232). Until the lifting of the headscarf ban in state offices on 8 October 2013, pious covered Muslim women in Turkey had great difficulty securing jobs in the state sector or in attending public universities. The famous case of Merve Kavakçı is particularly illustrative of the challenges faced by the headscarf movement. A prominent activist for the rights of covered women, Kavakçı was elected to serve as an MP representing Istanbul in 1999 as a member of the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*), a successor to the RP. On 2 May 1999, wearing a headscarf during her first appearance at the Turkish parliament, she was booed and jeered at by other MPs, and was prevented from taking her oath of office and driven from the building. She was later stripped of her Turkish citizenship (Kavakçı Islam 2010, 2).

The headscarf movement was highly significant in the history of Islamic thought in Turkey because it represented perhaps the first time feminist discourses of human rights (especially related to freedom of expression) were elaborated in an Islamic idiom by pious Muslim women themselves. This assertion of women's intellectual agency by members of the Islamist movement, however, often came into conflict with the patriarchal social vision presumed by some male Turkish Islamists (White 2002, 234). As Nilüfer Göle has noted, gender is crucial to "Islamist self-definition and implied Western criticism"; "Islamism brings forth women as markers of modest and morality. By the same token, women's participation and politicization engenders the formation of a public and collective identity for women that distances itself from definitions of separate gender roles within the domestic sphere" (Göle 1996, 1).

Despite their utilization of human rights and feminist-inspired discourses, many Islamist women activists sometimes disassociated themselves from the “feminist” label, a term that in Turkey was subjected to widespread prejudice and therefore often derided as “opposition to men, perversion, lesbianism, and ugliness” (Gürhan 2011, 76). In addition, pious covered Islamist women activists often clashed with the social agendas of secular feminist groups. They shared common ground in combating violence against women and the exploitation and objectification of women’s bodies, but diverged in their views on issues such as divorce, birth control, abortion, and sexual ethics (Gürhan 2011, 76).

At the same time, the secular feminist groups that emerged at the forefront of civil activism in the 1980s and 1990s also leveled criticism against pious female activists. As Jenny White points out, “Kemalism and Islamism each provide the other with an oppositional social model that, while it does not need to actually exist in fact, legitimates the idealized characteristics of one by demonizing the perceived opposite characteristics of the other” (White 2002, 8). Initially, secularist civil feminists viewed the headscarf with suspicion, often seeing it as a symbol, a visual affirmation of support for an Islamic state at the expense of Kemalist secularism (Aldıkaçtı-Marshall 2005, 109). Secular feminists viewed Islamist women in much the same way the Kemalist state did many decades previous: as representatives of an antiwoman, patriarchal religious system. This suspicion was an inheritance of Kemalist ideology, which viewed religion itself as inherently anti-democratic; when giving his rationale for the closing of the RP in 1997, the chief prosecutor of the Constitutional Court, Vural Savaş, remarked that “Islam and democracy cannot coexist and indeed one is against the other” (White 2002, 25). Civil feminist critiques largely addressed the role of religious discourses that legitimized and supported patriarchal institutions and practices; they did not initially take into account the viewpoint of women who took religion as the starting point of their identities (Tuksal 2014, 25). By contrast, many pious covered Turkish women described the headscarf as a vehicle of liberation and as a legitimate affirmation of their personal religious identities (Aldıkaçtı-Marshall 2005, 111).

### **Theological Reconciliation of Feminist and Islamic Discourses: The Work of Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal in the 2000s**

One of the most significant Islamic intellectual developments in Turkey in the past two decades has been the emergence of a feminist theological vision that incorporates feminist theoretical insights and terminology into Islamic discourses on ethics, hermeneutics, and social justice. I term

this theological vision “Turkish Islamic feminism.” My usage of the term “Islamic feminism” follows Margot Badran and Aysha Hidayatullah’s usage in that it refers to thinkers and movements that may or may not refer to themselves as “feminist,” but who are all distinguished by “their shared use of dynamic epistemological tools to challenge the abuse of male power in the interpretation of the Qur’an” and other Islamic sacred texts and traditions (Hidayatullah 2014, 45).

This usage is, in fact, how the term “Islamic feminism” (*İslami Feminizm*) first came to be used in Turkish: Nilüfer Göle first used the term in her groundbreaking study of the headscarf movement published in 1991, *Modern Mahrem* (translated into English in 1996 as *The Forbidden Modern*). Thus, the possibility of speaking about “Islamic feminism” in modern Turkish emerged from the activism of the headscarf movement in the 1990s (Badran 2001, 243; Gürhan 2011, 67). As Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal explains, these pious women activists first began a conversation on the relationship between religion (*din*) and tradition (*gelenek*) that was a product of their own experiences and reflections; this conversation has continued as one of the key modes of theological debate among Muslim thinkers in contemporary Turkey (Tuksal 2014, 25). The entry of women into broader sections of the workforce during the 1980s and 1990s also spurred on these discussions.

The work of Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal is perhaps the most influential example of Turkish Islamic feminist theology. Her work represents a watershed moment in the history of Islamic theology in Turkey, as it systematically unites feminist theoretical discourses with Islamic theological and ethical discourses, and in doing so has served as the foundation of feminist theological reflection in contemporary Turkey. In this sense her work represents an entirely new mode of Islamic theological discourse in Turkey: one that resolves the tensions between secular feminism and pious Muslim practice that characterized the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Tuksal, a pious covered woman, received her PhD from the Divinity Faculty at Ankara University, and is currently a faculty member at Mardin Artuklu University in Mardin where she teaches courses in gender studies (Güner 2015). She is a long-time member of the highly influential Capital City Women’s Platform (*Başkent Kadın Platformu*), one of Ankara’s most influential advocacy groups for women’s equality and empowerment. Tuksal was also a regular columnist at the *Star* and *Taraf* newspapers, and she was one of the founding members of *Serbestiyet* (Freedom), a social commentary and news website created in 2013. Tuksal now frequently contributes to *Serbestiyet*, whose pluralist, social-justice viewpoint aligns closely with Tuksal’s theological vision. Tuksal’s most influential work to date has been

her book *Projections of Misogynistic Discourse in Islamic Tradition (Kadın Karşıtı Söylemin İslam Geleneğindeki İzdüşümleri*, 2014; originally published in 2001).

As the first systematic Islamic feminist theological work ever written in modern Turkish, Tuksal's *Projections of Misogynistic Discourse* will almost certainly continue to exercise enormous influence in continuing conversations in Turkey about constructions of gender and sexuality in Islamic texts and discourses. She begins her book with a detailed theoretical definition and analysis of patriarchy (*ataerkillik*) and takes up the task of identifying, analyzing, and determining the sources of patriarchal and misogynistic discourses in the Qur'an and hadith. She highlights key examples of patriarchal and misogynistic discourses specific to Muslim tradition, including the "concept of 'obedience'" (*itaat kavramı*) as the central framework for traditional Islamic discourses on marriage, and the general valorization of male sexual desire and the denigration and fear of female sexual desire (Tuksal 2014, 27–28). Elsewhere she has also criticized the misogyny of "*fitna* discourse" (*fitne söylemi*) that associates female sexuality with moral and social chaos (*fitna*), thus restricting women's participation in public and social life (Tuksal 2013, 1). By stigmatizing female sexuality, *fitna* discourse restricts women's freedom of dress, movement, and participation in the public sphere due to the fear that women's presence in society, when not properly circumscribed, may engender overpowering sexual desire among men. Tuksal also points out that *fitna* discourse constitutes another version of the obedience concept, as it enforces a subservient, quiet, and deferential mode of femininity.

Tuksal contrasts such patriarchal and misogynistic discourses with the actual "essence" of Qur'anic teaching, which assumes and asserts fundamental human equality (Tuksal 2013, 1; Tuksal 2014, 27, 49–51). Tuksal points to Surat al-Baqara 25 and Surat an-Naḥl 90 as paradigmatic summations of Qur'anic ethics. Surat al-Baqara 25 (and a number of other verses) refer to "those who believe and who do good deeds," the essence of the ethical demands of the Qur'an. According to Tuksal, Surat an-Naḥl 90 provides a pithy summary of the core message of the Qur'an that requires universal application to all times and place: "Indeed, God commands justice, and goodness, and giving to kith and kin; He forbids iniquity, evil, and oppression." According to Tuksal, the essential ethical message of the Qur'an is counter to oppression and injustice itself, including the oppression and injustice of patriarchy.

In light of this essential Qur'anic message, Tuksal undertakes a historicist analysis of the provenance of existing patriarchal and misogynistic discourses in the hadith tradition. She also explains the presence of patriarchal

and misogynistic discourses in the Qur'an itself by discussing the "functional structure" of the text. Though revealed to humanity in order to communicate certain universal and timeless truths, the Qur'an was also of necessity communicated to a certain group of people at a certain time in history, and thus bears the traces of the patriarchal social institutions and customs of that time and place (Tuksal 2014, 47). Due to its status as a text revealed to human beings, patriarchal and misogynistic discourses in the Qur'an, as "reflections of the social realities and conditions connected with the first generation to be addressed by the divine message, are woven tightly into the fabric of the Qur'an" (Tuksal 2014, 51).

Thus, Tuksal does not attempt to downplay or interpret away misogynistic language in the text of revelation. Instead, she acknowledges its existence but also neutralizes its negative potential by drawing a sharp distinction within Qur'anic discourse itself. Her avowedly historicist hermeneutic acknowledges the divinity of the text while also acknowledging the humanity of its addressees. The situatedness of the Qur'an's addressees resulted in situated discourses, which may not therefore express the essence of the Qur'anic message (and thus, have limited or no contemporary application, because these highly contextualized verses are addressing an audience that no longer exists).

As Güner shows, Tuksal also powerfully criticizes constructions of Turkish masculinity as lying at the root of patriarchal social instructions and practices in contemporary Turkey: "To be a man, in short, means being the one in power ... We absolutely must talk about, discuss, this hegemonic masculinity [*hegemonik erkekligi*]. Unless we do, it will not be possible to rescue ourselves from problems such as violence". To use her phrase: "Masculinity in Turkey is ill and problematic". In her view, the most important issue of gender justice facing Turkey today is "the acceptance of women as an independent subject" distinct from the hierarchical power relations that define masculinity in contemporary Turkey. Tuksal also calls attention to the fact that, despite major positive steps toward gender justice in the past few decades in Turkey (such as significant steps taken to end domestic violence), male dominance prevails at all levels of Turkish society. Furthermore, she links male dominance to certain types of conservative religious discourses that, though it may be alien to the essence of Islam, predated Islam as a social system and flourished in traditional Muslim societies based on certain interpretations of religious texts. She refers to this particularly religious root cause of male dominance in contemporary Turkish society as "patriarchal religiosity" (*ataerkil dindarlık*) (All quotes from Güner 2015, unpaginated).



## Gezi Park and Intersectional Islamic Feminism in Turkey

By the time the Gezi Park protests erupted in the late spring of 2013, Turkish public opinion had changed considerably on the issue of the headscarf, reflecting a significant and widespread diminution in what was once one of the chief areas of tension between secular feminists and pious Muslim activists. Opinion surveys conducted in the early 1990s in Istanbul revealed that fully 75% of those polled supported the proposition that women wearing a headscarf at a university was “not contrary to secularism” (Sezen 1993, 166). Similarly, public opinion polling in the 2000s reflected that the large majority of Turkish citizens believed that female civil servants and students should have the legal right to wear the headscarf if they so choose (White 2002, 57). This shift in public opinion was momentous, as it reflected changing attitudes to the role of religion in public life and Turkish national identity that had been deeply influenced by doctrinaire Kemalism throughout the twentieth century. It signified an emergent notion of liberal human rights discourse that placed its emphasis on individual freedom of expression at the expense of the preservation of a hegemonic definition of Turkish national identity.

Gezi Park was the moment that this emergent emphasis on individual expression and plural identities became a political movement. The Gezi Park protests, though begun initially to protest police brutality in the dispersal of environmentalist protestors at the centrally-located Gezi Park in Istanbul, rapidly developed into a national movement that “signif[ie]d] new potentialities of collective political action and new understandings of democracy that are not bound by the hegemonic forms of politics and representation” (Karakayalı and Yaka 2014, 118). The protests targeted the exploitation of labor under the AKP’s neoliberal economic policies, its patriarchal rhetoric and social policy (including proposed restrictions on abortion and the AKP’s favoritism toward large families), and its oppressive deployment of a hegemonic construction of Turkish identity that marginalized ethnic minorities, the LGBTIQ community, and visions of gender relations that clashed with the agenda of the AKP.

This agenda produced an unexpected but powerful coalition of identities that found representation at the protests, including pious Muslims who objected to the AKP’s economic or social policies, Kurdish activists, secularists, feminists, and members of the LGBTIQ community. Gezi Park became a space where the right to express one’s own identity and sense of self, regardless of social status or religious or ethnic background, was fiercely defended and promoted. This pluralist ethic became known as the “spirit of Gezi” (*Gezi ruhu*), or an ideal of “collectivity and solidarity on the one hand and the sisterhood of the people of all ethnicities and identities, on the

other” (Karakayalı and Yaka 2014, 128). Put another way, this spirit reflected “universal values, neither leftist nor rightist, deeply individualistic though capable of care, solidarity, and political engagement” (Arat 2013, 807). This ethic was, at its core, an attempted denial of any act of othering (*ötekileştirme*); a utopian vision that championed inclusion and respect above all forms of marginalization and degradation.

Gezi Park became a major turning point in the history of feminist and LGBTIQ activism in Turkey. LGBTIQ activists were at the forefront of the protests, catapulting LGBTIQ rights into an issue of prominent public concern and discussion. Along with feminist protest slogans that attacked misogyny, the rainbow flag became a vivid symbol of the kind of pluralist vision of individual expression that epitomized the spirit of Gezi.

Feminist protestors played a transformational role in structuring the protest discourses of resistance (*direnış*) in ways that avoided misogynistic language (Tekay and Ustun 2013). An alliance between pious Muslim women and secular feminists were demonstrated at Gezi in their joined chant: “Take your hands off my body, my identity, my veil” (Tekay and Ustun 2013). These demands echoed earlier protests: in 2008 uncovered university students in solidarity with their covered friends carried signs which read “don’t touch my friend.” The chant “Take your hands off my body, my identity, my veil” is particularly significant as it represents a moment of reconciliation and coalition-building between secular feminism and the headscarf movement. Gezi secular feminists released public statements proudly declaring their support for and solidarity with pious covered women (“Bir yorum” 2014). They denounced any act of violence taken against women generally, and specifically those who choose to wear a headscarf; they decried AKP attempts to politically divide covered and uncovered women or to “instrumentalize” the experiences of women for their own political gain (“Bir yorum” 2014). Rather than distinguish their agenda from the headscarf issue, Gezi feminists instead strongly emphasized “solidarity among women” (*kadınlar arası dayanışma*) (“Bir yorum” 2014).

The Gezi protests were the product of the intersectional nature of violence inflicted by the Turkish state, whose patriarchal policies and rhetoric united women, ethnic and religious minorities, and the LGBTIQ community in their shared consciousness of marginalization under the AKP administration (Arat 2013, 807). Gezi was therefore composed of “forms of resistance to a continuum of violence enacted by an increasingly authoritarian government” (Arat 2013, 807). This shared experience of resistance had a number of momentous outcomes in Turkish society and social debate, including renewed discussions of the nature of Turkish identity, the nature

of the state, and women's and LGBTIQ human rights in contemporary Turkey. The emergent coalition of secular civil and pious Muslim feminists (informed by and in conversation with LGBTIQ activism) has signaled the emergence of a powerful new form of intersectional feminist discourse. Echoing the theoretical foundations laid by Tuksal's theological work in an activist context, the Gezi protests produced a viable intersectional Islamic feminist discourse and political practice that would emerge in an organized political context only a few years later.

### **Intersectional Islamic Feminism and Electoral Politics: Hüda Kaya and the HDP**

Turkey was shaken by a political earthquake in the summer of 2015. Due to the 7 June general election, the AKP temporarily lost its thirteen-year long majority in the Turkish parliament. The temporary downfall of the AKP majority (which was regained on 1 November) was accomplished by the strong performance of the HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, the People's Democratic Party) in the elections. Garnering 13.1 percent of the national vote, the HDP passed the controversial 10 percent election threshold and entered parliament. The HDP and its supporters faced a wave of post-election attacks and violence between the 7 June elections and the beginning of the fall of 2015, including dozens of attacks on HDP political offices across Turkey in September ("Post Election" 2015). This wave of post-election violence culminated in the horrific suicide bombing of a peace rally involving numerous HDP supporters in Ankara on 10 October 2015, resulting in some ninety-seven deaths and hundreds of injuries ("Anakara" 2015).

The rise of the HDP was a momentous event in modern Turkish politics. The HDP is the first pro-Kurdish party to pass the election threshold and it succeeded in gaining massive support in majority Kurdish regions of the country, significantly reducing the AKP's influence over national politics as a whole. Furthermore, the party platform of the HDP is itself quite striking in the context of mainstream Turkish political discourse. The political rhetoric and symbolism of the HDP often refers explicitly to the Gezi movement. Its party program is based on a pluralist vision of identity that decries all forms of discrimination and oppression; it includes explicit support for Kurdish and other ethnic minority rights, a peaceful end to hostilities in the eastern part of the country, the rights of workers, religious freedom, gender equality, and the rights of LGBTIQ individuals ("Parti Programı" 2015). The rise of the HDP represents the delayed but powerful effects of the Gezi movement; its party ideology successfully combined a pro-peace and pro-Kurdish agenda with the pluralist "spirit of Gezi" to create a movement powerful enough to

temporarily challenge the AKP's majority rule. The significance of Gezi in this event was evident immediately: the cover page of the post-election edition of the famous satirical magazine *Penguen* (Penguin) depicted a tree in Gezi Park, laughin (*Penguen*).

The rise of the HDP brought with it the entry of intersectional Islamic feminism into mainstream Turkish politics via the Istanbul HDP MP, Hüda Kaya. Hüda Kaya was a prominent member of the headscarf movement in the 1980s and 1990s, and was at one point even imprisoned and threatened with the death penalty for her activism ("Hüda Kaya" 2015). She herself freely chose to wear the headscarf at the age of eighteen, after reading the Qur'an for the first time ("Hüda Kaya" 2015). Her ideals reflect a powerful intersectional Islamic feminist vision that now has official representation in the Turkish parliament. She describes her politics this way: "My struggle is not just for headscarf freedom. Both within Turkey and around the world, if they feel a connection to something, people must freely express themselves. This is what I am defending. I take the reference for this from the Qur'an, the single reference point in my life. People are as equal as the teeth of a comb. They only excel each other to the degree that they are virtuous, moral, and possess responsibility" (Sabuncu 2013). Kaya's election message on her official Facebook page is a further example of intersectional Islamic feminist discourse. Her statement celebrates the HDP victory as "the victory of women over male dominance, labor over capital, nature over pillage, unity over singleness, belief over denial, right over oppression."

Kaya has used similarly universalist language to express her views on members of the LGBTIQ community, though there is a very evident tension in her discussion of LGBTIQ identity. She attempts to demonstrate solidarity with the LGBTIQ community on a human-rights level, even while expressing her socially conservative disapproval of LGBTIQ identity itself: "If I say that no one has the right to disparage my lifestyle and preference, I too do not have the right to insult or disparage another's preference, lifestyle, belief, or stance- even if I don't approve of it" ("Ülkücüyen" 2013). Kaya's membership in the highly pluralistic HDP, and her own use of universalist human rights discourses no matter how broadly conceived, therefore still evince a potential theoretical contradiction (or at least an unresolved theoretical tension) with respect to sexual identity.

### **In Place of a Conclusion: Postscript to 1 November 2015**

Following the failure to form a coalition government after the 7 June elections, snap parliamentary elections were held on 1 November 2015. In a surprising turn of events, the AKP regained its majority in parliament

with 49.5 percent of the vote; the HDP reentered parliament with 10.76 percent of the vote. This time, the HDP and other opposition parties did not gain enough votes to prevent an AKP-majority government. Post-election commentary by opposition parties and writers argued that the AKP garnered votes by appealing to the need for national stability and strength felt after the catastrophic bombing in Ankara and a rise in PKK attacks (Alkan 2015; Babacan 2015; İlicak 2015; “Korkunun zaferi” 2015). In their view, in a climate of fear and tension, the AKP successfully managed to draw voters from opposition parties by appealing to the AKP’s professed ability to protect the country from terrorism. The HDP and outside observers argued that the AKP’s vast influence over national media, and the security challenges faced by the HDP due to widespread violence against their offices and supporters after 7 June, were factors that disadvantaged opposition parties’ ability to campaign prior to the 1 November elections (Erkuş 2015; “Unfair Conditions” 2015). Other analyses argued that the HDP’s failure to strongly condemn PKK attacks alienated some potential supporters (Babacan 2015).

The HDP’s continued presence in the parliament remained significant, however. The uniquely pluralistic discourse of their party’s platform will still continue to influence Turkish politics and social debate. For instance, following the November elections, 16 MPs who are openly supportive of LGBTIQ rights have now entered parliament, two of which are Istanbul MPs from the HDP (“LGBTİ Hakları” 2015). Hüda Kaya continues to serve as an Istanbul HDP MP as well. Though the HDP is just beginning its career in the Turkish parliament, its success has enabled new forms of social justice causes to enter into mainstream Turkish politics, including dynamic transformations within Islamic feminism in Turkey that will likely prove to very influential in Turkish Islamic thought in general in the decades to come.

During the latter half of 2015 and through 2016, Turkey was rocked by a wave of horrifying terrorist attacks. As I write these lines, it is less than a week since an unsuccessful military coup (which was prevented by the courageous mass mobilization of Turkish citizens themselves) attempted to take over the Turkish state and democratic system. There is a fierce debate in Turkey regarding the identity of the coup plotters, the appropriate measures to bring them to justice, and the appropriate measures that need to be taken to ensure the stability and perpetuation of democratic institutions and genuine civil society in Turkey. None of these debates will likely be settled by the time this article goes to press, and political polarization in the country may increase as a result. What impact these developments will have on Islamic feminism, and on other Islamic strains of thought in Turkey, is extremely unclear. The HDP, like other Turkish political parties, came out strongly against the coup

attempt and in support of the strengthening of Turkish democracy. What is certain is that this hope is shared by wide segments of Turkish society, cutting across political boundaries and ideologies. Just how this will be accomplished remains an urgent but unanswered question.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup>Tuksal's theology has some interesting similarities with what Asef Bayat has called "post-Islamist feminism" in Iran that endeavors to elaborate "a blend of piety and choice, religiosity and rights" within an Islamic discursive framework "that [combines] religious and secular idioms" (Bayat 2013, 93–94).

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