

Research Profile No.2

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Reflections On A Visit To Turkey

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I had the opportunity to visit Turkey for one week in May 2004, wearing my customary twin hats of academic researcher and WiB activist. My first question was: is there or has there been in Turkey any mobilization under the name of Women in Black? There is not. But 'WiB' is a familiar term to many women there, due in particular to visits to and from WiB Belgrade, and a visit by Luisa Morgantini and other Italian women of *Donne in Nero*.

There have been however other inspiring and instructive manifestations of women's opposition to war and militarism in Turkey, working in a context where a high cost has often been paid for activism. This is a brief review of some of the groups I had the privilege of meeting. It's important to add, though, that my visit was brief and geographically limited. I was based in Istanbul, apart from a brief visit to the South East. It's certain that there are many other interesting individuals, projects and organizations that I missed, particularly in Ankara – where I know for instances there's a feminist 'platform against war'. I look forward to filling out the picture over time.

Militarism and anti-militarism

Turkey's strategic situation

Turkey is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and has a West-oriented defence system. Placed at the juncture of 'East' and 'West', bordering on countries formerly of the Soviet Bloc, adjacent to the Arab world and Iran, and with ports on the Black Sea, the Aegean and the Mediterranean, the land mass known as Anatolia has been viewed by the US and NATO military strategists as a site of great significance, both during the Cold War and since. Turkish nationalists have used this discourse of 'vulnerability' to the USSR and 'insecurity' in the context of Middle Eastern politics to justify a high level of militarization and military co-operation with the US, who have six or seven air bases in Anatolia (Department of Defense 2003).

Within NATO, in terms of numbers of military personnel, Turkey comes second only to the United States. In 2002 Turkey had 816,000 military personnel - more than half as many as the massively militarised USA. Its forces were as numerous as the two next biggest national forces combined – those of Italy and France. Military employees represented almost 4% of the Turkish national labour force. In this respect Turkey is second only to Greece in NATO (NATO website).

Turkey, the USA and Israel

The US has indeed shown ambivalence towards Turkey in the last 15 years. It continues to need it as a site of US military bases in connection with Middle East operations, and as a route for oil pipelines from the newly-available Central Asian oil fields. However West European governments have till recently felt it politic to keep a distance on account of Turkey's poor human rights record and failures of democracy. Some European Union member states have been slow to warm to Turkey's request for membership, their hesitation possibly motivated by racism against this large Moslem neighbour as well as by Turkey's troubling human rights record.

Turkey has a little-publicized alliance with Israel, from whence, with the Pentagon's blessing, it acquires US-produced weapons. Turkish support for Israel fosters a positive relationship with the Jewish lobby in the USA, useful in countering the strong Greek and Armenian lobbies that oppose Turkish interests *vis à vis* Congress (Jung with Piccoli 2001).

Militarism in Turkey

The military has been the defining factor in Turkish politics since the emergence of Turkey from the collapsing Ottoman Empire and the state-building revolution led by Kemal Ataturk in of the 1920s. The Turkish military strongly influences (some would say dominates) political decision-making constitutionally through the National Security Council and by less overt means. The army and police have been forcefully repressive both of popular democratic initiatives, Islamist tendencies and minority self-expression, the climactic moment being the coup of 1980, which effectively stamped out the leftwing radicalism of the 1970s.

Militarist culture is pervasive in Turkish society. With few exceptions, males are obliged to serve in the military and the notion of Turkey as an essentially 'military nation' is widely propagated and popularly endorsed. An obligatory element in high school education is the course titled *National Security Knowledge* taught by military personnel. Through both the school curriculum and their subsequent training during military service, Turks are encouraged to be continually alert to threats by 'enemies' of the nation, both external and internal (Altinay forthcoming).

Turkey's 'enemies'

Apart from the former-USSR, Greece has been the principal 'external enemy'. Overt war between the two emergent nations ended in 1923, but hostilities have continued to flare up from time to time, typically over Cyprus and disputed coastal territory. 'Internal enemies' comprise non-Muslim citizens (mainly Greeks, Armenians and Jews), Islamists and other minorities, together with leftwing political opposition. The most significant threat perceived to internal security however is the Kurdish minority – itself an ethnically plural group – and related religious and cultural minorities whose

claims to 'difference' state policy has until very recently refused to recognize. The present government, elected November 2002, under Prime Minister Erdogan Tayyip, of the Justice and Development Party, is rather conservative on gender issues. But it is an improvement over its predecessor on foreign policy issues (e.g. Cyprus), on democratic rights and on multiculturalism. In particular it has begun to acknowledge, and even to broadcast in, a multiplicity of languages current in Turkey, including most significantly Kurdish.

Between 1984 and 1999, the state and the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK: Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan), militant in the name of oppressed and excluded Kurdish people, engaged in bitter war in south-east Turkey. Some elements of the Kurdish movement have called simply for human rights (including language rights) for Kurds. Others have called for internal autonomy within the Turkish state, and yet others for an independent state involving the Kurdish populations in neighbouring countries. This 15-year civil war is said to have cost more than 30,000 lives. There were many civilian casualties, forced migration and extrajudicial killings. State repression was directed not only against the PKK but against any form of oppositional politics or culture. Areas of the east and south-east still remain depopulated and hugely militarized, and there is a residue of extreme bitterness and mistrust (White 2000).

The opposition to militarism and war in Turkey

Anti-war activism takes the form of a sizeable but loose coalition, the precise composition of which depends on the particular focus. For instance Islamists join the (communist / trotskyst / anarchist etc.) left in opposing US-led military interventions in the Middle East, and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. Mass anti-war demonstrations occur characteristically in the major cities, particularly Ankara and Istanbul. The movement scored a notable success in early 2003 in mobilizing sufficient popular opinion to persuade the Turkish parliament to vote, by a small minority, against granting the US and allies use of its land or air space for the invasion of Iraq.

Not all Turkish men accept the military version of masculinity and the practice of military conscription. In particular, some have felt the war against the Kurds to be morally indefensible. However, to refuse the values of Turkish militarism, sustained so forcibly by nationalist ideology, is socially very costly for men. Two notable books by women have documented this. Nadire Mater's *Mehmedin Kitabı* (Mater 1999) soon to appear in English as *The Good Soldier Mehmet* (Palgrave, forthcoming 2005), movingly and critically documents soldier's experiences of enlistment in the south-east. Ayse Gul Altinay's *The Myth of the Military-Nation* (Altinay forthcoming 2004) demonstrates the pervasiveness of militarization in Turkish education, culture and consciousness, and its gendered nature and gender-specific effects. She also documents the small, but brave and creatively political, movement of conscientious objection to military service.

A glimpse of the refusenik culture came in an e-mail and photos from Ugur Yorulmaz, a conscientious objector active in Savaskarsitlari (the Turkish branch of War Resisters International, www.savaskarsitlari.org), describing a

'Militourism Festival' mounted on May 15, 2004, the International Day of Conscientious Objection.

Three busloads of young men and women belonging to assorted 'anti-militarist, anti-authoritarian and anarchist groups and individuals from Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir' toured significant sites in Istanbul, accompanied by CO 'tour guides' who lectured on their militarist meaning. The aim was to

call on to hundreds of thousands of *de facto* objectors (those who run away from military service) to stop living as fugitives, turn conscientious objection and total objection into an ordinary event, take it out on the streets and bring it into everybody's life (Ugur Yorulmaz, personal communication by e-mail).

The first stop was the Haydar Pasa Train Station. During the war years this station had become a scene of festivity and ceremonial when young recruits are sent off to begin their military service. Here some conscientious objectors were instead *welcomed* on arriving by train, and some were tossed in the air, in mockery of the customary laddish ritual. Stopping at a military headquarters, an academy, a naval museum and a corporation 'selling death machines', they performed an 'irritating concert' and a 'chaotic belly-dance'. They delivered a crate of apples, some good, some rotten, to the military medical centre in mockery of their practice of sorting out the 'fit' from the 'unfit' young male population. They posed for snapshots, sticking their heads through the hole of a cut-out soldier holding the War Resisters' International symbolic broken rifle. And ten new conscientious objectors took their oath. Five were men – but another five were women who, though not subject to conscription, were refusing the deformation of their own lives by militarization. They good-naturedly wrangled with police. 'We said we are non-violent but we didn't say we won't make a fuss!' This day-long extravaganza was partly to remind the people of Istanbul that a NATO summit was soon to be held in the city.

Women's activism

The various political tendencies comprising the mixed-sex coalition opposing militarism and war tend not to be supportive of the idea of a feminist analysis of violence, or feminist activism against it. For their part, some women are critical of the non-consensual, aggressive, even militaristic, style that often characterizes the mainstream movement. But this mutual dissatisfaction cannot be said to have given rise to a country-wide, unified or large-scale women's movement against militarism and war in Turkey. On the other hand, Turkish realities being what they are, these issues have been unavoidably present within various manifestations of Turkish feminism during the 1990s and 2000s. This is typically expressed for instance in what the Feminist Women Circle (see below) say of themselves: 'We think that feminist politics should have a kind of frame which would be against militarism and war, in a country like Turkey where there is supreme power of the army and there have been active war conditions, and still are' (Feminist Women Circle undated). In addition, there have been, as we shall see, a number of local groups or

initiatives that have made militarism and war, or conversely peace, their main focus.

A women's movement

'Second wave' feminism did not get going in Turkey until the early 1980s, in the political waste land resulting from the military's ferocious reassertion of power in the 1980 coup. The first sign was a column in a left newspaper, *Somut*, in 1982. Small discussion groups began forming at this time, with women meeting in each other's homes. In Istanbul, early feminist initiatives were *Mor Cati* (the Purple Roof, a women's centre focusing on domestic violence) and the Women's Library. These were important foci for activism, especially around violence against women and women's control of their bodies and sexuality. As elsewhere, differences and divergences occurred over time, as evidenced by the founding of two journals, one of which was clearly socialist feminist, the other radical feminist.

Relations between Turkish and Kurdish women

This early phase of the movement, I was told by Ayse Gul Altinay, who then, as now, was living in Istanbul, was memorable for its intensity. Its weaknesses (visible in retrospect) were a tendency to élitism, in the sense that many activists were intellectuals, university teachers or students. There was also a certain blindness to issues of racism / multiculturalism, particularly the oppression of the Kurdish minority in Turkey. (Note: The notion of 'multiculturalism' in Turkey stands in contradiction to the state's practice of drawing an ethnic boundary around the 'Turkish nation', homogenizing all within that arbitrary line and defining other inhabitants of Anatolia as aliens.)

For their part, while many Kurdish women activists at this time were strongly associated with the PKK or other Kurdish parties and were militants for their party line, others, as feminists, found their 'Kurdish' identity silenced or ignored in the women's movement. Latterly however a stronger autonomous feminist movement has developed among Kurdish women, who can in turn look more confidently to Turkish women for solidarity as they wage their difficult three-way struggle against the repressiveness of the Turkish state, the racism of the Turkish left and the sexism of Kurdish male militants. In the same period, Turkish feminists have acquired a greater alertness to Turkish injustice towards Kurds and today, although there is still the potential for insensitivity, hurt and anger, more productive alliances are being made than in the past.

Some women's initiatives today

During the week I spent in Turkey in May 2004, based mainly in Istanbul, I had the chance to meet women involved with several different initiatives that have this contemporary quality of being not only clearly feminist but also anti-militarist and positively multiculturalist.

Women's Studies Club of Bogazici University (BUKAK) and the Feminist Women Circle

BUKAK is the women's students' club of the University of the Bosphorus. These young women are energetic in organizing a variety of activities and publish a magazine *Women's Agenda in Bogazici University*. To celebrate March 8 2004 they organized a discussion with me around issues of research on gender and conflict, accompanied by a stall of books and CDs.

The discussion was followed by a performance by artists of the Feminist Women Circle (Feminist Kadın Cevresi), a group that has been active for more than ten years. I cited their leaflet above, stressing the inevitability in Turkish circumstances of a 'frame which would be against militarism and war'. The leaflet goes on to say 'Womanhood has been combined with other identities. Thus, while making politics against sexual oppression it's needed to see what kind of a relationship the patriarchy constitutes with racism, nationalism, capitalism, militarism...intervention in the national and global agenda is a very important part of feminist politics'. Thus they talk of having a 'multi-identity perspective' and building 'multi-identity women platforms'. Their ethos is deeply 'alternative' and 'global'. They organize study groups and seminars, publish an annual magazine, *Feminist Frame*, and translate women's articles for the Turkish/Kurdish page of the Internet independent medium *zmag* (Feminist Women Circle undated).

The Feminist Women Circle theatrical show for International Women's Day, at Bogazici University, was a humorous political play, followed by music and dance. It was stunning in its conviction and professionalism. The performance included Armenian and Gypsy dances and songs as well as Turkish. But most striking was the inclusion of Kurdish dances in a style that mixed traditional with modern. The music and songs were authentically Kurdish, but along with Kurdish-style headscarves the dancers wore trousers, and T-shirts bearing the circular women's-combined-with-peace-symbol.

I was struck by the explosive energy manifested in these two March 8 events at the University and wondered whether some of it came from a lesbian activism. I was told that, no, rather few of the individuals involved would identify as lesbians, and the groups do not actively address sexual politics. Rather, Zeynep Kutluata told me, 'the source of our energy is always our feminist identities'. In fact, many of the Feminist Women's Circle performers, numbering thirty or forty, are also members of a mixed-sex theatre and music group, Bogazici Performing Arts Ensemble, that has produced popular CDs in Turkish, Armenian, Syrian, Kurdish and Greek.

Together men and women seem to have created a refreshing, alternative environment. Feminist Women's Circle, an independent collectivity, have established their own women's living spaces where, they say, 'our daily practices are developed with feminist tendencies' (Zeynep). They write of the importance of their collective living 'in terms of interference to life practices, questioning them, organization and establishing solidarity. So that it is easier

for us to put alternative organization models and life practices into our agenda' (Feminist Women Circle undated).

Amargi

The Amargi Women's Co-operative, full name Amargi Kadin Akademisi, was established in 2001. Amargi is a Sumerian word meaning 'freedom', with connotations of 'return to the mother'. The word was carefully chosen to avoid identification as Turkish, Kurdish or English. Some members of Amargi take actions, 'such as making press statements and holding demonstrations as women opposing the practices of militarist and male-domination-minded politics', under another name: Katagi (Initiative for the Development of Women's Position). There are 25 subscribing members but a larger circle of several hundred women are likely to attend specific activities. The group has office and meeting space, the rent paid for by individual subscriptions. They run courses of feminist criticism and gender studies here, use the office as a base for grassroots CR activity in the neighbourhood, for their campaign to change the law, and for work in support of survivors of violence. It is here that I had a meeting with around a dozen of the core group, including Yesim Basaran, Pinar Selek and others including Ulku, Mujgan and Berivan.

Amargi started at a time when, as they put it, 'Turkish feminism was at a low ebb', reduced to mere funder-driven 'projects' on the one hand, while, on the other, the mass women's organizations were the women's sections of political parties. The issue of difference and diversity was a primary focus for them. They explained, 'We were varied women, so we discussed differences. Ethnic, cultural, sex or class differences. We weren't doing this in the mode of "celebrating the richness of diversity" but of exploring mutual oppressions, a real politics of difference, looking to identify a common agenda'.

Secondly, Kurdish questions and the Kurdish war were central for them. They wanted to 'act for connection' between Turkish and Kurdish women. 'The men typically do this through football matches. Women choose dialogue.' They started by organizing three big meetings, in 2001 in Diyarbakir, in Batman and in Istanbul. The aim was for meaningful connection between Turkish and Kurdish women, women of Istanbul and the south-east, that was 'not just roses and flowers but opportunities to air disagreements'.

A third important focus has been engaging with Turkish militarism. In February 2003, when the invasion of Iraq was impending and it was urgent to hold the government to non-co-operation with US plans, they organized two group visits, one to Silopi on the Iraq border, the other to north Cyprus. (The latter trip was controversial within the women's platform opposing the war in Iraq, some of whom adhere to the left's line on Cyprus, which involves no critique of the Turkish military presence on the island, much resented today by many Turkish Cypriots, as well as Greek Cypriots.)

Amargi say they direct their feminist criticism against the military because, 'like nationalism and heterosexism, it is a mechanism through which masculinity is produced'. They dissociate themselves from the notion that

women suffer most from war. 'That's not the point, that isn't why we do it. We are interested in the reasons, the relation between militarism and sexism.'

As part of their work against militarism they organized an initiative they called the Women's Peace Table, taking it to several towns and cities and finally to Bingol in the Kurdish south-east, with the aim of 'substituting talk for patriarchal violence politics towards the Kurds'. The Table called on the NGOs, the state and everyone who had something to say on this issue to sit symbolically around the table and start discussing it in order to solve the conflict in a peaceful way, instead of with weapons as usual. The visual symbol of the 'broken rifle' was used for this campaign, to signify the rejection of violence.

The left antiwar coalition in early 2003 was opposing the invasion of Iraq. Amargi withdrew their energies because they wished to direct their efforts against militarism as such. Pinar stressed 'we don't just oppose militarism at moments of threatened war. It is intrinsic and continual for us. Violence against women, and the ongoing war with the Kurds, are central for us'. They are in close contact with antimilitarists and conscientious objectors in Turkey and take part in common demonstrations against militarism. In these ways Amargi clearly distinguishes itself from the left's 'just war' position. The group stresses the alternative of 'a civilian response to the conflict'. They see the civil war lived in Turkey most of all as the consequence of undemocratic rule, especially in the 70s and 80s, which leaves violence as the only means of struggle for the left opposition. 'This should be changed by taking account of democratic requests, so as to avoid any re-occurrence of such catastrophes. We believe that non-violent solutions to social problems should be developed.' (E-mail, Ulku)

Amargi have a clear analysis of both violence and power. Violence they see as not only physical but also structural. Violence is legitimated by state power which in turn legitimates men's power and violence in the family. They have a strong critique of 'power as domination' and strive to be horizontal, non-hierarchical, in their own way of working, believing that 'change must come from below'. They see gender as involving power relations that are closely linked to all other dimensions of power. Ethnic power relations for instance are gendered. 'Another dimension of power is the dominance of culture over nature.'

Ka-mer

It may not seem at first sight correct to call the women's centre, Ka-mer, in the predominantly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir, an 'antimilitarist' organization. I include it here however because these are women, working in a place where violence is pervasive and threatening, challenging the patriarchal oppression of women by men, while at the same time signifying something more. For the project is also a bold expression of activism based on the non-violent pursuit of human rights, including women's rights, that has emerged in South East Turkey where state militarism has been countered by a politics of violent resistance.

The name Ka-Mer is an abbreviation of Kadın Merkezi, or Women's Centre. It was opened in August 1997 by a group of twelve women who had been active in other NGOs. They write, 'one day we noticed that we are women'. The war was still going on at this time, though the situation gradually improved. PKK Kurdish party discourse was shifting from armed militancy to non-violence. A ceasefire was achieved in 2000. It was of course easier and more fruitful to work in the absence of armed conflict. As the women of Kameran say, 'the stop of the general violence in the region provided that we can see the situation of women more clearly' (Ka-Mer undated a)

Ka-Mer are independent of all political parties. Although the group is predominantly Kurdish, the project is multicultural: there are Turkish women, and women of various local minorities including Arabs and Assyrians (Christians), both in the team and among those who benefit from their activities. Ka-Mer are opposed to hierarchy and choose teamwork and decision by consensus. They began by setting up an office offering emergency counselling to women experiencing violence. Then they opened a restaurant. Gradually they extended the range of their activities to include work on drug addiction, income and credit generation for women, social and cultural activities, and a kindergarten.

The kindergarten is impressive as a pre-school education modelling the principle that children should be respected as individuals, educated by doing and participating, understanding and questioning, rather than by discipline and fear. They are developing a consciously anti-sexist and non-violent education in which boys and girls equally learn housework and caring skills, and fathers are expected to share in caring for their children (Ka-Mer undated b).

That children are represented in this Ka-Mer nursery as something other than the 'property' of the family is deeply significant in this community, where the key problem is violence against women and girls in the family. At its most extreme this takes the form of extra-judicial execution of women by male family members in the name of family honour. Of more than 2000 women coming to Ka-Mer for help since 1997, due to experiencing violence, 70 were under threat of death for contravening the extraordinarily strict patriarchal code of honour. Two have subsequently been murdered. But many others have been saved through conciliation, or given assistance in escaping to live elsewhere. Some male relatives, designated by the family elders to kill a condemned woman, have come to Ka-Mer asking for help in avoiding this destiny. Ka-Mer are urgently seeking funding for shelters for abused and threatened women.

The founder of Ka-Mer is Nebahat Akkoc, formerly a school teacher, known throughout Turkey as a Kurdish human rights activist who has survived imprisonment and torture at the hands of the Turkish state. Unsurprisingly, this women's centre she was active in founding adopted a 'women's human rights' focus for its work. They have written a handbook for use in a 'women's human rights consciousness-raising programme', offering courses

simultaneously in different towns, involving half-day sessions weekly over a period of approx. 12 weeks. An immensely popular, and continually over-subscribed, self-replicating process, this is effectively building the capability of many women and mobilizing a women's movement in this area. They estimate that 4000 women have by now experienced the course, which has spawned a growing number of remarkable women's centres on the Ka-Mer model. They are uniquely optimistic phenomena in this desolate region, beset with the barbed wire of Turkish military encampments, where people still do not have the right to speak, write and teach in their own language in public institutions, and where non-violence is still far from being an accepted principle in oppositional politics.

An-Fem

This had been a small and very thoughtful group of antimilitarist and feminist women in Izmir, but were no longer operating as a group at the time of my visit. I failed to meet them, but subsequently had an exchange of e-mails with one member, Hilal Demir. The individual women formerly calling themselves An-Fem remain their thoughtful and creative selves, and continue to carry their ideas into the women's and antimilitarist movements, hence my decision to include a description here of the project as it was.

An-Fem (Antimilitarist Feminists) in Izmir, south-west Turkey, began as an informal group of women within ISKD, the Izmir branch of War Resisters, the mixed-sex and international antimilitarist movement. Following a training session run by WRI in Germany where 'feminist strategies' had been on the agenda, their aim at first was to bring women's perspectives into ISKD.

But they became uncomfortable with the 'emotional violence which we call invisible violence' they were experiencing within the organization. They began to develop a feminist critique of the 'patriarchal methods which are used in most [such] groups'. They wrote later

...we all made bad experiences. (Like being interrupt, feeling that your speech is not taken seriously, being obliged to speak loudly and long etc.) We know that we can't avoid the search for different methods and non-violence any longer...the methods which we are using in our meetings and between ourselves influence our activities...We try to develop alternative activities which are more createful ... and effective (An-Fem paper, undated).

In late 1999 some of the German WRI Women's Group came to Turkey for a study visit. The Turkish women were feeling some quite deep cultural differences and difficulties with them, which took time to address. But 'autonomy' was one of the questions debated. And it was after this formative encounter that the Turkish women broke away from ISKD to establish a separate organization. Recognizing that among them were women who identified primarily as antimilitarists, and others who identified primarily as feminists, they called themselves 'Antimilitarist Feminists', or An-Fem. Their focus was on the relation between antimilitarism and feminism.

Because it was not clear for all of us about this connection politically. So we did readings and discussions on that. All the women were non-violent but some of us had no experiences on non-violence, and some of us had experiences on feminism. We did trainings to understand the connection. Militarism has many different faces and it is in our daily life always, also patriarchy is one of the important face of the militarism. So we aimed to struggle with that. Because we as women effecting mostly from this face...

I asked Hilal whether male violence against women had been a subject of importance for them. Her answer was yes, inevitably, since 'you see it everywhere: on the streets, at the schools in the families etc.' It's something 'nourished from militarism.' Yet it was perhaps more characteristic of this group that they had identified, as a 'main and first problem', women's violence against women. They experienced many women in the antimilitarist movement as having adopted the 'strong/hard' style of the male left, in which 'there is no space for emotions or brainstormings', 'you yell or pressure your idea'. This is, she feels, a 'face of militarist style which is really dangerous'. Their new group, consequently, was to be a non-violent group working with non-violent methods, consciously prefigurative. 'We are believing that if we wish an alternative world, so we trust it could be with an alternative way.'

Inspired by an international women's training session which they eventually achieved with the German women, An-Fem's activism in Turkey went on to include training work, with the aim of carrying an alternative working style to feminist groups. They were at this moment, it seems to me, a crucial little initiative modelling non-violence in the women's movement, while simultaneously introducing, as women, an alternative process (singing, for instance) to the 'hard' demonstrations of the left.

An-Fem supported a men's group working for gender change in ISKD. There have been some high-profile cases of conscientious objection to military service in Izmir, and An-Fem worked closely with individual CO men, supporting them through court cases etc. An-Fem had discovered that their proposals for processual and relational change in ISKD were most readily accepted by women and by a homosexual group. 'Therefore,' they write, 'we think that mostly women and homosexuals feel disturbed by the classical methods, or we can say "the others" in the eyes of "man society" ' (An-Fem undated).

After two or three years of activity, however, An-Fem ceased to exist as a group. They became demoralized by failing to progress some of their projects, through lack of time, energy and common will. They were unable to find the resources to handle personal conflicts when they arose.

This process tried us a lot. When we perceived our burning-out - it was too late - we tried to change this situation but could not find enough energy. So we agreed to finish the group.

Winpeace

Greece's project of nationhood as conceived in the 19th century was in the main a project of liberation from Ottoman domination and the recovery and unification of 'Greek' territories and Greek-speaking populations, most importantly in Anatolia and the Aegean islands. There were bitter wars and mutual expulsions of population, the conflict of the 1960s and 1970s between Greek and Turkish Cypriots being a late expression of this. The 'Greek' therefore is seen in Turkey as the paradigmatic 'enemy other'. As a result, relations between the Greek and Turkish government were often hostile, and there was rather little social and cultural interaction between the two peoples until the 1999 earthquake brought some rapprochement.

In 1996 there occurred a territorial dispute between the Turkish and Greek governments over the island of Imea/Kardak. Provoked by the absurdity of such a dangerous stand-off over a barren rock in the ocean, Margarita Papandreou, feminist president of KEDE, the Centre for Research and Action on Peace, in Athens, made a phone call to Zeynep Oral, writer, peace activist and one of the co-founders of the Turkish-Greek Friendship Association in Istanbul. They discussed taking some initiative to prevent recourse to violence in the conflict between the two countries. This resulted in a meeting of Turkish and Greek women in July 1997, and eventually the formation of an organization, Winpeace (Women's Initiative for Peace of Greece and Turkey). Some of the members were old friends from the 1980s, 'the anti-cruise-and-pershing days', when women of all NATO countries had met in Brussels in Women for a Meaningful Summit, protesting the deployment of US missiles in Europe.

The aims of Winpeace include taking joint action in building a peace culture; enhancing women's role in conflict resolution; and developing non-violent solutions to problems and tensions from a women's point of view (Winpeace undated). I met with Turkish Winpeace members Nur Bekata Mardin, Gonul Dincer and Zulal Kilic. They told me, 'It's easier for women to focus on many issues that are common and frictionless, and unite us more than the issues that divide us. But even if we are dealing with differences, we manage in a different way. Our way of thinking is inspired by women's values on preserving life.' In political composition the Turkish members are relatively diverse, the area of agreement between them relatively narrow: 'peace with Greece'. By contrast, Greek members are mainly from the centre-left party PASOK and thus have a more comprehensive shared agenda. The group communicate through three e-mail listservs, in English, Turkish and Greek, and meet together once or twice a year. They have a website: (www.winpeace.net)

The organization has both political and practical projects. Politically they campaign for the two governments to reduce military budgets, especially those parts of military programmes that are directed specifically against each other's country. They have called for a 5% reduction of military budgets of both countries by 2003 and for savings to be channelled toward satisfying human needs: education, health and the empowerment of women. The

reductions have actually been realised, due to a grave economic crisis in Turkey and the need on the part of Greece for funds to cover the cost of preparations for the 2004 Olympic games. Arguing from a women's perspective on 'security', they see violence as caused by poverty, despair and the culture of violence. If you give people hope, eradicate poverty and generate a peace culture at grassroots level they will be less willing to support violent solutions. Sustainable peace springs from peace education and a culture of non-violence, they say, not armaments.

They have three current practical projects, for which they have received EU funding. First, 'literature exchange'. They have already translated short stories from Turkish to Greek and a children's book from Greek to Turkish. Now they are working on two women's novels. The second project is 'peace education', under which theme they have developed and piloted a curriculum designed to address prejudice and promote non-violent solutions to conflict, for use in schools with 14-16 year olds. This will soon be published as a book. They are launching a campaign for the inclusion of peace education courses as part of the regular curriculum of schools at all levels in both countries. They have also been running youth camps for some years, in which Turkish, Greek and recently also Cypriot, high-school and university students of both sexes can get to know each other and share courses on conflict resolution. (As in Winpeace itself, in all these encounters English is necessarily the common language.)

Winpeace's third project, of 'agro-tourism', involves a cooperative of rural women of three Turkish villages and women of Lesbos, a Greek Aegean island. Agro-tourism (they write) 'is an alternative type of tourism, soft rather than massive, aggressive or industrialized, a tourism that respects people and environment. It is a modern but also traditional way of tourism rooted into the local community and based upon their geographical characteristics, traditions, culture and customs. It is a business activity aiming at hosting tourists in private houses or in the small pensions/hotels. For this reason it is evident that such a kind of tourism passes through the hands and the soul of the rural women and empowers them' (Winpeace undated). Based on a practice of women's cooperatives already familiar in some areas of Greece, they have fostered collaboration between pilot villages. Women are trained and supported in establishing 'bed and breakfast' accommodation for tourists and producing organic foods for sale etc. Eventually it is intended that visitors will be able to buy a package holiday that involves a week on the Greek island and a week in the Turkish village.

Things this visit to Turkey made me think about

The focus on 'Turkish militarism'. In comparison, say, with the UK, there is quite a marked and clear focus among the above groups on the militarism and militarization of the state in which they live – as opposed for instance to protesting individual war acts like those of a Milosevic, Sharon or Bush. I imagine this to be due to: the emphatic, even proud, traditional militarism of Turkish nationalist discourse, the soldierly nature of its 'national identity', the

continuance of compulsory military service, the overt involvement of the military in political life, aggressive political policing and the particular phenomenon of the repression of the Kurdish minority (Altınay forthcoming). But it may be that, for women in some other countries, Turkish women could be an exemplary model of looking deeper than the epiphenomenon of a war to challenge the ideologies and structures that produce or foster the war-making tendency.

'Patriarchal honour' as motivating violence in both state and family. I was struck by the fact that masculine honour legitimates femicide in some subcultures in Turkey, and may perhaps (though less explicitly) be seen as legitimating battering, abuse and oppression of women in a far wider segment of the population. When I heard that marked out in mega-letters across a hillside in south-east Turkey are the words (in Turkish) 'The Border is Honour', it struck me forcibly how patriarchal honour is at work not just in the traditional family but simultaneously in contemporary state militarism, legitimating defence expenditure and the construction (and killing) of another kind of 'other'. Women here are making this connection explicit in their feminist antimilitarism.

Reasons for the absence or presence of Women in Black. I wonder whether it is mere accident that there is no group calling itself 'Women in Black' in Turkey, or whether it can be explained by Turkish circumstances. The WiB formula functions for opposing the oppression of Palestinians and the militarism of the Israeli state – it could presumably have been equally relevant to Kurds and Turkey. It may be that street vigils (though this is far from being all that WiB groups do) have appeal and effectiveness, and indeed are only feasible, in particular political situations and moments. When we were speaking of 'Women in Black' several of my informants recalled weekly silent vigils that occurred during the war years in Turkey, protesting 'disappearances' of family members. The media came to know the vigilliers as the 'Saturday Mothers' - although they called themselves the Saturday People, and included men as well as women. They suffered serious police harassment and eventually desisted. Alternatively the use or non-use of the name/formula WiB in a given place, may simply reflect the degree of women's international connectedness. I may get an answer to this from observing other countries where WiB does and doesn't 'catch on'.

Acknowledgments:

This profile is based on a six-day visit to Turkey which was in part an occasion for pursuing my current research project *Women Opposing War: Organization and Strategy in the International Movement of Women against Violence and Militarism*. During the visit I met and learned much from the following women. My very sincere thanks to you all!

- Nur Bekata Mardin, Gonul Dincer and Zulal Kilic of Winpeace;

- Zeynep Kutluata, Banu Acikdeniz and other friends in BUKAK and the Feminist Women Circle;
- Yesim Basaran, Pinar Selek together with Ulku, Mujgan, Berivan and a number of other activists of Amargi / Katagi
- Nebahat Akkoc and colleagues at Ka-Mer in Diyarbakir;
- groups of active women in two other women's centres in the Kurdish area of SE Turkey: Ka-Mer in Mardin and Kad-Mer in Kiziltepe;
- Nadire Mater, journalist and author, who generously invited me to her home to meet several friends with long experience in the Turkish women's movement;
- Tansel Demirel and Asena Gunal of the progressive publishing house Iletisim;
- Ugur Yorulmaz and Hilal Demir of the antimilitarist movement both sent me written information.
- Ayse Gul Altinay gave up a week of her precious time to be my constant companion, guide, informant and interpreter. She also generously read and commented on several drafts of this profile.

I returned a first draft of their individual profiles to Winpeace, Bukak/FWC, Amargi, Ka-Mer and An-Fem, and received helpful comments and amendments, of which I took account in producing a second draft. This draft was returned, as a whole, to each group, and I believe from further comments they are all now at least comfortable with the idea of it appearing on the web. It is important to say, though, that I take full responsibility for any remaining errors. Please feel free to help me in building an accurate picture – the weblog at www.cynthiacockburn.org is open for your comments!

Below are some contact addresses which the individuals involved are willing to have circulated.

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Website: www.winpeace.net

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This document is one of a series of local and regional profiles that will appear on this website in coming months. They are interim products a two-year research project *Women Opposing War: Organization and Strategy in the International Movement of Women against Violence and Militarism*, being carried out by the author from her base in the Department of Sociology, City University, London, during 2004/5, with the support of several charitable trusts. The profile is not intended for publication in its present form. I would be grateful if you would not quote it in published work without first seeking my agreement.

The weblog on which you have found this Profile is an experimental tool in my process of action-research. My hope is that the act of putting interim materials into public space in this way may enable others to help me improve them, facilitate discussion between and among activists and others interested in this field, and ultimately deepen our understanding of each other's activities and ideas.

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