# Digital Feminist Activism in Turkey: Has Long-Awaited Fourth Wave Feminism Arrived?

*Türkiye'de Dijital Feminist Aktivizm: Uzun Süredir Beklenen Dördüncü Dalga Feminizm Geldi mi?*

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**Highlights:**
- User-centred social networks have presented an important role in social movements.
- Digital platforms have started to be used to promote awareness within feminist politics.
- Digital spaces have a potential to work as counter publics for marginalised groups, such as women.
- Digital feminism in Turkey presents an alternative space for women to express their demands.

**Abstract:** Throughout different waves of feminisms, women have called attention to sexist political and social norms across countries. Starting from the first wave feminist demands of suffrage to third wave's intersectional feminist politics, women activists have struggled to achieve gender equality in different contexts. With an emphasis on intersected identities, fourth wave feminism, also called digital feminism, endeavors to implement third wave's concepts in the digital space via blogs, websites and social media platforms. In Turkey, in the second decade of the 2000s, women have started to extensively use social media to combat patriarchy, particularly violence against women and femicide, and to increase communication and solidarity among women in line with the political opportunity structures in the country. Through digital platforms, women stimulate political change by exposing gendered discourses. However, due to government's increased control on digital spaces, activists' capacity to alter the social gendered structure has been limited. Nevertheless, digital spaces still have a great potential to work as counter publics for marginalized groups, such as women.

**Keywords:** Digital Feminist Activism, Fourth Wave Feminism, Hashtag, Social Movements, Turkey.

**Öne Çıkanlar:**
- Kullanıcı merkezli sosyal ağlar, toplumsal hareketlerde önemli bir rol üstlenmektedir.
- Farkındalığı artırmak için feminist politikada dijital platformlar kullanılmaya başlanmıştır.
- Dijital alanlar, kadınlar gibi marjinal gruplar için karşıt-kamu olarak çalışma potansiyeline sahiptir
- Türkiye'de dijital feminizm, kadınların taleplerini ifade etmeleri için alternatif bir alan sunmaktadır

**Öz:** Kadınlar, farklı feminizm dalgaları süresince, farklı ülkelerdeki cinsiyetçi politik ve sosyal normlara dikkat çekmişlerdir. Birinci dalga feministlerin oy hakkı taleplerinden üçüncü dalganın kesişimsel feminist politikalarına kadar, kadın aktivistler farklı bağlamlarda toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini sağlamak için mücadele etmişlerdir. Dijital feminizm olarak da adlandırılan dördüncü dalga feminizm, kesişimsel

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kimliklere vurgu yaparak, üçüncü dalga feminist hareketin kavramlarını, bloglar, web siteleri ve sosyal medya platformları aracılığıyla dijital alanda uygulamaya çalışmaktadırlar. Türkiye'de 2000'li yılların ikinci on yılında, kadınlar, ülkedeki siyasi fırsat yapıları doğrultusunda ataerkillik, özellikle kadına yönelik şiddet ve kadın cinayetleri ile mücadele etmek ve kadınlar arasındaki iletişim ve dayanışmayı artırmak amacıyla sosyal medyayı yoğun bir şekilde kullanmaya başlamışlardır. Dijital platformlar aracılığıyla kadınlar, cinsiyetçi söylemleri açığa çıkararak siyasal değişimi teşvik etmektedirler. Yalnız, siyasal iktidarın dijital alanlar üzerindeki artan kontrolü nedeniyle aktivistlerin toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı yapıyı değiştirme kapasitesi sınırlanmıştır. Bunula birlikte, dijital alanlar, kadınlar gibi marjinalleştirilmiş gruplar için karşıt kamu oluşturmak adına hala büyük bir potansiyele sahiptir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** dijital feminist aktivizm, dördüncü dalga feminism, etiket, toplumsal hareketler, Türkiye.

## Genişletilmiş Özet

Son yıllarda yeni bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerinde ve dijital medyada yaşanan gelişmeler, toplumsal ve siyasal hareketlerin ülkelerdeki gelişimlerini şekillendirmiştir. Dijital medya hem bilginin dolaşımının sağlanmasında hem de aktivist hareketlerin örgütlenme pratiklerinde etkin bir şekilde kullanılmaya başlanılmıştır. Feminist aktivizm de bu akımı takip ederek dijitalleşmekte ve bu süreç dördüncü dalga feminist hareketin varlığı üzerinden tartışılmaktadır. Mevcut literatürde yaygın olarak tartışılan dijital feminizm temelli örnek olayların derlenmesine dayanan bu makalenin temel odak noktası, dijital feminist aktivizmin Türkiye'deki popüler örnekleri üzerinden dördüncü dalga feminizmin, ülkedeki siyasi fırsat yapıları da göz önüne alındığında, gelişme potansiyelini tartışmaktır.

Kadın hareketlerinin tarihi farklı ortak temalara sahip "dalga"lar üzerinden açıklanmaktadır. Birinci dalga olarak nitelendirilebilecek ilk feminist dalganın ana vurgusu, 19. yüzyılda, özellikle ABD ve Birleşik Krallık'ta genel olarak haklar ve özel olarak da seçme/seçilme hakları üzerinden şekillenmiştir. 1960'larda gerçekleşen ikinci dalganın odak noktasını ise "özel olanın politikliği" vurgusu ile kadınların ataerkil toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinden topyekûn kurtulması oluşturmaktadır. Toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini sadece beyaz, heteroseksüel, orta sınıf kadın üzerinden tanımlamakla eleştirilen ikinci dalgaya bir kritik duruş olarak siyah feministler tarafından 1980'lerde başlatılan üçüncü dalga ise, toplumsal cinsiyetin tek başına kadın olma durumunu açıklayamadığı fikrine ve bu nedenle farklı toplumsal lokasyonlara ait kesişimsellik olgusunun vurgusuna dayanmaktadır. Böylece, üçüncü dalga feministler, kadınlar arasındaki farklılıkları tanımanın ve kadınların maruz kaldığı farklı tahakküm biçimlerine göre politikalar üretmenin önemine dikkat çekmektedirler. 2000'li yıllardan bu yana, yeni bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerinin yükselişi ile feministler, çoğunlukla dijital olarak yönlendirilen yeni, dördüncü bir dalganın potansiyelini tartışmaya

başlamışlardır. Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006) ve Instagram (2010) gibi yeni sosyal medya platformları alternatif bir kamusal alan yaratmışlardır.

Vegh (2003: 71-84), dijital aktivizmi 'internet üzerinden şekillenen politik bir hareket' olarak tanımlamakta ve "farkındalık/savunuculuk", "örgütlenme/seferberlik", ve "eylem/tepki" olarak ayırdığı üç türünden söz etmektedir. Dijital, dördüncü dalga, feminizm, üçüncü dalga feminizmin kesişimsel kimlikler üzerinden şekillenen kavramsallaştırmalarını içermekle birlikte, söz konusu aktivizm yollarını kullanarak, dijital platformlarda bu talepleri seslendirmektedir. Türkiye üzerinden değerlendirildiğinde, özellikle 2000'li yılların ikinci on yılından itibaren kadınların dijital medya teknolojilerini kullanarak feminist politika ürettiği ve kadınlar arasındaki iletişimi ve dayanışmayı artırmak için bu platformları kullandığı görülmektedir. Bu katılımda, 2002 yılından bu yana iktidar partisi olan Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin (AKP) toplumsal cinsiyet, cinsellik ve aile alanlarındaki muhafazakâr ve dışlayıcı tutumu etkilidir (Eslen-Ziya, 2013). Siyasal iktidarın toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine karşı çıkma, en az üç çocuk sahibi olmayı vurgulama, kadınların kürtaj erişimini sınırlamaya yönelik politikalar üretme gibi muhafazakâr söylem ve politikalar üretmesi kadın öznelliğine yönelik kontrolü artırmış ve feminist hareketlerin siyasi kapasitelerini sınırlandırmıştır (Kandiyoti, 2016; Altunok, 2016). Bu noktada, kadınların dijital alanları aktif bir şekilde kullanması, resmî kamusal alanlarda kendilerine yer bulamayan marjinalleştirilmiş grupların bir karşıt-kamu yaratma mücadelesi olarak görülebilmektedir (Messina, 2022). Bu karşıt-kamulara örnek olarak, dijital aktivizmin ülkedeki ilk örnekleri, 2000'li yılların başında kurulan feminist dergiler *Amargi, Feminist Politika, Kültür ve Siyasette Feminist Yaklaşımlar*'da görülebilmektedir. Sonrasında kurulan bloglar, *5Harfliler* (2012), *Reçel Blog* (2014), *Çatlak Zemin* (2016) ve feminist web sitesi *Erktolia.org* (2015), geleneksel biçimci yöntemlerden ayrılan yapıları ve alternatif bir [feminist] gündem oluşturabilmelerindeki başarıları ile dijital feminist aktivizmin ve karşıt-kamu oluşturabilme potansiyelinin önemli örnekleri olarak yer almaktadırlar (Goker, 2019; Cantek & Bora, 2015; Erdem & Karakoç, 2019).

Blog ve web siteleri ile sosyal medya platformları da karşıt-kamu oluşturma pratiğinde ve ulusal ve uluslararası feminist dayanışma ağlarının kurulmasında etkin olarak kullanılmaktadır. Kadınların, bu platformlarda özellikle kadına karşı şiddet ve kadın cinayetleri etrafında örgütlendiği literatürde tartışılmaktadır. Özgecan Aslan (2015), Emine Bulut (2019) ve Pınar Gültekin (2020) cinayetleri sosyal medyada kadın cinayetlerine dikkat çekmek adına başarılı kampanyaların başlamasına neden olmuş ve uluslararası dikkat çekmeyi başarmışlardır. Bununla birlikte, her ne kadar kadın cinayetlerinin sayısı sürekli bir artış gösteriyor olsa da (Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu, 2022), kadınları şiddetten korumakla yükümlü siyasal

iktidar, kadına şiddete karşı en önemli yasal korumalardan olan *İstanbul Sözleşmesi*'nden 2021 yılında ülkenin muhafazakâr ahlak değerlerine vurgu yaparak çıkmıştır (Messina, 2022).

Feminist aktivizm, dijital alanlar aracılığıyla bir karşıt-kamu ve uluslararası feminist ittifaklar kurarken, ülkedeki hegemonik otorite nedeniyle cinsiyetçi politikaları değiştirme kapasitesinde sınırlandırılmaktadır. Siyasal iktidarların medya ve internet üzerindeki mutlak gözetimi ve kontrolü, dijital platformların bir disiplin ve sansür alanı olarak var olabileceğini göstermektedir (Brimacombe vd. 2018; Lu, 2020; Lixian, 2020; Dey, 2020; Matos, 2017). Bununla birlikte, 2000'li yılların ikinci on yılından itibaren kadınların dijital varlığı yadsınamaz bir gerçekliktir. Kadınlar, taleplerini dijital platformlar üzerinden dile getirerek kamusal alanı demokratikleştirmeye çalışırken feminist bilgi üretimine katkıda bulundukları dijital karşıt-kamular yaratmışlardır. Bloglar ve web sitelerinden, sosyal medya ve etiket aktivizmine kadar, kadınlar savunmasız grupları güçlendirmek ve ülkedeki cinsiyet eşitsizliklerine dikkat çekmek için ulusal ve uluslararası ittifaklar kurmak için yeni bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerini kullanmaktadırlar. Bu nedenle dördüncü dalga feminizmin Türkiye'de feminist bilgi inşasına katkıda bulunmak için, sınırlı da olsa, önemli bir potansiyeli olduğu yadsınamaz.

**Introduction: Do Different Feminist Waves Mean Different Problems/Solutions?**

The development in the new information and communication technologies and the digital media in recent decades has affected the form of social movements and shaped political communication methods and processes. The use of social media to promote awareness within social movements has started to dominate the form of activism, including feminist politics. Based on a compilation of case studies examined within the existing literature on the subject, the particular focus of this paper will be on the popular examples of digital feminist activism and the potential for a fourth wave feminism in Turkey. However, rather than a first-hand data collection, the paper is depended on the existing studies' findings on the given subject. In order to examine the potential for a fourth wave feminism in Turkey, firstly, the different waves of feminism and their focal points will be discussed in this section. Then digital feminist activism's advantages and disadvantages will be reviewed. Finally, the potential for a fourth wave feminism in Turkey will be questioned through political opportunity structures.

To explain different focuses on women's problems, scholars have used the "wave" rhetoric to discuss the history of the women's movements, whether/or not those had feminist politics. The first wave's main emphasis was on women's rights, particularly, enfranchisement/suffrage, in the 19th century, especially in the US and the UK. During this "wave" of political action, [white] women struggled to win their political, civil, and social rights to be treated as equal citizens as

men (Walby,1994). The second wave's focal point, however, was women's liberation from patriarchal gender roles with an emphasis on the "private sphere", which took place in the 1960s. Simone de Beauvoir's famous quote, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir, 1956: 273) has been frequently cited to demonstrate the gendered aspect of societal norms. Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1977), which originally came out in 1963, had an immense influence on women in this era. Systemic sexism that locates women in private sphere - at home and ascribes them caring roles was robustly criticised and created some sense of homogeneity among women and a political "sisterhood". With the motto of "personal is political", second "wave" feminism aimed to achieve a collective social change, where a shift from a sole focus on "rights" to address women's cultural and social marginalisation, was intended. However, the second wave feminism was denounced to exclude the majority of women who were ignored by "feminist solidarity". Women of colour criticised earlier feminists by arguing that racism had shaped their feminist theoretical stance, and thus they ignored women's complex social realities (hooks, 2000; Mohanty, 2003). Consequently, any feminist politics centring on white, middle-class, heterosexual women's experiences, were criticised by third-wave feminism, which aimed to direct the focus on women's multicultural and intersectional existence (Crenshaw, 1995), and on their diverse social belongings based on their gender, class, race, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, ability, and age. Third-wave feminists draw attention to the importance of recognising the differences among women and producing policies according to different forms of domination women are subjected to. Thus, while the first two waves centred around gender, third wave has successfully drawn attention to women's diverse intersected identities, with the influence of post-modern and post-colonial theoretical stances. Since the 2000s, however, with the rise of new information and communication technologies, feminists have begun to discuss the potential for a new -fourth wave, which is mostly digitally driven. The new social media platforms such as Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006), and Instagram (2010) created an alternative public space. The use of the Internet, particularly these user-centred social networks, have presented an important role in social movements all over the world in the last two decades, including the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street in the 2010s, as well as Gezi Protests in 2013 in Turkey. Thus, the shift in organising activism through online platforms and spreading social movements' messages to masses digitally, have led what is now called "digital activism". Accordingly, when women started to organise, shared their experiences, voiced their demands and problems, resisted against patriarchal norms, and called for women's solidarity through digital platforms, fourth-wave feminist movement has emerged. Due to the revival of fourth-wave feminism on the Internet

platforms, it has also taken the name of digital feminism/cyber feminism. Thus, in this study, such conceptualisations will be used interchangeably.

As well as the popularity of the wave rhetoric, defining these waves with sharp ends and beginnings is problematic. Undoubtedly, there are still feminists who identify with the second or the third wave, even though the current movement is mostly digitalised. While, as Nicholson (2008: 139-140) argues, the wave metaphor was politically useful since it reminded people that women's issues and struggle to gain rights/liberation did not emerge abruptly, the risk is considering all these different movements under the same umbrella: feminism. The "wave" metaphor presumes a sole homogenous movement that changes its level of activity through different periods (Nicholson, 2008: 140). However, even though we describe feminism in a broad, intersectional sense, as in the third and fourth wave feminisms, the historical differences between these different movements are overlooked at. Especially in Turkey, some women activists, such as Islamic women and Kurdish women, do not prefer to use "feminism" to define their political standpoint. However, their activism is, particularly, discussed within the third wave feminism due to their emphasis on inclusivity and identity politics. In the Turkish case, an intersectional view of feminism is notably an outcome of these women's emphasis on to be included in the category of "woman". With the popularity of social media platforms, however, "feminism" has become an attractive identity category, especially to young women, which has served as a foundation to new digitalised movements.

**Digital Feminist Activism: Pros and Cons**

It should be emphasised that digital activism is a broad term, which includes multiplicity of different modes of activism (Kaun & Uldam, 2018). Vegh (2003: 71) defines digital activism as 'a politically motivated movement relying on the Internet' and identifies three types of digital activism: "awareness/advocacy" – accessing information of a certain topic that is not reported by mainstream information channels and raising public awareness on the subject, "organisation/mobilisation" – using the Internet to call for an offline/online action, and "action/reaction" – hactivism (Vegh, 2003: 72-84). Digital feminist activism uses all types of activism in their consciousness raising efforts, as in the second wave feminism (Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016), in their attempt to organise online/offline political participation (Nacher, 2021), and in using hactivism to establish female discourses of resistance (Tanczer, 2016).

Although digital, fourth wave feminism mostly includes similar demands of third wave feminism, such as intersectional, queer, trans-inclusive, and body positive politics, it voices these demands in digital life, firstly via blogs. The use of online blogs by women in the 1990s in the

West, allowed women to interact with each other and helped in constructing an online culture (Cobble, Gordon & Henry, 2015). Contemporarily, while the use of blogsphere has decreased, women express themselves more on social media platforms and online feminist sites.

Thus, the main difference between the third and fourth wave feminisms is not based on their content, but their means of activism[1]. Additionally, the representatives of this new wave are mostly the young women who are a natural part of digital sphere and interested in feminist knowledge building. Based on the intersectional discrimination on age and gender, young women feel more comfortable to express themselves in the cyberspace, compared to the physical space, where they presume, they are more subjected to cultural and political constraints (Brimacombe et.al. 2018: 512-513).

It can be argued that pursuing activism in the digital sphere has some negative impacts on activism. First, although accessibility is discussed as one of the biggest advantages of the fourth wave – equal access to the Internet on a global scale has not been achieved. Digital divide points to the distinction between individuals and societies that have access to the means to participate in the information and communication technologies and those who do not (Chen & Wellman, 2004: 40). The digital divide is not just about the availability of access resources, but also about digital capabilities, quality of access, availability of social support (van Duersen & van Dijk, 2009; van Dijk, 2009).

Relatedly, generation gap often leads to digital inequality which can be regarded as another limitation. The acceleration of digital feminist activism has a risk of negatively affecting the relationship between different generation of feminists. Since online spaces are solely visible to elder women activistswho prefer to be involved in mainstream forms of activism, may not be aware of young women's digital feminist participation. Moreover, digital concepts such as "cyber-feminism" and individualisation of the feminist movement due to the emphasis on women's differences, are criticised severely by second wave feminists, whose focus is on collective action (Schuster, 2013: 12). Matich et.al. (2019: 345) argue that even though digital feminist activism has consciousness-raising efforts, as in second wave feminism, once feminist messages circulate through digital platforms, intended messages might lose their meanings and they might become "de-contextualised, chunks of information and images".

Third disadvantage of digital activism is young people's online political participation is often disregarded as "slacktivism", which may divert attention from more efficient and traditional

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[1] Nevertheless, some scholars prefer to discuss women's digital activism as a part of the third wave feminism (Schuster, 2013).

modes of political participation (Morozov, 2011; Schuster, 2013; Christensen, 2011). While online activists' political impact is small, Morozov argues, online activists might feel productive by simply being in the digital space (Morozov, 2011: 190-204).

Finally, countries' democratic developments might have a negative impact on the digital space. New information and communication technologies have provided means to activists to scrutinise activities of governmental bodies, which increases accountability mechanisms in democracies (Dey, 2020). In authoritative contexts, where national media censorship occurs due to restrictions on freedom of expression, and in-street activism has many risks for activists, such as detention, digital networks also provide platforms for political discussions, advocacy, and online protests/resistance. However, in such political climates, online spaces can easily become means of surveillance, manipulation, and discipline, and digital activists can be subjected to cyberbullying (Brimacombe et.al. 2018; Lu, 2020; Lixian, 2020; Dey, 2020; Matos, 2017). It can be argued that cyberbullying and online harassment may target women more due to "gendered communication styles" andit may affect young women's digital participation adversely (Schuster, 2013: 19).

In terms of digital activism's advantages, it is also argued that online [feminist] activism has a great potential to challenge mainstream forms of political participation and create new publics (Kahn & Kellner, 2004). By suggesting the concept of "subaltern counterpublics", Nancy Fraser (1990), critiques Habermas' public sphere, which is a designated space for citizens to engage in discursive political participation. She argues that public sphere is dominated by hegemonic groups and marginalised communities have been consistently precluded from the public sphere based on their gender, class, race, sexuality etc. Thus, these groups 'have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics', and Fraser calls these "subaltern counterpublics" (1990: 67). She argues that these spheres are 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs' (1990: 67). In other words, subaltern counterpublics assist marginalised communities to recast their identities and thus diminish their existing disadvantage in "official public spheres" (1990: 67). It can be argued that women who are underrepresented in the mainstream media, search for alternative platforms to voice their struggles. Digital activism points out and challenges how minority identities, such as women, are represented in the mainstream media and resists against misleading stereotypical knowledge production by dominant groups. It creates privileges for feminist activists to authentically represent themselves (Bonila & Rosa, 2015; Darmon, 2014; Matos, 2017; Williams, 2016). Thus, following Fraser's conceptualisation, digital sphere has the

potential to develop a virtual "subaltern counterpublic" (Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016), particularly in authoritative contexts. Jackson and Banaszczyk (2016) argue that digital feminism creates counterpublics shared by marginalised communities to make their experiences visible and allows activists to challenge mainstream feminist standpoints. With an emphasised focus on intersectional belongings, digital feminist counterpublics present diverging experiences of women with different access histories to power and privilege. However, it should be noted that, due to the limits of the Internet access and digital divide as stated above, particularly in developing countries, all women's voices are not necessarily represented in virtual spaces or has equal potential in influencing politics (Matos, 2017).

Second, the Internet enables women activists to see the multiplicity of perspectives and narratives beyond their physical social networks. Digital activism has also a potential to overcome the restrictions of time and space differences among digital advocators. This may shape their perceptions of establishing digital safe spaces and solidarity across varied virtual communities. Hence, digital feminism can bring together diverse feminist positionings, through which feminists can notice how intersectional oppression affects women's lives, and thus constitute new intersectional conversations (Brimacombe et.al. 2018: 512-513; Baer, 2016:18).

Third, studies show that online activism has a potential to shape the future of social movements and in-street activism by establishing connections between online and offline political participation, hence structuring connected mobilisations. Campaigns held in virtual spaces have the potential to create a union between online and offline activism. Hence, fourth-wave feminism utilises digital discourses to reach vast audience in both: online and offline (Tüfekçi & Wilson, 2012; Matich et.al., 2019; Gerbaudo, 2012). Relatedly, online activism puts pressure on policymakers through generating public outcry, "bottom-up activity" and creates first international and subsequently national media attention, "top-down pressure" (Brimacombe et.al., 2018: 509).

As a result, it can be stated that in addition to what third wave feminism has created, challenging sexism and misogyny in everyday life outlets, digital activism has initiated a '"call-out" culture, in which sexism or misogyny can be 'called out' and challenged' (Munro, 2013: 23). Following Nancy Fraser's conceptualisation of "subaltern counterpublics", Nacher (2021: 265) calls this 'mundane yet socially engaged acts of everyday, popular digital culture' as "weak resistance", as opposed to "heroic, revolutionary, and spectacular movement of protest". Feminist activists have used digital sphere to draw attention to violence against women, sexual harassment/abuse, sexism, and misogyny by using "hashtags activism", using hashtags such as #WhyIStayed, #EverydaySexism, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, #RapeCultureIsWhen, and

#metoo. Using digital space for activism has enabled women working outside of formal organisations, which, historically, have been dominantly structured, white, and middle-class, to voice their demands and participate in alternative knowledge building (Clark, 2016: 790).

### The Potential for a Fourth Wave Feminism in Turkey

During the late Ottoman society, traditional moral discourse on gender, based on gender segregation and traditional gender roles, was dominant, both in urban and rural settings (Mustafa, 2022). However, during the same period, the upper class educated Ottoman women questioned these traditional gender roles and demanded participation in public sphere, as well as gaining their rights to education, and to work. Hence it is when the first stage of the women's movement in Turkey has started (Tekeli, 1995; Kandiyoti, 1987; Abadan-Unat, 1981; Arat, 2000).

The second phase of the women's movement, marked as "state feminism", began in the early periods of the Republic of Turkey (Tekeli, 1995). Like the first-wave feminism in the western context, women in Turkey advocated and asserted their civil and political rights while also being portrayed as symbols of modernisation and westernisation by the nation-state elites. Thus, the main emphasis was on women's public emancipation (Kandiyoti, 1987; Acar & Altunok, 2012; Durakbaşa, 2000; Tekeli, 1990). In the 1970s, left-wing ideological groups gained influence around the world, and in Turkey. During this time, the main emphasis was on class-based inequalities and women were expected to participate in class struggles with socialist men. 1980 coup in Turkey, however, created a realm for feminist politics to flourish, by censoring all other political movements (Tekeli, 1995). Women's experiences within the leftist movements and the 1980 coup' authoritarian policies – banning political parties, restricting unions and other types of organisations, etc. – provided means to organise around women's problems. Hence, 1980s in Turkey have created a breaking point for a new feminist and self-determining women's movement (Arat, 2000). In the early 1980s, the feminist movement launched intensive consciousness-raising groups, in which women underlined the value of small-scale non-hierarchical groups in Turkey (Tekeli, 2004; Timisi & Gevrek, 2011). Women, as in the global second wave, emphasised the motto "the personal is political" and addressed women's bodily autonomy, including combatting against violence against women and reproductive rights. 1990s, however, refers to an institution-building phase within the women's movement in Turkey. Almost all women's groups were institutionalised in different ways, and this led to divisions within the movement at the administrative degree, which created "competition among organizations" and a "project-based activism" (Coşar & Onbaşı, 2008: 340). Furthermore, in the 1990s, various women's rights organisations emphasised the importance of independent identities, as a reaction to Kemalist

reforms' unfulfilled promises (Arat, 2000: 28). Thus, women began to form their own clusters, as can be seen in Islamic women's and Kurdish women's organising. By emphasising the "intersection of their differences" (Crenshaw, 1995), based on their religious, ethnic, and class-based differences, Islamic women and Kurdish women challenged the unitary understanding of "womanhood". Parallel with black and non-western women's movements' criticisms of "white, heterosexual and middle class" based feminist politics, Islamic women and Kurdish women condemned the dominant Turkish feminism for otherising minority identities (Diner & Toktaş, 2010). Islamic women protested the ban on the headscarf at universities and assisted for varied Islamist conservative political parties' surge to power (Acar & Altunok, 2012). Kurdish women called attention to their intersected subordination: their marginalised ethnic identity and enforced sexism within their ethnic groupings (Yüksel, 2006).

In the 2000s, however, the rise of neo-conservative politics in Turkey has led to an increased polarisation among groups. The Justice and Development Party (JDP), which has been in power since 2002, has used divisive conservative discourse and policies on the realms of gender, sexuality, and the family, such as dissenting from gender equality, emphasising having at least three kids, willing to limit abortions and so on. Thus, feminist movement in Turkey has been limited in its political capacity due to increased scrutiny and attack on women's subjectivity (Kandiyoti, 2016; Altunok, 2016). Against such policies, in the second decade of the 2000s, Eslen-Ziya (2013) argues, women activists have adopted new strategies, rather than using mainstream activism methods, and used social media to disseminate information and increase communication and solidarity among women in line with the political opportunity structures in the country. Political opportunity structure means that 'activists' prospects for advancing particular claims, mobilizing supporters, and affecting influence' are shaped by extensive contextual changes (Meyer, 2004: 126), such as the "formation of the nation-state", "strategies of opponents", "potential allies" etc. (della Porta, 2013: 478). A social movements' political opportunity structure increases when the power that states hold is distributed evenly between other actors, such as "pressure groups, political parties, the media, and ordinary citizens" (della Porta, 2013: 479). Hence, a country's democratic state is determinant on the success of the national social movements. However, even in non-democratic contexts, in which strong repression on social movements occurs, the movements may adapt new ways to survive, either by finding ways of working together with governments or establishing transnational alliances to oppose them (della Porta, 2013: 482). Therefore, it is important not to neglect activists' agency, and wisdom (Meyer, 2004). Women's use of the digital sphere in Turkey is argued to be an example of successful attempt to establish counterpublics against epistemic injustice faced by minority groups, including women, to

challenge exclusionary policies of the JDP and to build "new social networks of solidarity" (Messina, 2022: 861).

Women activists in Turkey, following the global digital trend, have started to use online platforms to combat patriarchy, particularly violence against women and femicide, by creating social media platforms for their organisations, by blogging, organising digital events and campaigns, and using social media for agenda-setting. Early examples of digital activism can be seen in feminist journals established in the early 2000s, such as *Amargi*, *Feminist Politics, Feminist Studies in Culture and Politics*. Moreover, *Women's Shelters and Consulting/Solidarity Centres Convention,* which has been accommodated in different provinces by women's rights organisations each year since 1998, initiated an e-mail group to provide a discussion platform for women's activists to share their collective action plans to combat violence against women. A feminist collective blog, *5Harfliler*, established in 2012, an Islamic feminist blog, *Reçel Blog*, established in 2014, and another feminist blog, *Çatlak Zemin*, established in 2016, are also successful examples of digital feminist activism in Turkey. It is argued that in their content and style, these blogs are like DIY culture by mixing the personal with the political and using popular culture and humour in their feminist politics, rather than conventional formalistic methods. Moreover, these blogs also function as counterpublics in Turkish society by creating a space for marginalised groups who do not hold power in mainstream political discourse (Goker, 2019). In their work on *5Harfliler* and *Reçel Blog,* Cantek and Bora (2015) argue that the reason of these blogs' success lays behind their ability to set an alternative [feminist] agenda, rather than constituting their existence based on reactions to mainstream politics. Moreover, in 2015, a website called *Erktolia.org* was founded to withstand sexist advertisements and statements in the mass/alternative media platforms. As a digital feminist activism platform, *Erktolia.org* works against discourses and policies initiated by institutions, famous individuals and politicians, brands, which target, otherise, and discriminate marginalised individuals or groups based on their gender identity and sexual orientation. By organising a great number of successful social media campaigns, *Erktolia.org* also functions as a counterpublic and digitally organises communities for change (Erdem & Karakoç, 2019).

Aside from blogs and websites, using social media for digital feminist activism, has increased after 2010 in Turkey. In his study based on interviews with four women's rights organisations' members, Aksu (2017) states that as a social media platform, Facebook has been extensively used by those women's rights organisations compared to other platforms, such as Twitter and Instagram. He discusses that one of the reasons behind the popularity of Facebook among the organisations is due its ease of use, providing fast communication and having more

members. Similarly, Şeşen (2019) analyses the websites and Facebook posts of 10 women's rights organisations and argues that those women's rights organisations use their digital platforms for collective action frames. In their analysis of three well-known feminist activist groups, *Flying Broom (Uçan Süpürge), University Women's Collective (Üniversiteli Kadın Kolektifi)*, and *Purple Roof (Mor Çatı)*, Şen and Kök (2017) state that although their online profiles are limited, said groups utilise their social media spaces for both digital and in-street activism purposes. They argue that the groups social media platforms to call for action on issues such as violence against women, rape, and femicide.

One of the significant reasons in the rise of digital [feminist] activism is the Gezi Movement in 2013 in Turkey, where an opposition movement against the government took place, and social media, especially Twitter, had a strategic importance for people to organise. Seeing the potential of hashtag activism during the Gezi Movement, women realised that using hashtags allows women to connect with each other at the local, national, and global levels. Especially on the issues of femicide, women have extensively started to use social media to call international attention on the subject. Özgecan Aslan's example, for instance, created both local outrage and through social media the case made impact in international platforms. Özgecan Aslan, a 20-year-old university student, was murdered in an attempted rape on 11th February 2015 in Mersin, Turkey. She was travelling home in a minibus during daytime, and the bus driver tried to rape her, stabbed her, beat her to death and getting help from his father and friend, tried to burn her body (Davidson, 2015). Özgecan Aslan's murder galvanised a mass Twitter movement in the country, when İdil Elveriş, a lecturer from İstanbul Bilgi University, tweeted "Can you use the sentence beginning "because I am a woman" and the hashtag #sendeanlat [tell your story] to write examples of things you experienced only because you were woman?" on Twitter, with the hope of raising awareness about femicide and sexual assault (Ikizer et. al., 2019: 463). Women across the country, including well-known public figures, responded to Elveriş's tweet, shared more than a million of tweets, and told their experiences of sexual assault, harassment, and tactics to avoid rape (Davidson, 2015). The hashtag, #sendeanlat, is an important indicator of how women are systemically subjected to sexual harassment in their day-to-day lives. However, in Özdemir's (2015) analysis of one of the biggest online communities in Turkey, *ekşisözlük*, demonstrates that women's sexual harassment narratives under #sendeanlat, have also a potential to reproduce dominant misogynistic views. The entries under #sendeanlat, Özdemir argues, written by women sharing their sexual harassment experiences have these male-dominated themes: emphasis on conservative clothing and honour; cursing the harassment using sexist swearwords; women as a source of harassment; needing for protection; and being ugly and/or masculine to prevent sexual harassment (Özdemir, 2015).

However, activism after Özgecan Aslan's murder also created mass pressure on gendered policies. On change.org website, a literature student, Gözde Salur, initiated a digital campaign calling the government to abolish the sentence reductions given to men for good behaviour and being subjected to provocation for crimes against women. To this date, the petition was signed by 1.381.586 people (Change.org, 2022). Thus, an unorganised individual digital campaign has become a mass digital protest by uniting individuals around an issue of social importance and forming a network (Aktaş & Akçay, 2019). Although said sentence reductions have remained the same, Özgecan Aslan's murderer received a life sentence without abatement. The tweets including the hashtags #sendeanlat and #ozgecanaslan decreased fairly after a week (Ikizer et.al., 2019: 463). However, the online petition campaign is discussed as a successful example of digital advocacy that creates social mobility through digital channels and showed the capabilities of digital technology to increase the effectiveness of advocacy work (Aktaş & Akçay, 2019).

According to the data of the *Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu - We Will Stop Femicide Platform* – (2022), since Özgecan Aslan's murder, more than 2500 women were killed in Turkey. Among many others, Emine Bulut's and Pınar Gültekin's deaths created rise in digital feminist activism in the country. Emine Bulut was stabbed to death by her ex-husband in front of their daughter on 18th August 2019 in Kırıkkale, Turkey. Days after the femicide, a footage of Emine Bulut's murder emerged, where she was saying "*ölmek istemiyorum [I do not want to die]*". Her outcry turned into a reaction against femicide on social media under the hashtags #eminebulut and #olmekistemiyoruz [we do not want to die] (Nisan & Tuncel, 2020). A year later, Pınar Gültekin, a 27-year-old university student, was brutally murdered by her male acquaintance, who was married and a father of two at the time, and claimed to have had an affair with her. Gültekin's body was founded on 21st July 2020, in Muğla, Turkey. After killing her, the murderer put her body in a barrel, set her on fire, and poured concrete over her body to obfuscate the evidence (Duvar English, 2022). Later, feminist activists started a social media campaign, where women were asked to share their black and white photos – referring to black and white photos of the murdered women in newspapers daily. The campaign quickly spread globally, particularly on Instagram, and Hollywood celebrities such as Jenifer Aniston, Eva Longria followed it. However, due to the campaign's quick global spread, the original context of the campaign seemed to have been lost and it turned into a popular trend for most social media users (McKernan, 2020). In July 2022, the court reduced the jail term of the murderer from aggravated life sentence to 23 years in prison based on "unjust provocation" (Duvar English, 2022).

Even when women are subjected to brutal sexual violence, as in these examples, the male perpetrators receive considerable reductions in their sentences. The reasons that legitimise

violence against women in the eyes of the public include wearing revealing clothes, being out late at night, drinking alcohol, knowing the perpetrator etc. To not to be complicit in the act of violence against themselves, women are expected to be an "ideal victim", who are completely innocent. Among given examples, since Özgecan Aslan's example fit into this category, the mainstream media emphatically highlighted her innocence, as opposed to other examples. Hence her story is individualised, rather than stating the gendered nature of the sexual violence in patriarchal societies (Sarıtaş, 2015). Concerning the matter, Erdoğan's study (2022) demonstrates that Aslan's murder left a more permanent mark on the public memory than other femicides.

In the first eight months of 2022, 220 femicides were committed, and 157 women were found suspiciously dead. Most of the perpetrators are their husbands and former/current partners as in previous years (Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu, 2022). Despite this fact, on 20th March 2021 President Erdoğan denounced *Istanbul Convention*, a human rights treaty, which was signed by Turkey in 2012, to combat violence against women, including psychological violence, stalking, physical violence, sexual violence, rape, forced marriage, FGM, forced abortion and forced sterilisation (Messina, 2022: 873). On 1st July 2021, the *Istanbul Convention* ceased to be effective in Turkey. Even though, among other countries, it was firstly ratified by Turkey, feminist activists criticised the government for not fully enforcing the *Istanbul Convention* in the past decade, as femicides in the country have increased. While withdrawing from the *Istanbul Convention,* the JDP presented it as "destructive to Turkish society, claiming that it damaged family values by encouraging women to divorce and made young people accept LGBT communities" (Messina, 2022: 875). After the withdrawal, hashtag #istanbulsozlesmesiyasatir [The Istanbul Convention keeps women alive] was shared by many on social media platforms and created an international outrage, even though the government did not opt out. Hence, it can be argued that social movements, and feminist digital activism as in these examples, are not independent from the countries' political and social structures.

### Conclusion

Throughout different waves of feminisms, women have called attention to sexist political and social norms across countries. Starting from the first wave feminist demands of suffrage to third wave's intersectional feminist politics, women activists have struggled to achieve gender equality in different contexts. With an emphasis on intersected identities, fourth wave feminism endeavours to implement third wave's concepts in the digital space. Digital feminist activists draw attention to issues such as femicide, sexual assault, sexual harassment, as well as post-colonial feminism, body politics, queer politics and so on, through blogs, feminist websites, and social

media platforms. Through this mundane activism, fourth wave feminism has created a feminist digital culture, in which the gendered discourse of everyday life is unfolded.

On the one hand, some scholars point out the potential risks with digital feminist activism through the discussions on digital divide, generation gap, slacktivism, and its existence in non-democratic regimes (van Dijk, 2009; Schuster, 2013; Morozov, 2011; Lixian, 2020). On the other hand, others emphasise digital feminist activism's advantages through its potential to create counterpublics, see diverse feminist positionings, connect online and offline political participation, form local and international pressure on policymakers (Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016; Baer, 2016; Matich et.al., 2019; Brimacombe et.al. 2018).

Digital, fourth wave, feminism in Turkey presents an alternative space for women to express their problems and demands. Blogs, websites, and social media platforms have a potential to work as counterpublics, which strive as "parallel discursive arenas" (Fraser, 1990: 67). Through these platforms, digital feminist activists can stimulate political change by exposing gendered discourses. However, due to government's increased control on digital spaces, activists' capacity to alter the social gendered structure has been limited. Censoring mobile networks and social media platforms curb dissent is discussed as a strategy in authoritative contexts (Dey, 2020). Thus, it can be argued that the social movements are related to the resources that are available to activists within given political contexts (Eslen-Ziya, 2013). Turkey presents an important example on this matter. Women's digital activism in Turkey is open to backlash, as in other authoritative contexts. While establishing a counterpublic through digital channels, and establishing international feminist alliances, feminist activism becomes limited in its capacity to alter national gendered policies due to hegemonic authority in the country. The Internet surveillance of the current government, ultimate media control, social media posts being a reason of detention, banned street protests, in brief, in authoritarian contexts digital platforms may exist as a realm of discipline and censorship. Since the Gezi Movement in 2013, the government has censored and blocked access to digital platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook multiple times (Coskuntuncel, 2018). Hence, global digital movements, such as #metoo, do not necessarily have the same effect in every political climate, as in Turkey (Bakan, 2019), due to country's domestic political structure (Meyer, 2004). Nevertheless, even in such political climates, digital space provides a great potential to mobilise groups for collective action, networking and establishing solidarity, which in turn can influence the "official public sphere". Since the second decade of the 2000s, women's digital existence has become more visible. While trying to democratise the public space by voicing their demands through the digital space, women have created digital counterpublics where they disseminate feminist knowledge. From blogs and websites to using social media and hashtags for

feminist activism, women have utilised new information and communication technologies to empower vulnerable groups and establish both national and international alliances to call attention to gender inequalities in the country, despite the attack and control on their activism. Hence, it is undeniable that fourth wave feminism has a critical, though limited, potential to contribute to feminist knowledge building in Turkey.

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