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TURKISH WOMEN'S MAGAZINES: THE POPULAR MEETS THE POLITICAL

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Synopsis — This article focuses on the way concepts of feminism and femininity, often considered oppositional, intersect within two contemporary Turkish women's magazines, *Kim* and *Kadınca*. The methodology is derived from feminist critical theory and cultural studies, and includes textual analysis of the magazines as well as structured interviews with their editors. A range of potentially competing interests is identified in the production of the magazines, those of editors, owners, and advertisers, and the ways in which these are managed and negotiated is explored. It is argued that the incorporation of feminist discourses with patriarchal and commercial discourses offers a repertoire of subjectivities to women readers, some complementary and others contradictory. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Early feminist work on the form and content of women's magazines argued that they were largely determined by the articulation of the interests of capital, which exploits women as consumers, and of patriarchy,¹ which perpetuates heterosexuality as a necessary precondition of women's acceptance of unequal gender relations. For example, in Britain in the mid-1970s feminists condemned girls' and women's magazines for exemplifying oppression (McRobbie, 1991). It was argued that there was no interest in improving women's position in society, and that women were represented only within the already established parameters of conventional femininity. Specifically, this early critical feminist approach to women's magazines reflected the relation between academic feminism and commercial "women's genres" as an opposition between feminism and femininity (Brunsdon, 1991; Stuart, 1990). However, particularly after the 1980s, feminist discourses began to filter into women's magazines alongside commercial and patriarchal discourses. As McRobbie explains, feminism is also "a discursive formation and, as a political force, it too is given over to representing women" (McRobbie, 1997, p. 193). The engagement of women's magazines with feminist themes and issues has contributed

to the redefinition of female experience and the way in which young women express themselves in daily life, from personal appearance to life style.

In Turkey, women's magazines as a social institution and economic phenomenon have responded to the changing demands and conditions of women. Although women's magazines have shaped and influenced their audiences' expectations of female identity, they themselves have changed and adapted themselves to the economic and political changes and social movements throughout the 20th century. The period after the 1980 military coup not only marked a turning point in the women's magazine market but also marked the emergence of a new feminist movement in Turkey. The socio-political and economic climate of the 1980s and 1990s evoked different responses in terms of the ownership, sales, titles, and messages of women's magazines. Women's magazines' definitions of femininity and the female role came to be treated as transformable.

The most significant Turkish publications in this genre were *Kim* and *Kadınca*, and they are the focus of this study. *Kadınca* was launched at the end of 1978, becoming a significant source of the feminist movement throughout the 1980s in Turkey, and *Kim* was launched in

1992. The two magazines are linked not least through the person of Duygu Asena, who has been chief editor of both at different times. This study relies upon textual analysis of the 1995 issues of the magazines as well as structured interviews with their 1995 editors, and explores the strategies used and the constraints experienced in the popularisation of feminism. Going beyond the debate as to whether popular culture oppresses or “liberates” women, I explore the incorporation of feminist discourses in these two women’s magazines and raise the following questions. How are we to interpret the engagement of women’s magazines with feminism? What does it signify about the relationship between feminism and femininity, which have been seen by some feminists as oppositional discourses? How are different discourses and interests managed and negotiated in women’s magazines? What kinds of subjectivities are offered to women, and how do these subjectivities connect “feminism” and “femininity”? To what extent does this so-called “feminised space,” which is part of a large publishing industry,² allow ways of disseminating feminist ideas and theories without placing them in total opposition to contemporary culture? Finally, because neither of these magazines are being published today (*Kim* ceased publication in 1999 and *Kadınca* in 1998), how can their demise be explained?

The following section discusses the theoretical and methodological framework of the study in more detail, and then I turn to a sketch of the socio-political and cultural context in which these two magazines emerged. Section three provides the main analysis and concludes that feminist issues and themes embedded in popular and commercial discourses are complex and various. Specific conditions and politics engender a variety of forms for the popularisation of feminism in different contexts, and help to construct diverse female subjectivities in contemporary women’s magazines, sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The cultural studies approach of the Birmingham School to gender and media has been employed to study *Kim* and *Kadınca*. According to this perspective, media texts are seen as cen-

tral sites in which negotiation over gender takes place, and in which contradictory cultural representations of gender are accommodated, modified, reconstructed, and reproduced. Thus, as Stuart Hall (1981) maintains, popular culture is viewed as a field of both conflict and contestation.

Early cultural studies of women’s magazines drew on Althusser’s theory of ideology (Althusser, 1971), acknowledging the fact that the meanings and values of ideology were socially constructed. Studies on the concept of ideology emphasized its significance in the reproduction of the existing relations of institutional power in society. In this view, institutionalized power relations, such as patriarchy and capitalism, construct the dominant means of the “ideal” image of woman and “sexual difference.” Feminist critique of women’s magazines in the late 1970s, for example, early works of both McRobbie (1978, 1993) and Winship (1978) from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, were concerned with the ideological constructions of femininity in women’s and teenage magazines. Both these theorists used semiotics and a Marxist analysis of social hegemony in their analyses.

With the impact of poststructuralist writing, feminist scholarship on women’s magazines has moved beyond the question of ideology, as it was acknowledged that the concept of ideology suggested some underlying true state of being. Accordingly, it meant some kind of ideal and essential state of womanhood. As McRobbie writes, “instead of seeking to uncover the truth behind ideology, the question now was to consider the power of meaning” (McRobbie, 1997, p. 193). At this stage of feminist analysis, women’s magazines are seen as commercial, competitive sites, where what it is to be a woman in the contemporary society is defined. Although packages of meaning offered about womanhood help shape women’s consciousness, they at the same time produce desires and pleasures. Thus, in addition to the analysis of the meaning and construction of signification in women’s magazines, feminist researchers began to raise questions about textual pleasure that women’s magazines offer their readers.

The tradition of textual analysis and reception analysis positions women merely as consumers of popular culture. Such an approach not only drives women increasingly towards

questions of pleasure and consumption but also maintains the theoretical division between femininity and masculinity. As Modleski puts it, "countless critics . . . persist in equating femininity, consumption and reading on the one hand and masculinity, production and writing on the other" (Modleski, 1986, p. 41). To challenge these dichotomies or establish a productive relation between women and cultural commodities, it is crucial for feminist criticism to conceptualise the experiences of women as producers of cultural meanings. McRobbie's criticism of cultural studies provides a useful analytical point. She argues that "cultural studies has been concerned with representational forms and their meanings, leaving the terrain of lived experience completely to the side" (1996, p. 176). This feminist approach to popular culture and gender helps to open up popular cultural texts to a wider debate by shifting the emphasis from consumption to production. This, in turn, allows more effective ways of delivering a feminist politics and developing theories that would address the experience of women as both producers and consumers of cultural meanings.

The case study presented in this article employs this theoretical framework to analyse the production of cultural meaning about gender in the magazines, which are sites of conflicting interests (between editors, owners, advertisers, and readers) and discourses (commercial, patriarchal, feminist). The study approaches the production of meaning in the magazines in question through a study of the cultural texts themselves and their meanings for their editors. Although women as readers are also acknowledged as creators and producers of meanings, how women's magazines are received and made meaningful by readers is not a central concern here.

The case study is based on a systematic analysis of the 1995 issues of *Kim* and *Kadınca* for two reasons. First, they were among the best selling women's magazines in mid-1990s in Turkey.³ Second, their construction of female subjectivities combined controversial, and sometimes distinct, feminist, popular/patriarchal, and commercial discourses. The production of meaning in these two women's magazines is approached by employing textual analysis to investigate the way they construct for readers a variety of positions from which to identify or understand themselves. Further-

more, the role of women as producers of the text constituting female subjectivities is studied through an examination of the editors of the magazines in question. Structured interviews were conducted with the editors of the magazines in their offices in 1995, and the quotations used in the study are my translations. These interviews aimed to explore the editors' accounts of the magazines and their approach to feminism, and thus to understand the ways in which women's magazines might engage with feminist discourses. Moreover, the methodology applied in this study provides a wider context for studying how influential the editors are in shaping the content of the magazines along feminist lines, and what their experiences might signify for the future from the vantage point of feminist politics.

THE CONTEXT AND CONTENT OF *KIM* AND *KADINCA*: AN OVERVIEW

Contemporary Turkish women's magazines are the outcome of two parallel developments that occurred in the context of the cultural and political climate of the 1980s: the emergence of the new feminist movement and new forms in the media. An autonomous contemporary feminist movement came into being in the early 1980s during the period of the military regime that succeeded the military coup of 1980. The army seized power for 3 years, banning all political activity, outlawing political parties, and forcibly silencing all political opposition. Surprisingly perhaps, this unstable political situation gave women a chance to politicise the public arena through their fight against women's oppression. Women activists at the time were not repressed by the state authorities because they were not perceived as a threat to the status quo.

After the 3-year military regime, the conservative Motherland Party (ANAP) came to power in 1983. This marked a new period in Turkish politics and helped open up a space for people to question the very identity of the Turkish citizen, with Turkish intellectuals searching for, as Sirman states, "new conceptions of democracy and individuality" (Sirman, 1989, p. 15). Such a process involved all sections of the political spectrum, and produced new forms of political participation, such as workers campaigning for better wages and

feminist groups searching for new understandings of female identity and so on.

A group of urban and educated women, who were predominantly middle class, began to question problems in society that stemmed from being a woman. The women's rights gained throughout the 20th century had been secured through the official (state) ideology, but now a new, antistate feminist ideology was gradually gaining ground. Women began to raise their voices against male oppression, and to question their gender status and traditional feminine identity.⁴ Consciousness-raising groups and small discussion groups started to increase and some of them emphasized the need to disseminate feminist ideas through publications. Two feminist journals were published in the second half of the 1980s: *Feminist* and *Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs*. It was around these journals that the dynamics of feminist debates emerged. The mainstream press also contributed to the dissemination of feminist ideals, values, and arguments by representing female identities that remained outside the dominant male discourse.⁵

The changing political and economic structure of the 1980s also marked the emergence of entirely new forms in media. This period is often associated with the term "depoliticization," as freedom of expression was repressed following the coup.⁶ Inevitably, this had a dramatic effect on the media and news-making, and journalists who were forced to avoid political issues, such as prison sentencing, became more interested in expressions of "private lives." At the same time, following their counterparts in the West, media owners and managers realized the importance of exploring new markets and began to introduce new target group-oriented magazines. The result was, as Arzu Öztürkmen points out, that many "private" issues, which had previously barely been publicly discussed, made the front cover of new weekly and monthly publications; sexuality being the most significant subject⁷ (1998, p. 278). As a result of these developments, the economic structure of the print media also went through radical changes. As Ahmet Oklay (1987) emphasizes, the Turkish press was forced to submit to the control of the big capital, and thus to operate as large conglomerates.

Kadınca, launched in 1978, was among the first outcome of this changing media market. Other women's magazines followed, such as *Kadın*, *Elele*, *Rapsodi*, *Marie Clarie*, and *Vizon*

launched in the 1980s. These magazines offered their readers information about "new" female goals, such as employment, education, health, female sexual pleasure and equal rights, alongside fashion, home and childcare. Representations of women in the magazines, as well as the actual roles of Turkish women in society, began to move away from the traditional conception. The women's magazine market, along with that of other consumer magazines, continued to flourish in the 1990s, with *Kim* being launched in 1992. According to Davaz-Mardin, 195 women's magazines/periodicals were published in Turkey between 1928–1996, and more than half of them in the period 1980–1996 (Davaz-Mardin, 1998, pp. 19–21, my translation).

Thus, the emergence and existence of *Kim* and *Kadınca* needs to be understood within the socio-political and cultural context of the 1980s. Distinct from the other women's magazines in Turkey, they attempted to engage in explicitly feminist issues and to establish a female consciousness in line with feminist politics. On the one hand, they were traditional in terms of their layouts and contents,⁸ speaking to readers in the same intimate and individual tone as traditional women's magazines and offering solutions to readers' problems as well as hope for a better future. On the other hand, the editorial construction of both magazines emphasized women's daily lives and strategies for their improvement and the concept of women's equality with men dominated the editorial perspective.

According to the editors, *Kim* and *Kadınca* set out to address middle and lower middle-class Turkish women between the ages of 20–30; approximately 50% of whom are in paid employment, 10–15% of whom are students and the remainder of whom work as housewives. The editors define the typical reader as independent, successful, dynamic, intellectual, and as a woman who questions life, male and female relationships, masculinity and gender inequality in society. Both magazines drew upon discourses of feminism to construct this ideal image of Turkish womanhood. Like other women's magazines, *Kadınca* and *Kim* also addressed women's concerns about relationships, sex, beauty, and fashion. One notable difference between them is that *Kadınca's* emphasis on sport, environment, and employment is absent from *Kim*.

Four distinctive periods can be identified in *Kadınca*'s development. It began in December 1978 as a traditional women's magazine addressing urban housewives. The second period of its development started in 1979, with the take over of production by Duygu Asena and her staff, who came to be known in the following decade as "radical" feminists. During this period feminism began to achieve some public legitimacy in Turkey, particularly through the street demonstrations and petition campaigns which marked the 1980s. All of these were widely reflected in *Kadınca*, which became the leading voice of the feminist movement in the 1980s and played a significant role in disseminating many discussions on feminist issues to a large number of people.

After *Kadınca*'s publishing company changed ownership, Asena and her staff could not come to an agreement with the new owner about the magazine's content, and in 1992 they left. For a short period thereafter *Kadınca* became a traditional fashion and beauty magazine, its third manifestation. Then in 1993, Kazancibasi took over the editorship and the magazine shifted back to a feminist agenda.⁹ Kazancibasi described *Kadınca* as a magazine that "informs women about their rights, provides guidance about the issues of the women's movement, and helps women take care of their body and sexuality." Kazancibasi worked as the chief editor of *Kadınca* until it ceased publication in 1998.

Asena launched *Kim* in 1992, and worked as the chief editor until 1999, a few months before the magazine ceased publication. In terms of its content and style, *Kim* was seen as an extension of *Kadınca*. Although *Kim* attracted more glossy advertisements latterly and its rhetoric became more provocative, as Asena points out, there are more similarities than differences between the two magazines. Both emphasized that the way to improve your life is to foster independence and to fight stereotyped sex roles, and in both this feminist perspective existed alongside popular and commercial discourses, discussed further below.

EDITORIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDEAL WOMEN: ECONOMICALLY INDEPENDENT AND "LIBERATED"

The content analysis of the magazines in question reveals that topics relating directly to feminist issues accounted for about one-third of

the articles in the 1995 issues. The dominant themes that emerged from content analysis can be categorized under six subheadings: sexuality; self-confidence and self-determination; family and marriage; employment and career; masculinity and male identity; and representation of feminist politics. Not all the themes are feminist themes in themselves but they were dealt with through feminist discourses. For the purposes of this article I will concentrate primarily on the last theme.

The magazines often engaged in discussion of political issues in Turkey, such as the election system, the underrepresentation of women in politics, alterations made in the family law, changes in the ministry responsible for women's issues, and the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women. The editorial commentaries are often pedagogic and authoritative, introducing feminist ideas and politics and making the reader aware of contestations. Examples of real situations are used to enlighten the reader about gender inequalities in society as well as possible solutions to overcome these.

Kim and *Kadınca* have incorporated the prominent slogan of the feminist movement, "the personal is political," which has worked in the Turkish context as a powerful metaphor for women beginning to see the political implications of their own lives. This slogan served to bring together the spirit of women's magazines, which emphasized women's daily lives and ways to improve them, with the spirit of feminism, which emphasized transformation of women's personal lives. Referring to the 1980s, Öztürkmen claims that the foremost contribution of *Kadınca* to the rising women's movement was "its voicing and popularization of problems in everyday life" (Öztürkmen, 1998, p. 425).

Popularization of women's private lives marked a shift in the understanding of women's rights. Previously state-regulated institutional emancipation of women, part of the modernization project of the Turkish Republic, was the norm. This understanding of women's rights tried to lock the feminist movement into a nationalist discourse, thus distancing it from issues about women's private lives. In this respect, the efforts of women's magazines in dealing with the problems of patriarchal power relations and the status of women in the private sphere can be seen as a valuable contribu-

tion to making feminist issues a central reference point.

The regular section entitled “Witch Like” in *Kim* is significant in terms of its political and ideological approach to feminism. In 16th- and 17th-century Europe witches, always female, were punished for “supernatural” abilities that were perceived as a threat to male power. The word “witch” has been used in the last decades both in Europe and North America as a label seeking to to define as marginal and “dissident” (radical) feminists opposing and criticizing traditional patriarchal values. The way *Kim* uses the word reappropriates it, and gives it a positive rather than a stigmatising meaning, such that witches, and thus feminists, are rendered neither threatening nor dangerous. Indeed, the editor Asena explained that introducing this section was a deliberate strategy to make issues of the feminist movement part of the popular discourse and to legitimise its aims and goals. At the same time, both *Kim* and *Kadınca* have also reflected the differences within feminism, having special regular sections where oppositional feminist ideas, Islamist, radical or liberal, are discussed.

There is a very similar section to “Witch Like” in *Kadınca*, entitled “Pink Pages.” These two sections cover almost all the issues that are on the feminist agenda in Turkey, such as, women’s NGOs, changes in family law, equal treatment before the law, women’s shelters, political parties’ policies for women, domestic violence, successful women trade unionists, international women’s conferences, sexual abuse, rape, virginity test, and so on.¹⁰ Rarely, they also include issues that are not generally discussed or are considered to be taboo, for example, incest, child abuse, or the rights of prostitutes to social security.

Various forms of male oppression such as domestic violence and rape are seen as important legal, social, and political problems. Therefore, their solutions are often located in the social order. For instance, political and social aspects of rape incidents are discussed with strong language in *Kim*: “The number of rape cases taking place in the police stations have increased” (September 1995, p. 31) and “Rape is encouraged by the authorities” (July 1995, p. 28). The magazines have also criticized state policies for controlling women’s bodies through virginity tests: *Kim* criticized the subordination of women by the state and argued

that “virginity tests requested by parents, police, headmasters are not legal, on the contrary, they are against the constitution, human rights and international law” (March 1995, p. 29). Editorial views are often stated in a sarcastic manner, for example, one of the headlines read “An IQ test should be given to those imposing a virginity test.”

Both of the magazines engage with the debates on feminism and women’s rights discussed in popular culture and politics and with key actors. For example, a page entitled “*Kim*’s most loved and unloved ones,” lists in the top half and under the logo of a pair of lips “the ones who are kissed by the witch,” i.e., praised, usually media figureheads or politicians who are aware of gender inequality and argue for women’s rights. The bottom half of the page lists the names of those who have demeaned women, this time under the logo of a boiler and the words “the ones who are to be boiled by the witch.” These pages create a space to engage with feminist issues and to interact in popular discourses, but using an ironic style.

In its regular man’s section, *Kim*’s sarcasm and irony becomes even more apparent as fun is made of men, their intelligence, sexuality, physical appearance, and patriarchal values. Men are not taken seriously, and their masculine characteristics are often parodied. Irony is also used in an attempt to challenge stereotypical representations of women and reverse roles: a half-naked male model on the cover page of the section is captioned “This month’s beauty,” and the female audience is invited to “consume” him. Asena explains a definite shift in approach: “In the past, when we were publishing *Kadınca*, we took everything seriously and attacked men. [. . .] What I mean is that in the 1980s we called men ‘pigs’ and argued that ‘men do not know how to make love, how to please women’ and so on” (interview, 1995). Explaining that men have learned something about themselves and about women in the last 10 years through the changes achieved by feminist activists she adds “that’s why we make fun of the things, including men, that we used to take seriously.”

How can this ironic style and tone of *Kim* be interpreted for future feminist strategies within which female and also male subjectivities are constructed? Perhaps, as McRobbie argues, “the irony, the touch of parody, and

the refusal of feminine naivety produce a space for greater reflexivity and critique on the part of reader" (McRobbie, 1996, p. 188). The sophisticated use of language allows the magazines and thus the reader to deal with "serious" issues in a more relaxed way and to explore female fantasy, fun, and pleasure more freely. For example, making fun of masculinity may be a way of coping with male dominated society and making the struggle more manageable. It also creates a new shared language among a young generation of women which can be seen as an attempt to break out of a male-dominated language. Analysis of the women's magazines in this study strongly supports the argument that the ironic space in the magazines' discourse can offer possibilities for critical reflection. Moreover, it is partly through an ironic "light" touch that the magazine disseminates feminist ideas without placing them in total opposition to contemporary culture.

In addition to irony and sarcastic language, *Kim* and *Kadınca* discuss masculinity and reconstruction of the "New Man" in a "serious" manner in line with feminist thought. They provide men's accounts of transformations in masculine values and the ways they are coping, acknowledging the need to build bridges and create alliances between men and women based on flexible identifications rather than fixed identities.

Appropriation and articulation of feminist discourses at different levels and in different ways by the magazines have inevitably influenced the redefinition of femininity in the 1990s. The kind of woman constructed by *Kim* and *Kadınca* is someone who wants to learn about her rights, her body, and about life in general. The emphasis is on the independent, successful, dynamic, intellectual woman. The editorials of the magazines always encourage the readers to exercise agency rather than to submit to fate and suggest that only those who try hard can achieve. Features aiming to empower women use mantras such as "I wish I could say no" (*Kadınca*, August 1995) and "You should trust yourself. Be confident" (*Kim*, May 1995). They speak to individual woman in "personal" tones, and give examples of personal and practical experiences of "real" women. Extensive lists are provided, making succinct statements about how to be a liberated and independent "modern woman." By reading these lists the reader learns what to do,

how to behave, what to expect, and what sense to make of her feminine identity. The lists encourage women to get rid of their virginity, be economically independent, and demand and exercise political rights, counterdiscourses to the prescriptions of patriarchy and Islam in Turkey. This emphasis on the individual could be compared with early "pragmatic" liberal feminists in the West.

Kim and *Kadınca* address a type of woman reader who has benefited or wants to benefit from the achievements of the contemporary feminist movements and who, as a result, is more aware of sexual and gender inequality than most women. The editors of the magazines play a significant role in the construction of this imaginary and ideal reader, who can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between feminists and nonfeminist women, and it is to their politics that attention is now turned.

Duygu Asena and Esra Kazancıbaşı grew up in the context of the 1970s and 1980s feminist debates and are both self-proclaimed feminists. They define feminism as a "women's struggle and fight for equal rights and better life," and claim that they reflect their feminist ideas in the magazines, a claim supported by the above textual analysis. Both have a recognized feminist identity within Turkey's large and diverse feminist circles as well as the media. Moreover, Asena is a well-known public figure as a writer, journalist, feminist activist, and women's magazine editor. She was a nationally influential figure in the Turkish feminist movement of the 1980s, and opened the way to the popularisation of feminism. Her first book entitled *Kadının Adı Yok* (Woman Has No Name) came out in 1987, and earned best-seller status over a long period, not only in Turkey but also in Greece. The book was a quasi-autobiographical "confession," with reported memories of sexual experiences, emotions, regrets, and anger, and was recognized in some feminist circles as Turkey's first feminist manifesto. The popularity of the book and its author evidently added to the popularity of *Kadınca*, for which Asena then assumed responsibility as the editor.

Both editors state that their magazines help women by providing information about their rights, emotional existence, work, and relationships, and act to some extent as consciousness-raising sources. According to Kazancıbaşı,

They raise women's consciousness about social life and relationships as well as about their rights as women. We give such messages, for instance, that if you face domestic violence or sexual abuse you must not accept it as your destiny . . . It is not natural or normal to experience such things. [. . .] We suggest to women that they stand on their own feet, know their rights, get educated, work and get involved in democratic, non-governmental organisations, politics and so on . . . we encourage women to fight for their rights, to refuse to stay at home and do nothing. This is how women can control their lives. This aspect of the magazine is concerned with women's status in society. The other aspect is the personal lives of women, their emotions and feelings. The type of woman constructed is someone who is confident, and content about her body and her life in general . . .

Asena expressed her purpose as a writer and editor as follows:

. . . to teach women something about themselves and about the society we live in. My aim is to encourage them to think and question the things they confront in the patriarchal society that we live in. Along with the good bits and fun, we report serious issues (such as gender inequality in all aspects of life).

Asena and Kazancıbaşı identify women's economic independence as one of the most significant social changes of the second half of the 20th century, giving women equality, independence, and freedom, but they simultaneously point to the fact that women work longer hours, have less job security, and are paid less than men. They also identify sexual and emotional changes that have occurred in women's lives, and assert that women's magazines have responded to these social changes. Kazancıbaşı makes this explicit, arguing that "the content of a magazine depends on the social changes that take place in society as well as the editor's view."

Having trained as journalists, Asena and Kazancıbaşı both stated in my interview with them that when they left their existing jobs they would either wish to carry on as editors elsewhere or work as journalists. In fact, after Asena left *Kim* in 1999 she worked as the coordinator of all the consumer magazines pub-

lished by the parent company. She is now regularly writing as a columnist in a daily newspaper and also working on her new book. When *Kadınca* ceased publication, Kazancıbaşı moved to a private television channel, Show TV, and has been working as a journalist since then. Thus, Asena and Kazancıbaşı are carrying on their careers in the media sector, which is highly competitive and male dominated. They have attained their current prestigious status by addressing the whole Turkish public, instead of just addressing women from a gender-segregated sector of the media. Their career progression in the media draws a positive picture of feminist politics in Turkey, for they believe that they will be able to merge their feminist consciousness into their present and future work.

Asena's and Kazancıbaşı's efforts to negotiate and produce feminist meanings outside the academy help make feminist issues part of commonsense ideas and a reference point in culture. Although their magazines never made an explicit statement about such objectives, they became a crucial medium enabling a closer link between feminist values and representations of female identity. This commitment to feminism resulted in a recognition of diverse female subjectivities and a move away from the fixed and clichéd images of women. Yet, as the following section illustrates, conflicting interests in magazine production sometimes cause disharmony in the content of a women's magazine, particularly between its written texts and its advertisements.

COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDEAL WOMEN: PASSIVE BEAUTIES

Although messages about women's freedom and self-esteem predominate in the articles in *Kim* and *Kadınca*, the primary driver behind the magazines is not improving women's lives but making a profit to survive under the pressures of a competitive market system. As Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, and Hebron (1991) put it, "magazines are part of an economic system as well as part of an ideological system by which gender difference is given meaning" (pp. 9–10). Attracting more readers is only marginally profitable, the bulk of profits to be realized by selling advertisements and charging advertisers a rate adjusted to the known circulation of the magazine. However, an analysis

of the advertisements in *Kim* and *Kadınca* reveals a contradiction between a strong emphasis on feminist values in the written texts and a depiction of women in their traditional roles in the advertisements. The latter are predominantly concerned with fashion, beauty, the body, and domestic products, and promote normative notions of femininity, producing stereotypical, and sexist images of women that contradict the feminist ideas articulated elsewhere in the magazines.

The "Ege Seramik" advertisements published in *Kim* are useful material to discuss in this respect. Ege Seramik is a well-known producer of ceramics for home decoration in Turkey, as well as a successful exporter. During 1995, three different advertisements for Ege Seramik were published in *Kim*, all consisting of two full pages, and each one used a close-up picture of a woman in a domestic setting. The setting and the woman were presented as of various nationalities, Japanese, Spanish and Italian, and for reasons of space I will examine only the depiction of the Italian woman here.

On the left-hand page there is a large bathroom designed in the "Mediterranean" style and the style of the window, swimming suits, and sea ball are used as signifiers in the creation of "mediterranean" atmosphere. The caption on this page reads: "The world's preference Ege Seramik." On the right-hand page there is an image of a woman in the foreground, attracting the consumers' attention. The colour and style of her hair, the jewellery she wears and the way she looks reproduce a "stereotypical" image of an Italian woman: beautiful, attractive, and sexy. Advertisers tend to use stereotypes, which Perkins (1996) defines as "short-circuit thinking," as it makes their job easier and more convenient to give the message or the information to the audience in a direct and shorter way. A caption at the top of this page written in Italian and one at the bottom written in Turkish read "Elegance and aestheticism are very important for me." The caption refers on one level to the elegance and aestheticism of the product, the ceramic. However, at another level it also refers to the nationally perceived characteristics of Italian women. Indeed, the captions vary to this end; for the Japanese series the caption reads "They are mysterious and charming. Like a dream." The product, which initially has no "meaning," is given value, is signified,

by the woman, who already has a value to us. Thus, the characteristics of the woman and the product in the advertisements are used interchangeably. This very identification of the woman with a product reduces her to a "sexual" object used to sell the product, a commodity. Moreover, using only a female image in the advertisement, which is concerned with home decoration, reproduces the public/private dichotomy. It helps establish women's domestic role as an innate female characteristic.

How are we to understand the high level of engagement with feminist discourses in *Kim* and *Kadınca* and yet their representation of clichéd images of women in advertisements? The analysis of such contradictions leads us to consider the advertising policies of the magazines. The fact is that complex power relations are enacted in the production of women's magazines between writers, editors, advertisers, and owners and these are significant for their content and advertising strategies. Restricted financial resources make it difficult for women's magazines to have an independent policy on advertising that is compatible with the discourse of the text.

As editors, positioned at the top level of the managerial structure, Asena and Kazancıbaşı stated that they have total control for all aspects of the magazines except one: advertising and promotion. They explained that "although we try to attract advertising for products which are more appropriate for our readers, it is the owners who make the final decision." Women's magazines are crucial sites for the advertising and sale of commodities, part of the capitalist mode of production and consumption. Consequently, while the editors of the magazines are pursuing the construction of feminist identities for the readers, defining womanhood outside the traditional male discourse, the commercial concerns of the market economy play a significant role in perpetuating dominant and traditional notions of womanhood, glorifying women's investments in appearance, their status as commodities and their confinement to the domestic sphere.

THE DEMISE OF *KIM* AND *KADINCA*

The main reason for the demise of *Kadınca* is that it did not attract enough advertisement to cover the cost of its publication. There is a tendency among large media corporations in Tur-

key to set up their own advertising agencies to decrease the cost of advertising. These large corporations often subsidise most of their consumer magazines. Being part of a rather small publishing company, *Kadınca* did not survive in this highly competitive market.

Compared to *Kadınca*, *Kim* was published by a larger media company, Ad Yayıncılık, which itself is owned by Doğan Corporation Media Group. Yet the demise of *Kim* is also based on a failure to attract sufficient advertising, connected perhaps to its primary content. According to Asena, *Kim* had more political and ideological content vis-à-vis feminism than its rivals that managed to survive, and this affected advertising revenues. She says “because our readership cared more about the content of the magazine than the glamorous outlook of it, we failed to attract as many advertisements as the glossy magazines. Fashion and beauty advertisements in *Kim* were less than in other women’s magazines” (1999).¹¹ Thus, the dependence on advertising revenues rather than sales revenues seems to be the major factor in the closure of both *Kim* and *Kadınca*. This implies that, commercial interests—the most significant force for the existence of women’s magazines—allowed and provided space for feminism as long as it generated sales.

Besides commercial pressures, the disappearance of such magazines from the marketplace can be related to the status of feminism and its representation in the late 1990s in Turkey. Although feminist issues occupied a significant place in public discussions since the mid-1980s, and became part of effective political discourses by the mid-1990s, they have recently faded away from the political agenda and from public debate. This should neither be understood to mean that we no longer need feminism because it has fulfilled its task of transforming society, nor that feminism has failed as a social and political movement. The feminist movements in Turkey have not produced deep-rooted transformations of the extant laws and the socio-political status quo; yet they have raised gender consciousness among different groups in society. Consequently, feminism has become, to some extent, a reference point in culture over the last decade, mainly through feminist activism and the media. The closure of *Kim* and *Kadınca* marks a shift in the representation of feminism in popular culture as well as a change in the expectations of

the readership. While *Kim* and *Kadınca* both engaged with feminist issues explicitly, currently women’s magazines tend to implicitly incorporate feminist discourses into popular discourses. Contemporary consumer discourses in both advertising and the women’s magazine press tend to appropriate the feminist terminology of self-assertiveness, achievement, and liberation in an attempt to expand the commodity-sign¹² values of consumer goods. This phenomenon has been termed “commodity feminism” by some western scholars, and involves turning feminism into sign values¹³ and forgetting its origins in a critique of unequal social, economic, and political relations.¹⁴ Like their counterparts in the West, today career women’s magazines in the Turkish market show this approach to feminism.

CONCLUSION

Kim and *Kadınca* are two examples chosen from a range of popular cultural products in Turkey, through which several feminist or pro-feminist women have explored possibilities and ways of intervening in the popular, and gained a space for themselves to redefine female identity and feminism in the contested and congested arena of the 1990s. By providing discussions of “the woman question” and feminist issues in different contexts, *Kim* and *Kadınca* illustrate their responsibility to inform and enlighten their readers about the ways and means to escape the consequences of women’s subordination. The ideal model of Turkish woman projected by the magazines is someone who is economically independent, aware of feminist issues, and seeking an alternative lifestyle. The construction of this image emerges from both the context in which these two magazines came to life, that of a new feminist movement and new media forms and structures, and from the editors’ approach to feminism.

These magazines can be seen as valuable feminist assets, helping to disseminate feminist issues to a wide group of people. Popular feminism, which ties together the effects and reflections of feminist, commercial and popular discourses, may stimulate controversy and dissent among some feminists but it does keep (certain) feminist issues alive in the media. The popularisation of feminism provides for a vari-

ety of voices and a diversity of interpretations and meanings, rather than limiting what feminism is and what feminism should do to a small group of people such as academics or politicians. Moreover, the provision of diverse versions of the concept of feminism provided through women's magazines allows women readers a range of possible engagements. Therefore, the texts of popular feminism, in the form of women's magazines, soap operas, films, or advertising, should be treated as progressive because they attempt to keep patriarchy under constant interrogation, help legitimate feminine/feminist values, and thus produce self-esteem for women.

At the same time, however, the magazines offer selective and partial representations of feminism that are not equivalent to a feminist politics that targets material and fundamental change. *Kim* and *Kadınca* offer a version of feminist ideology that suits the needs of women's magazines, rather than those of feminist politics, and tends to promote individualized feminist goals rather than collective action. There is always a need for feminist analysis to keep emphasizing the fact that feminism is a social and political movement with material consequences that makes a commitment to collective action necessary.

Moreover, while feminist discourse plays an important role informing the representation of female identities in popular media, it is not alone. The analysis of *Kim* and *Kadınca* has highlighted projections of a traditional femininity embedded in a patriarchal context running alongside popular feminist ideals. These constructions of traditional womanhood emerge from the advertisements that the magazines carry, the Ege Seramik campaign analysed suggesting that women are to be valued (by men) as much for what they look like as what they do. This juxtaposition of competing representations points to the importance of extensive analysis of the production process and context of women's magazines to examine in detail how feminist and women's issues are negotiated outside the academy. Such an approach allows us to identify some of the obstacles that editors and journalists face in relation to dealing with feminist issues and/or other subjects. Moreover, because these representations offer very different sets of possible identifications for the woman reader, the question of audience reception immediately opens up.

There is scope for further study to examine what sense the reader makes of the texts and images, how she negotiates the controversial, and/or complementary feminine/feminist meanings offered, and the various ways she might use and appropriates texts to empower herself. Approaching women's magazines from this perspective would allow us to reconceptualize the relationship between feminism, producers of cultural texts and consumers.

ENDNOTES

1. The term patriarchy is understood here as a system of social structures, social relations and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.
2. The following figures illustrate the growing market of women's magazines over the last 20 years: 44 new titles were introduced to the Turkish market between 1980–1990; and 63 new titles between 1990–1996 (Davaz-Mardin, 1998, pp. 19–21).
3. According to the publishing companies, the monthly circulation of *Kim* in 1995 was 11,500 copies, that of *Kadınca* 10,000.
4. Due to limited space, I will not discuss the development of contemporary feminist movements. Many Turkish feminist scholars have studied this subject; see, for example, Tekeli (1986, 1990); Sirman (1989); Arat (1991).
5. For a detailed discussion see Saktanber 1995.
6. However, towards the end of the 1980s, the privatization of television and radio helped to bring Turkey lively public debate. As Kandiyoti notes, “with the transition to democracy after the 1980 military coup, roundtables, panels, and talk shows have been a popular medium for intellectuals, political actors, citizens debating the issues of identity, secularism, ethnicity and democracy” (cited in Göle, 1997, p. 62).
7. This reflects the influence of the feminist refutation of the public–private divide, i.e., the prominent feminist slogan “the private is political.” However, the use of the term sexuality here refers to heterosexuality. The only female sexuality covered by *Kim* and *Kadınca* in the course of 1995 is heterosexual. Lesbianism as an issue has not been on the feminist agenda in Turkey until very recently and has not generally been seen as part of the feminist struggle. Lying behind women's silence about lesbianism are the traditional values and norms of Ottoman and Turkish cultures through which woman's sexuality has been suppressed. For a historical examination of woman's sexuality in Turkey, see Kırca, 2000.
8. Women's magazines are in themselves a vast category with variations in style and content. If we are to categorize contemporary Turkish women's magazines, these publications may fall into six categories: fashion and style oriented magazines; homemaking magazines; career women's magazines; teenage girls' magazines; Islamic women's magazines; feminist magazines. Although *Kim* and *Kadınca* engage implicitly or explicitly with feminist issues, their visual style, layout, advertisements, and content make them closer to the career women's magazine category than any other.

9. For an in-depth examination of discourse analysis of *Kim* and *Kadınca*, see Kirca, 2000.
10. In her critical analysis of Turkish media, Saktanber (1995) notes that *Kadınca* deals with similar issues in the late 1980s. This shows continuity in *Kadınca*'s explicit engagement with feminist issues.
11. Quoted from an interview with Duygu Asena conducted in 1999.
12. "Commodity-sign values": advertisers appropriate feminism and associate feminist values with objects to sell products such as Nike Shoes or Esprit Jeans. Sign objects are thus made to stand for and made equivalent to feminist goals of independence and professional success. This practice expands the meaning and values which are attributed to commodified objects.
13. "Sign values": means fetishizing feminism into an iconography of things that is associated with an object: a look, a style.
14. Western scholars in the field of media, gender, and cultural studies have undertaken a number of studies on the subject since the 1980s. See for example, Goldman (1992) and Macdonald (1995).

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