DEBATING 'ISLAMIC FEMINISM':
BETWEEN TURKISH SECULAR FEMINIST AND NORTH AMERICAN ACADEMIC CRITIQUES

by

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Abstract

This project questions western hegemonic discourse about the non-western Other, specifically the Muslim woman subject, through a post-colonial critical point of view. It takes the debate on Islamic feminism, especially in North American academy as a departure point of a discussion relating that discourse to the western feminist arguments over the usefulness and nature of Islamic feminism. The project has two phases: One summarizes and discusses the Islamic feminism debate in North American academia while second takes secular feminism in contemporary Turkey as a field of study where the debates on Islamic feminism in North America resonate and are reproduced at the discursive level. The project analyzes the special volume of secular feminist journal Pazartesi on religion in order to ask whether a colonialist/orientalist discourse underpins the refusal to acknowledge Islamic feminism as a feminist endeavour for gender equality from within Islam for both the western academic community and secular feminist circles in Turkey.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Scope, Methodology and Organization of the Project

This thesis analyzes Islamic feminism as a feminist movement, arguing for the importance of utilizing feminist theory as an epistemological and methodological alternative to secular feminist theories and movements. The study examines debates surrounding Islamic feminism in the North American academy in relation to the complex interplay of colonialist and orientalist discourses in Turkey and beyond. It illustrates the debate over the usefulness and relevance of Islamic feminism for Muslim women today. The project takes contemporary Turkey as a field of study where Muslim women’s bodies are marked through orientalist and colonialist discourses in secular feminist circles. This study looks into whether debates on Islamic feminism in the western academic and Turkish feminist circles rest on colonialist/orientalist reasoning that often negates and denies the existence and usefulness of Islamic feminism. At a broader level, I offer both a contribution to the larger academic debates on Islamic feminism and a self-reflective critique of the secular feminist endeavour in Turkey.

In light of the theoretical background presented, this study analyzes Western feminist theory and discourse in relation to Islamic feminism, taking the contemporary feminist political history of Turkey as its field of study. To anchor my discussion of Islamic feminism, I will utilize postcolonial and third world critical and feminist theories.
that act against universalist understandings of western feminisms or misinterpretations by western feminist theory\textsuperscript{1}. Bearing this in mind, the methodological frame of the study is deployed on a two-fold but intersectional approach: one is a socialist feminist positioning for the analysis of the case of Turkish secular feminism and the second employs a third world feminist and post-colonial methodology for the larger analysis carried out through this dissertation.

Since the study’s scope originates from and aims at Islamic feminist movements which are alienated from ‘mainstream’ feminist theories and actions, a critical feminist perspective toward the theoretical stance against Islamic feminism is inevitable. My thesis will discuss the hegemonic and oppressive analysis of Islamic feminism in the North American academy which overlooks the interlocking character of various power relations such as race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual orientation. My project will explore the arguments against Islamic feminism in both local and global contexts in order to unravel the orientalist and/or colonialist viewpoints underpinning the critiques of Islamic feminist movement in Turkey. My aim is to open up a critical, inter-relational and transnational conversation between Third World feminism, North American academia and Turkish feminist praxis. The study presented here will constitute the very first step towards this aspiration. In that sense, this study attempts to make a contribution to post-colonial feminist theory through an introductory analysis of western feminism’s

understanding of Islamic feminism. By focusing on Turkey, the study offers a self-reflective critique for further alliances between various political streams of feminism.

The study is composed of three main parts: Chapter Two, *Mapping the Discourse: Islamic Feminism*, contextualizes, describes, and interprets the Islamic feminist movement and charts its theoretical endeavours and aspirations. It asks questions like under what conditions did Islamic feminism emerge as a political movement? What were the common debates? Who are the main critics of Islamic feminism? Who are its supporters? What are their main arguments? In Chapter Three, *Understanding the Political History of Feminism in Turkey*, I study the political history of the feminist project in Turkey. I look into the modernization project starting from the late 18th century and how it has shaped the official ideology or state-sponsored feminism, as well as feminist discourses in general. To do so, I utilize and analyze the concept of state feminism, understanding feminist approaches, alignments and critiques of the Turkish state. In Chapter Four, *That Bridge We Stand On: Secular Feminist Responses to Islamic Feminism in Turkey*, I analyze the special edition on religion of a secular feminist journal published in Turkey, *Pazartesi* (Monday), while addressing the central research question of the study: I ask whether a colonialist/orientalist discourse underpins the refusal to acknowledge Islamic feminism as a feminist endeavour for gender equality from within Islam for both the western academic community and secular feminist circles in Turkey.

1.2 Islamic Feminism Debate: Theoretical Background
Islamic feminism can be described as a feminist movement which bases its methodology and epistemology on both post colonial feminism and Islamic theology. Even though it was described as a “reform movement that opens up a dialogue between religious and secular feminists”\(^2\) by Nafsaneh Najmabadi, one of the pioneering scholars in Islamic feminism, Islamic feminism has been a focus of dynamic academic and feminist debates especially in North America.

It is possible to claim that there are two main approaches to Islamic feminism in North American academia and that both approaches are interrelated. The first approach, as it is reflected in the works of Afsaneh Najmabadi, Miriam Cooke and Margot Badran, embraces Islamic feminism as an important and relevant movement to feminism as it is argued that it critically approaches both western feminist assumptions about Islam and especially Muslim women as non-western others and male hegemonic domain of Islamic hermeneutics and presents a middle ground between these two discourses. The second approach rejects Islamic feminism as an oxymoron. It argues that Islam and feminism are two distinct ideologies that cannot co-exist with each other since Islam is considered to be essentially misogynistic, while feminism means being against misogyny.

In this project, I take a stand for Islamic feminism by arguing that seeing Islamic feminism as an oxymoron can be considered an extension of seeing non-western

movements with Western eyes. What is at stake in the discourse of critics of Islamic feminism is not Muslim women but women under Islam. That is, the discourse against Islamic feminism does not aim at a debate on feminism or women’s movement per se, but allegedly proving Islam as misogynist. For the critiques of Islamic feminism, Islam is configured as highly conflicting with women’s liberation. This part of the debate implies Islam’s character as despotic and barbaric, especially for women and yet the debate does not focus on women and concerns itself with its opposition to Islam as a religious and political and moral order. In this thesis, I argue that these ideas and assumptions should not be the starting point of a so-called feminist debate since the scope of those debates are not women or women’s positionalities but an expression and representation of colonialist and orientalist views of Islam.

1.3 Secular Feminism in Turkey: How Western are We?

Countries of the Middle East and North Africa such as Iran and Egypt have been experiencing rapid yet foundational changes, reforms and revolutions. Turkish political history is no exception to this. The ongoing Turkish modernization project, which dates back to the late Ottoman Empire, values the discourse of modernization and makes central to modern day Turkey Enlightenment values such as reason, empiricism and progress. Not surprisingly, the feminist movement of Turkey, at both the discursive and activist levels, is shaped around this predefined framework for feminism. As it is

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exemplified in my analysis of Pazartesi journal as a secular feminist medium, Islamic feminism in Turkey has been excluded and alienated from feminist circles on the basis of an orientalist viewpoint which sees Islamic feminism as an oxymoron. While the modernization project in Turkey has divorced itself from its oriental Ottoman roots, and has adopted euro-centric westernization as its ultimate goal, feminist discourses have been under the influence of this official discourse.

As exemplified in the third chapter of this project, secular feminists in Turkey view Turkish Muslim women’s movement as a threat to the reforms of the Republic and an obstacle to modernization from a liberal feminist point of view. The increased visibility of veiled women in public is viewed as a reflection of a false consciousness in which feminist demands and women’s concerns are falsely wheeled in the framework of Islam. Regardless of their political standpoints, secular feminists of Turkey have not conversed with Islamic feminists in regard to their demands and critiques but demarcated them as being victims of backwardness and oppression of Islam, as a religion. In that sense, Turkish secular feminism converges with North American academics, such as Moghissi, Mojab and Shahidian; that reject Islamic feminist movement as an oxymoron, in other words a movement without any foundation on feminism. In addition to the parallel reactions to Islamic feminism in both Western academia and feminist circles in Turkey, in this project I argue that the case of Turkish secular feminism constitutes an

4 Ottoman Empire extended its rule to three continents including Eastern Europe, Western Asia and Northern Africa during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Republic of Turkey succeeded the empire in 1923, holding the land called Anatolia, a peninsula between the continents of Europe and Asia.

5 Kandiyoti, Deniz. “Emancipated but Unliberated?: Reflections on the Turkish Case” Feminist Studies. 13. 2 (Summer, 1987): 317-338
example of self-orientalism at work. In other words, Turkish secular feminists’ critique and rejection of Islamic feminism reflects an internalization of the western hegemonic knowledge of Islam and the oriental other. This viewpoint leaves Islamic feminists marginalized and alienated from mainstream feminist circles in Turkey.

1.4 Zeitgeist\textsuperscript{6} of the Study:

I would like to note that although I utilize self-orientalism as a methodological tool to analyze secular feminism in Turkey \textit{vis-à-vis} Muslim women’s movement, self-orientalism is not limited to secular feminist discourse. While this thesis was being written, a spectre called Arab Spring is haunting the Middle East and North Africa and beyond. Angry people of Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, Libya and Greece, Spain and Portugal are taking the streets demanding a \textit{better life}. While this thesis was being written the Arab Spring hit Syria and the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdo\text{"g}an, announced that Syria is a \textit{domestic affair} and Hilary Clinton as the external affairs minister of the US asked Turkey officially to intervene in the situation in Syria. The next day the newspapers in Turkey translated this as the US asked Turkey \textit{politely} to stop this madness in Syria. In the meantime, in the newspapers columnists started immediately to \textit{joke} about a possible intervention in Syria as the grandchildren of the great empire of the Ottomans. At the end, they said, Syrian land was the last to be lost in the Ottoman Empire. After all,

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Zeitgeist} can be defined as “the general intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of an era” \textit{“zeitgeist.” Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam-Webster, 2011.Web. 29 August 2011.}
we have an unfinished business with that land. A joke which is not funny at all. While this thesis is being written, imperialism of Ottoman Empire against the Middle Eastern and North African countries, especially the ones with predominantly Arab and Muslim populations was being reproduced at the hand of the mainstream Turkish media, Turkish government and generally by the Turkish public in the form of self-orientalism where Turkey as a Middle Eastern country interacted with neighbouring countries with orientalist sentiments and agendas.

In another news, the Turkish public was so fascinated with a new television series called Magnificent Century (Muhtesem Yuzyil). The program traces the life of Suleyman the Magnificent, the Ottoman Emperor. The lives of the sultan’s, sultan mother’s, odalisques’ and all were being cut with the advertisements: paint your houses this summer with our new colors: majestic red, palace green, ottoman plum purple. This summer you’ll be imperial: our new jewellery designs; ottoman tulip necklace, sultan’s ring, sultan’s mother earrings. While this thesis is being written, my home country was in the process of re-discovering its past by painting their walls into titillating harem colors and by threatening neighbouring countries. What a great time to talk about orientalism of the orientals.
Chapter 2
Mapping the Debate: Islamic Feminism

Neither the US nor Jehadies (sic) and Taliban

This chapter describes the actors, major arguments and main themes of the debates in North American academic circles regarding the relevance and usefulness of Islamic feminism for a global feminist and/or women’s movement. In the first part, I present a brief epistemology, methodology, and ontology of Islamic feminism. The socio-political climate from which the movement emerged as well as the major academic and non-academic works around it will be summarized in this part. The second and third parts consist of negative and positive reactions to Islamic feminism and the internal dynamics of these debates. It will be followed by a brief discussion of these debates.

2.1 Defining Islamic Feminism

Even if feminist or women’s rights endeavours date back to as early twentieth century among Muslim women or in Muslim majority states, the term Islamic feminism

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8 For local histories, see for example, Margot Badran’s “Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam and the State in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Egypt.” Women Islam and the State Kandiyoti Deniz, ed. London: Temple University Press, 1991; Sirman Nükhet “Feminism in Turkey: A Short History”. New Perspectives on Turkey 3.1 (Fall 1989): 1-34. Also, for a very interesting reading on early feminist movements in Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) in general see: Weber Charlotte, “Between Nationalism and
is relatively contemporary in both usage and circulation. In the late 1990s, Islamic feminism gained prominence and was carried out with a social and religious reform agenda, particularly in Iran, Egypt, Yemen and Tunisia. The debate on Islamic feminism in academia, however, started with Afsaneh Najmabadi’s speech, delivered at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London in 1994 when she described Islamic feminism “as a reform movement that opens up a dialogue between religious and secular feminists”\(^9\). Najmabadi argued that Islamic feminism transcends the binary of the ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ through its critiques of unquestioned presuppositions of western-secular feminism regarding Muslim women. This important speech has come to mark and define how Islamic feminism is understood in academic circles and will form a starting point for my discussion of the complicated relationship between Islamic feminism and the North American academy.

Here it is important to note that there is an ongoing debate in the North American academy, and mostly among scholars whose expertise is on women’s movements in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Their debate centers on whether to define this movement as Islamic feminism or Muslim feminism\(^10\). For example, Roja Fazaeli embraces the term Islamic feminism as a feminist response in Islam towards various


\(^10\) I will touch upon the debate on the name of this particular feminism in the following pages. But broadly defined, Islamic feminism is closer to a feminist theology as methodologically its knowledge accumulation is from within the interpretations of the religious texts. Muslim feminism, on the other hand, may include Islamic feminism but it is not limited to that. It may refer to embracing feminism as an ideology, theory and movement and Muslimhood as a religious, and in some cases, ethnic identity.
social and political determinants. She argues, however, that there are four groups or categories in Iran that are included under the broad category of “Islamic feminists” and they include: Islamic state feminists, Islamic non-state feminists, Muslim feminists and secular feminists. I find this categorization problematic because even if Fazaeli’s intention is to show the distinctions among Iranian feminists, she generalizes them and subsumes them under the broad category of Islamic feminists. It is even possible to say that she uses the terms Islamic feminists and Iranian feminists interchangeably. This is particularly clear in her two paragraph long explanation of how secular feminists of Iran falls short where she does not provide any further information about what and how she describes as secularism and who she refers to as secularists:

Secular feminists, as their name suggests, are proponents of separation of the state from religious institutions. They see such separation as the ideal condition for women to achieve gender equality. Given the current situation and the historical relations between the state and the clergy in Iran, many secular feminists have come to realize that even if Iran is secularized, the clergy will always cling to some power. Therefore, some secular feminists support dynamic ijtihad. I believe her conclusion for secular feminists of Iran as supporting dynamic ijtihad falls short as she does not mention in any way why she distinguishes dynamic ijtihad from Muslim feminists or Islamic feminism in general. As it will be discussed further, Islamic feminism’s methodology contends and even requires dynamic ijtihad. Linking dynamic

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12 Ibid:13
13 Independent reasoning and investigation of the religious texts, including the Quran, the Hadith, and the Sunnah which includes the prophets’ sayings and doings.
*ijtihad* to secular feminists of Iran remains inadequate if not inaccurate because Secular feminism, in essence, does not embrace reforming religion or building a feminist consciousness from within religion as it considers religion to belong to a private sphere and individual conscience. It also views religion as static, dogmatic and ontologically misogynist. In fact, that is the reason why secular feminists condemn Islamic feminism as an oxymoron.

Another scholar, Raja Rhouni discusses “Islamic” as a term and determinant in Islamic feminism in her work titled *Secular and Islamic Feminist Critiques in the Work of Fatima Mernissi*\(^\text{14}\) Rhouni embraces the movement or theoretization of Islamic feminism yet she problematizes the adjective “Islamic” since, she argues, “it excludes both non-Muslims and secular scholars of Muslim background, who strive to contribute to the revitalization of Islamic thought through an approach that does not stigmatize Islam and recognizes its egalitarian scope”\(^\text{15}\). In the case of Rhouni, then, Islamic feminism is a faith-oriented theory and movement. This claim seems reasonable and it is one of the most common arguments among North American feminist scholars who see Islamic feminism as an oxymoron as I will discuss below. For this claim, two points need clarification. First, Rhouni does not give an alternative for “naming” those feminists and/or scholars who interpret Islam through a more egalitarian lens but she problematizes the adjective Islamic just to show its dangers and traps. Second, she does not possible


\(^{15}\) Ibid:33
adjectives for this specific kind of feminism or scholarship. I would argue that a Muslim feminism is a different articulation, which, I believe, serves only what Rhouni, is being cautious about. In other words, Muslim feminism only refers to self-described, pious practicing Muslims. That is why, throughout this work, I position myself using the term “Islamic feminism” as I believe it is more inclusive (to answer Rhouni) yet less generalizing (to answer Fazaeli). As Margot Badran asserts, Islamic feminism is “a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm.”

My understanding of “Islamic” as an adjective in that sense does not refer to a certain ethnic and/or religious background *per se* but to a signifier of a scholarship which anchors its debate in, around, and beyond Islam as a religion, as an ideology, as a way of life, or even as an identity.

### 2.2 Methodology of Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminism derives its source of knowledge from both post-colonial feminist and classical Islamic epistemologies. While Islamic feminism calls for gender equality in the social, political and economic spheres, its methodology stems from reinterpretations, or hermeneutics of the Qur’an, Hadith, and Sunnah via classical methods such as *ijtihad* (independent investigation of religious sources, independent

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17 The Qur’an (the holy words of Allah, provided to Mohammed through the Angel Gabriel) the Hadith (Sayings of Prophet Muhammad) and Sunnah (Practices of Prophet Muhammad) are three main elements that form the basis of Sharia or Islamic law through interpretation.
reasoning), and tafsir (interpretation of the Qur’an). There are examples of feminist organizing that can be described as examples of Islamic feminism in action, including the efforts of Iranian feminists for more gender-neutral laws, the demands of Egyptian feminists to participate in vocations which are currently not open to women such as the clergy, and the struggle of Turkish feminists to abolish the ban on veil in the public sector and on the state premises. Feminist hermeneutics of Islam, as Margot Badran argues, “renders compelling confirmation of gender equality in the Qur’an that was lost as male interpreters constructed a corpus of tafsir promoting a doctrine of male superiority reflecting the mindset of the prevailing patriarchal cultures.” The aim of tafsir, and the aim of Islamic feminism as it utilizes tafsir as its methodological tool, therefore, is to interrupt and challenge patriarchal (and in some cases even misogynist) readings of sacred texts and social formations constructed on those readings approaches to the religion that Islamic feminism stems from and by utilizing tafsir as its methodology.

One of the earliest examples for such effort is the work of Lebanese scholar Nazira Zain al-Din who challenged the very idea that women cannot interpret the Qur’an and other sacred texts in her book, Unveiling and Veiling. Also, Egyptian author Aisha

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18 The reason I call Islamic feminist methodology a feminist hermeneutics of Islam or Muslim feminist hermeneutics instead of Muslim feminist theology is that most scholars whose expertise are on reinterpretation of the sacred texts do not have a theology background yet they approach the Quran, Sunnah and Hadith by utilizing various tools from various disciplines, including literature, history, anthropology, sociology and so on.


Abd al-Rahman (Bint al-Shati)’s book series published throughout the mid-sixties on the lives of women who were close to the Prophet Muhammad such as his first wife Khadija, his second wife, Aisha, and his daughter Fatima, is another significant example of early interpretations of Islam with a gender-positive lens. More contemporary and pioneering works in terms of Islamic feminist hermeneutics were mostly published in early 1990s. In an era where third wave feminism, including third world feminisms, started being emerged as a reaction and critique to second wave feminism which disregarded other social constructions than sex and gender such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality and class and created its own rhetoric and discourse; feminists, religious and secular, produced works on and about Islam which contributed Islamic feminism specifically and third world feminisms in general. Scholars such as Moroccan secular feminist and sociologist Fatima Mernissi, Egyptian women’s studies professor and writer Leila Ahmed, and Turkish Islamic feminist Hidayet Şefkatlı Tuksal who focus on Hadith and Sunnah as well as historical sociology of the era of early Islam while Islamic feminists and theologians such as Riffat Hassan and Amina Wadud are more


interested in the interpretation of Qur’anic verses. While backgrounds and scopes of the works of these scholars are diverse, it is safe to argue that the knowledge they accumulated empowered the Islamic feminist movement in terms of theological and theoretical grounds for Islamic feminist demands and critiques.

2.3 Is Islamic Feminism an Oxymoron?

The controversy around the term “Islamic feminism,” its usefulness, and even its existence has divided many Muslim feminists and scholars into two camps. Valentine Moghadam²⁶, an Islamic feminist activist and academic based in the US, sees the camps as split between those who defend the importance of Islamic feminism as a movement and theory and those who oppose its legitimacy, value, and use and even deny its existence. On one end of the spectrum, which is primarily based in the North American academy, the opponents of Islamic feminism argue that it is an oxymoron since Islam and feminism are in essence incompatible with each other. Moreover, Islamic feminism is criticized for jeopardizing reformist movements with socialist and Marxist bends since it is seen as an example of “bargain[ing] with patriarchy”²⁷ that does not offer a solid ground for a total social reform and/or a social, political or ideological breakthroughs.

The other end of the spectrum constitutes a defensive stance against the intellectual opposition to Islamic feminism. This second camp, which includes both feminists working from the academy and others who work outside it such as Margot Badran, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Nayereh Tohidi and Miriam Cooke, argues that Islamic feminism is a middle-ground between secular and religious feminisms, an agent in geographies where modernization is ongoing, and an alternative discourse to the orientalist and colonialist viewpoints of western feminism towards Muslim women and women living in Middle East North Africa (MENA) region in general. My thesis will engage these debates in order to examine the interaction of colonialist/orientalist perception in relation to women who engage Islamic feminism.

2.4 In Defence of Islamic Feminism

According to Valentine Moghadam Afsaneh Najmabadi, Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Nayereh Tohidi are three major Islamic feminists pioneering the emergence of the movement of Islamic feminism by writing about it, and publicizing and theorizing it. Najmabadi, a professor in women’s studies and also a contributor to Zanan and Farzaneh, which are two of the most influential and groundbreaking feminist magazines in Iran and have significant influence on Islamic feminist knowledge accumulation.

described Islamic feminism in two ways: First, as Najmabadi writes, “At the center of Zanan’s revisionist is a radical decentering of the clergy from the domain of interpretation, and the placing of woman as interpreter and her needs as grounds for interpretation.”30 The deployment of women as the interpreters, then, is a challenge against orthodoxy of the religion for the sake of the equality of women. Second, Moghadam praises Islamic feminism since she sees the importance of this reformist movement as a common ground or a possible alliance with secular feminists in their efforts for gender equality.31 In a similar vein, Badran argues that “Islamic feminism is increasingly occupying a middle ground where the secular and religious meet or where the two collapse”32. Therefore, Islamic feminism can be useful not only for building an alliance between the secular and the religious as two distinct ideologies but also for dismantling presumptions and assumptions of one for another.

Besides the argument of Islamic feminism as a space in between the dualism of the secular and the religious, there are two main arguments to support the relevance and usefulness of Islamic feminism in terms of theory and activism: one is, as in Tohidi’s stand, that it’s a step for secularization of state formations; and second is that it’s a voice against essentialism of the muslimwoman33 in that it makes space for reform of power

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31 Ibid.
33 Cooke, Miriam “The Muslimwoman.” Contemporary Islam, 1 (2007), 139-154
relations both in and out of the communities from which Islamic feminism emerged as Cooke and Mir-Hosseini claim.

According to Badran, the relations of Muslim women in the Middle East and feminism emerged in the context of modernity and modernization in the late nineteenth century in relation to nationalist, anticolonialist, and/or Islamization discourses. She points out that feminism has always been “discredited in the patriarchal mainstream as Western and a project of cultural colonialism and therefore were stigmatized as antithetical to Islam”\(^34\). However, she asserts, the newly emerged movement of Islamic feminism offers a new path, a middle ground, a “middle space of an independent site” between secular feminism and misogynist Islamism (or Islamic fundamentalism)\(^35\).

Tohidi regards Islamic feminism as an inevitable and necessary step toward secularization of the Islamic state(s). First of all, she claims that, just like Jewish and Christian feminisms, Islamic feminism as a name is “more appropriate (than Muslim feminism) when used and conceived of as an analytical concept in feminist research and feminist theology, or as a discourse” and since it is newly emerged, unlike other religious feminisms or feminist theologies, Islamic feminism “is a relatively new, still fluid, undefined, more contested and more politicized trend”\(^36\) in comparison to other feminist


theologies and religious feminisms which could serve more flexibility in terms of building a discourse and a movement.

Although it is new, its theoretical and political grounds can be explained in three points according to Tohidi: Islamic feminism can be seen as responding to traditional patriarchy sanctioned by religious authorities, or as responding to modernity, modernization, and globalization, or as responding to the recent surge of patriarchal Islamism. It is possible to argue that those responses of Islamic feminism according to Thohidi may be interrelated if not intertwined as, for instance, modernity essentially is inseparable from patriarchy especially in the realm of the religion since patriarchal sex and gender binaries are the constructs of western modernity which is also utilized by the patriarchal readings of Islam and in fact of any religion. However, she, overall identifies Islamic feminism as “an inevitable and positive component of the ongoing change, reform, and development of Muslim societies as they face modernity.” Moreover; according to Tohidi, Islamic feminism, in the short run, may serve the Islamization of feminism; which is also a common critique from secular feminists to Islamic feminism, but in the long run, if debates and discussions are not prevented in society, Islamic feminists can serve as agents of the modernization and secularization of Islamic societies and states.
It is important to note here that Tohidi’s stance for Islamic feminism is controversial. In other words, it’s hard to claim that she evaluates Islamic feminism as an “accurate” or even authentic feminism. Yet, she sees secularism as the optimum aim for Middle Eastern women and, although she celebrates Islamic feminism as a part of the Middle Eastern feminism/s which are “born on and grown in home soil” and which “are not borrowed, derivative or ‘secondhand’”.\textsuperscript{40} Tohidi’s position on secularization as well as modernization are open to discussion since, she does not go further into the debates on modernization and secularization as orientalist and colonialist projects, nor does she address their relation to a Western Enlightenment mindset.

Similarly to Badran, Ziba Mir-Hosseini starts her argument with the early feminist movements, particularly in Iran. According to her, the 1979 Revolution disillusioned women with their gender equal agendas, especially in family law, marriage, and divorce issues. In a way, she claims the revolution raised gender consciousness to a certain extent that the failure of the state in gender issues became a starting point for the reform demands. In that sense, Islamic feminism is a part of the reform driven movement seen after the 1980s, which challenges patriarchal gender notions fuelled by the Islamic state.\textsuperscript{41}

Writing on these developments, Mir-Hosseini says,

\begin{quote}
By the late 1980s, there were clear signs of the emergence of a new consciousness, a new way of thinking, a gender discourse that was and is feminist in its aspiration and demands, yet
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid
Islamic in its language and sources of legitimacy. One version of this new discourse has come to be called Islamic feminism.\(^\text{42}\)

In that sense, Islamic feminism’s originality as a feminist movement and theory, according to Mir-Hosseini, stems from its double-agency as feminist and religious and from its task of bringing religion into the framework of feminism as well as making feminism legitimate within the religion:

Muslim traditionalists and Islamic fundamentalists silence other internal voices and abuse the authority of the text for authoritarian purposes. Secular fundamentalists follow the same pattern, but in the name of enlightenment, progress, and science — and as a means of showing the misogyny of Islam— while ignoring the contexts in which the texts were produced, as well as the existence of alternative texts. In doing so, they end up essentializing and perpetuating difference and reproducing a crude version of the orientalist narrative of Islam.\(^\text{43}\)

In that sense, Mir-Hosseini raises the question of ‘double exploitation’ of feminist women in the Muslim world. That is, she claims that women in Iran, as in other Muslim communities, regardless of their feminist backgrounds from either Western or indigenous roots, have always been subjects of argument in terms of different parts of their identities. That is, as Muslim, their identity is often questioned by secular fundamentalist and the feminism is viewed as suspicious by Muslim traditionalists and Islamic fundamentalists: ‘their Muslimness is perceived as backward and oppressed, yet authentic and innate; their feminism is perceived as progressive and emancipated, yet corrupt and alien’\(^\text{44}\). In that

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sense, she is close to the positions of Badran where Islamic feminism is viewed as a middle-ground between secularist and non-secularist fundamentalism, and she adds:

... though adhering to very different ideologies and scholarly traditions and following very different agendas, all these opponents of the feminist project in Islam share one thing— an essentialist and non-historical understanding of Islam and Islamic law. They fail to recognize that assumptions and laws about gender in Islam—as in any other religion— are socially constructed and thus historically changing and open to negotiation.45

What opponents of Islamic feminism miss is that religion, not only Islam as a case but religion as a social phenomenon, is not necessarily a series of dogmatic doctrines which are inevitably close to progress or change especially when it comes to the reforms in social orders including sex and gender orders, but can be dynamic to cover what the contemporary requires with the help of constructive criticism. In fact, Islamic feminism, with its methodology of reinterpretation, is an example of this kind of a constructive criticism to push the traditional scholarship of Islam to meet the demands of Muslim women today.

The secularist and orientalist narrative of Islam is also discussed in the works of Miriam Cooke. Even though it is not directly related to Islamic feminism per se, the term muslimwoman coined by Miriam Cooke is highly significant and reflecting of the orientalist point of view fuelled after 9/11 to understand the opposition against Islamic feminism. The use of this term creates an image of a monolithic Muslim-woman or identity that assumes that being a Muslim woman is in essence something oppressing,

and Muslimwoman, and all Muslim women, are victims of Islam’s patriarchal essence and thus inevitably are oppressed\textsuperscript{46}. Her understanding of Islamic feminism, then, is also related to her analysis of this image. That is to say, according to Cooke,

\begin{quote}
Whenever Muslim women offer a critique of some aspect of Islamic history or hermeneutics, they do so with and/or on behalf of all Muslim women and their right to enjoy with men full participation in a just community, I call them Islamic feminists. This label is not rigid; rather it describes an attitude and intention to seek justice and citizenship for Muslim women.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

Therefore, according to Cooke, the distinction between Muslim and Islamic feminism gets blurred. In fact, she argues all Muslim women would benefit from the critiques of (traditional) Islamic history and hermeneutics, as it would provide a positive change in the efforts to create a just community for Muslims. At first glance, this argument may seem homogenizing. Yet, Cooke asserts that multiple and different identities of Muslimhood in terms of ethnicity, politics and histories can come together with Islamic feminism in order to claim “simultaneous and sometimes contradictory allegiances even as they resist globalization, local nationalisms, Islamization, and the pervasive patriarchal system”\textsuperscript{48}. Cooke’s view appears to be in line with Mir-Hosseini and Badran’s arguments on how Islamic feminism transcends the “limits” of both the inside and outside dimensions of a woman’s movement but by exceeding those limits, Cooke stands for “how a subalternized group can assume its essentialized representations and use them

\textsuperscript{47} Cooke, Miriam “Multiple Critique: Islamic Feminist Rhetorical Strategies”. \textit{Nepantla: Views from South} 1.1. (2000):91-110
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid
strategically against those who have ascribed them. In that sense, Cooke follows Bhabha’s re-reading of orientalism in terms of power/knowledge relations and concludes that the subaltern acclaims a middle space in between the binaries to produce alternate discourses to challenge and disturb the knowledge, the representation and the discourse associated and signified to the subaltern. Then, Islamic feminism is another example of this middle space where marginalized Muslim women reclaim a discursive space in between the representations and assumptions about Muslim women.

According to Cooke, Islamic feminism, or Muslim women’s critical attitude and intention, is in line with Bhabha’s argument as Islamic feminists, despite their diverse identities, produces a thirdspace in between the binary of the secularist and the religious, by disturbing the understanding of (Western) feminist ideals and pointing to the orientalist values and images which consider Islam misogynist. Islamic feminists therefore challenge the traditional, orthodox readings of the religion of Islam for a more just socio-political order for women and men alike.

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49 Ibid
2.5 In Opposition of Islamic Feminism

The opposition of Islamic feminism, as it is represented in the works of Haideh Moghissi, Shahrazad Mojab and Hammed Shahidian are mainly based on the argument that Islam and feminism as two essentially and ideologically different realms that cannot meet each other as a movement; that is, “Islamic feminism” as a term is contradictory and hence it is an oxymoron. Second, the movement, or at least organizing under the term Islamic or Muslim feminism offers nothing but an obstacle for those who seek reform especially in the Iranian context of theocracy. In that sense, it is possible to argue that although Islamic feminism is not limited to Iran, its local origin and its political context remain some of the most significant oppositions to Islamic feminism.

Moghissi, one of the pioneers in opposition of Islamic feminism argues, “No amount of twisting and bending can reconcile the Qur’anic injunctions and instructions about women’s and obligations with idea of gender equality.”\textsuperscript{53} For Moghissi, then, there is no way to reform the Quran by reinterpreting it or not in a way to gender equality. In addition to the Quran itself, she puts the emphasis on Islamic political rule in the context of Iran: “Islam in political rule is incompatible with the cultural pluralism that is after all the prerequisite of the right to individual choice.”\textsuperscript{54} In that sense, she underlines not Islam \textit{per se} but political Islam as a governmental and ideological structure and its relation to

\textsuperscript{53} Moghissi Haideh. \textit{Feminism and Islamic Fundementalism:The Limitsof Postmodern Analysis}. London and Newyork: Zedbooks, 1999. 140.

democracy, cultural pluralism and individual choice. However, I believe before we start criticizing different approaches to democracy, cultural pluralism and individual choices in different setting of states regardless it is theocratic or secular, we should discuss what those terms such as democracy and individual choice reminds and how they differ from one region to another, from one understanding to another. For instance, it is important to note here that Moghissi’s emphasis on “the right to individual choice” goes along with the Western (feminist) ideal type of modernity that stemmed from Enlightenment values which praises individual over community. Thus, individual choice or agency is seen, in Moghissi’s analysis, in a universalist way in which there is one way of agency for all women. Moreover, according to Moghissi\textsuperscript{55}, although she rejects that this movement is a feminist movement, Islamic feminism is an obstacle for socialists, democrats, and feminists who work for secularization since agendas such as the reinterpretation of Quran serves only as a critique in religion and, in that sense, Islamic feminism is an obstacle for the secularists or reformists in their mission for deconstruction of religious paradigm, especially in Iran. Hence, she obviously excludes Islamic feminism from reformist movements which peaked especially after the 1980s and thus her stance differs from those held by Tohidi and Badran. Plus, reviewing Moghissi’s work \textit{Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis}, Chilla Bulbeck claims “In good Marxist fashion, [Moghissi] sees secular Enlightenment values, democracy and

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid
economic development as a necessary stage on the road towards socialism.” In that sense, Moghissi does not question in any way Enlightenment and its values as she sees those movements and their values as universal.

Although Moghissi sees Islamic feminism as an oxymoron, it is important to note the following: “Moghissi locates her own standpoint as negotiating a path between the need to avoid bolstering Western neo-orientalist discourse ... and speaking out as a feminist and insider ... refusing to ‘keep silent about one’s own cultural tradition or the inhumane practices of fundamentalist regimes’.” Moghissi claims that Islamic feminism is not only an oxymoron but also an ‘outsider’ concept and tradition, pushed by academics from the Muslim diaspora. This critique is highly significant since the supporters of Islamic feminism claim that it offers an insider perspective as an alternative to Western and “outsider” feminist politics. Moghissi turns this argument on its head by claiming that Islamic feminism itself is a product of the Western eyes. However, for supporters and opponents alike, the question of who is an insider and who is an outsider, whose “terms” define that boundary and who decides that remains unclear.

Along with Moghissi, Mojab also asserts that Islamic feminism is an oxymoron. In her understanding, Islamic theocracy, as seen in the Islamic Republic of Iran, strengthens traditional patriarchal gender relations. She argues that Islamic feminism is

58 Ibid
far from being an alternative to “mainstream” feminisms, such as socialist or radical feminism, since it justifies unequal gender relations derived from Islam itself. “‘Islamic feminism’ and its various forms, ranging from fundamentalists to reformists, do not have the potential to be a serious challenge to patriarchy,” Mojab writes\textsuperscript{60}. As seen in this quotation, although Mojab is concerned about the representation of Islamic feminism as a monolithic entity and agrees that it consists of a range of discourses from more traditionalists, or even fundamentalists to reformists, she makes the same theoretical mistake that she tries to avoid carefully. Mojab believes Islamic feminist discourse frames Islam regardless of their background: “Academic feminists who authorize ‘Islamic feminism’ tend to treat Islam, though not other religions, as the engine of history, the builder of identity, and a constant presence in history, which is permanently inscribed in the mind and body of every Muslim”\textsuperscript{61}. However, she does not give specific examples of who she refers to and how this process of authentication and universalization of Islam occurs.

As a specific example, on the other hand, she criticizes Iranian Islamic feminism whose agenda, she argues, is patriarchal since “its boundaries are drawn by a state, which in spite of its internal cleavages, is not willing to move in the direction of democratization of gender relation, a process which depends, to a large extent, on the separation of law and religion as well as state and religion”\textsuperscript{62}. Then, it is possible to claim that the

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid: 135
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid: 137
“accurate” non-patriarchal agenda of feminism is democratization and this is also obvious in her writings: “Feminists do not reject reform, which is a means of democratization of gender and social relations”\(^63\). Considering the political language of the era after 9/11, democratization, in my opinion, should be handled more carefully as imperial forces of the US have used it to legitimize the invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan\(^64\).

Also, democratization along with modernization, and liberalization and secularization should be analyzed through a deeper discursive analysis. What and how the socio-political determinants such as democracy, liberal, reform, secularism and so on are constructed and reconstructed, through which processes these determinants gain prominence, how the “ideal types of reform” as a discourse as Mojab and Moghissi argue; is created can be a more accurate point to start that discussion. For instance, how western feminist understanding of emancipation and liberation of women is constructed and in fact universalized by western feminism for all women as the ideal reform to be fought for. Under the circumstances where there is only one form of reform; feminist or not, I do not believe that there is an ideal.

Finally, Hammed Shahidian, another scholar who is critical of Islamic feminism, utters highly critical ideas in debates about Islamic feminism. First of all, he asserts that

\(^63\) Ibid:139
Islamic feminism is limited since it only addresses the interests of middle, upper class professional women and he adds that their emphasis on homogeneity discriminates against those women who do not share the same Islamic beliefs. Although his emphasis on the origin of the movement as upper-middle class professional women is worth considering, the question of whether secularist movements, in Iran and elsewhere are different than Islamic feminism remains unclear. Besides, his opposition on the basis of homogeneity seems ironic considering that the Western or secularist feminist discourse he stands for rejects diverse or alternative ideals such as Islamic feminism. Shahidian, as Moghissi and Mojab, argues that there is no space for compatibility between Islam and feminism and hence it is an oxymoron:

If by feminism is meant easing patriarchal pressures on women, making patriarchy less appalling, ‘Islamic feminism’ is certainly a feminist trend. But if feminism is a movement to abolish patriarchy, to protect human beings from being prisoners of fixed identities, to contribute towards a society in which individuals can fashion their lives free from economic, political, social, and cultural constraints, then ‘Islamic feminism’ proves considerably inadequate. I define feminism in these latter terms, and for that reason, I consider ‘Islamic feminism’ an oxymoron.

In this quotation, two points require further explanation: the first is the statement regarding “fixed identities.” Although Shahidian does not clarify which identities he refers to (social? Political? Economic? Ethnic? Or just religious?), it is possible to assume

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that he sees being a Muslim woman as a fixed identity, where fluidity of identities and perspectives are unacknowledged. This is further linked with the assumption of Islam’s character of being fixed, closed to discussion or any kind of opposition. However, as supporters of Islamic feminism claim in various ways, Islamic feminism is a way of “stretching the lines”67 and challenging both traditional readings of the sacred texts by predominantly male clerics and western feminist presumptions about Islam and Muslim women. Islamic feminism is, in fact, an alternative to the “Western eyes,” seeing Islam and women living it as fixed identities and ironically it is against the essentialist, reductionist and homogenizing view of Muslims especially after 9/11 as the very term of ‘Muslim’ signifies a whole, unified, monolithic entity. Second, while conceding the importance of his criticism in arguing that Islamic feminism does not present a holistic critique or solution for reform, I believe it needs to be extended beyond Islamic feminism since a very similar critique can be posed to secular feminisms that are focused on theoretical knowledge accumulation in academia. Especially western feminist discourse can be considered essentialist, reductionist and homogenizing as it frames the social order; or hierarchies, on the basis of male-female dualism without any emphasis and sometimes even by ignoring race, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality. However, as Mohanty argues, “Ideologies of womanhood have as much to do with class and race as

they have to do with sex.”. In that sense, it is also possible to accuse secular feminisms, such as western feminist discourse, does not offer a holistic approach as it is based on one and only dichotomy, female and male sex system; and it almost intentionally disregards different forms of oppressions.

### 2.6 Discussion of Islamic Feminism:

Although the discussion on the debate on Islamic feminism mentioned in this chapter will be extended in the third chapter, I would like to express my understanding of this debate briefly. Presumptions and acceptance of secularism as an inevitable part of modernization and liberation for women is both problematic and dangerous. To put it in a more accurate way, the dangerous discourse is not Islamic feminism, whether accepted theoretically or not and beyond the debate on its name, but the orientalist discourse, which has been used against it. In Said’s words, orientalism is a discourse which deals with the Orient; by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it ... an accepted grid for filtering the Orient into Western consciousness”.

As showcased in this chapter, the opposition camp of Islamic feminism as a movement and theory is based on the presumptions and assumptions or statements, not only about the religion as a social phenomenon but about the religion of Islam specifically. The acceptance of Islamic feminism as an oxymoron

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reflects two predefined *descriptions* about Islam and Muslim women: declaring Islam as dogmatic and misogynist and Muslim women as hopeless *in or under* Islam.

Considering Western feminism in this context and in the framework of Said’s theory, seeing women’s liberation or emancipation via one way, which happened to be the Western feminist’s way, is a part and parcel of an orientalist discourse. It is hegemonic power, in Gramsci’s terms, forcing its knowledge, in this case theoretical knowledge, as the one, unique, absolute, and universal reality by ignoring, disregarding and undermining the *other* (for instance by calling it oxymoronic). Seeing Islamic feminism as an oxymoron highlights the Western eyes\(^70\) on Islam.

What is at stake in the critical discourse on Islamic feminism is not women of the Middle East North Africa but women under Islam. This part of the debate implies Islam’s character as despotic and barbaric, especially for women and yet it does not focus on women. And, I believe, that kind of a presupposition and assumption should not be a starting point of a so-called feminist debate since the scope of those debates are not women or women’s diverse positionalities but an expression and representation of (neo)colonial and orientalist views on Islam. Although it is left without discussion in my project, the contemporary debates on veiling and Islamic feminism alike are also another example of this argument. In my opinion, the resemblance between the oppositions to veiling and the particular feminism of Muslim women is highly significant since:

It is no coincidence that the desire to unveil the Oriental woman coincided with the broader agenda of ‘progress’ and belief in the incompatibility of Islam with Western models of modernity and reason. Within this continual quest for a modern and civilized identity for Oriental women, Islam gained centrality in debates concerning the ‘woman question’. The subordination of Oriental women was read off mainly from the Islamic cultural practices.\(^7\)

Turkey, in this context, is one of the examples of a country in the MENA where “progress” is exported via modernization. And, not surprisingly, the feminist movement of Turkey too in both discursive and active levels is shaped around this predefined framework for feminism. The next chapter will discuss feminist history of Turkey in relation to that framework.

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\(^7\) Yegenoğlu, Meyda. *Colonial Fantasies: Toward a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge University Press. 1998: 100
Chapter 3

A Political History of Feminism in Turkey

Perhaps Turkey is a soul-break, which is broken in 1980 and healed its bones improperly.
Perhaps we are all broken here or there.72

“Turkey is like a bridge between the East and the West.” In Turkey, this expression is repeated in every textbook from elementary schools to high schools, from history to geography classes. Placed at the center of the political history of Turkey, this statement is at the heart of how Turkey describes itself politically, socially and even geographically and showcases its values, as straddling the East and the West. Whether it is a traditional or modern country, whether it is a secular or religious state, whether it is a European or Oriental entity and more are questions that are asked and answered through certain ‘social engineering projects’73 which shape the official discourse of the country. Women of Turkey throughout those reforms or revolutions have been seen as agents and bearers of those projects as sexless, asexual mothers of the nation, militants and organizers of a revolution, and their bodies have been used to showcase how successful the reforms have been in bringing Turkey into modernity.74 In this chapter, I will summarize the background of those official ideologies such as Kemalism and the specific

72Ece Temelkuran, Dişaridan:Kıyıdan Konuşmalar. (From Outside: Words From the Edge) Everest: Istanbul 2004:29. Not available in English. Unless it is pointed otherwise, translations are mine.
73I am hesitant to use the term social engineering project as it resonates quite differently in certain disciplines of social sciences. Yet I utilize the term to describe the complicated and deliberate efforts to re-shape the nation and the state. Those efforts will be analyzed in detail later.
74Altınay Ayşegül The Myth of Military-Nation Military, Gender and Education in Turkey .New York: Macmillan 2004
political movements such as Islamic revivalism vis-à-vis feminist responses and reactions, and movements and organizations since the feminist composition of Turkey, as in other cases, are not free from the formation and re-formation processes of the state ideologies, such as modernization.

3.1 Grandmas as Ottoman Feminists

The modernization movement in Turkey dates back to the late 17th and the early 18th centuries with the influence of Young Turks as a political-intellectual movement and Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti) as a more official political continuum of Young Turks in the late Ottoman Empire. During the early 18th century, Young Turks, who were mostly educated in Europe, brought back the principles

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75 The first modernization attempt, as accepted by most of the historians on Ottoman Empire, is called Tanzimat Reforms by Sultan Mahmud II which was basically an endeavor to answer the nationalist uprisings in the Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa by stretching the borders of ethnic and religious divisions and introducing “Ottoman” as an inclusive category to all minorities, especially non-Muslims. Even if the Rescript of Sultan Mahmud II could not meet the results he aimed for, it definitely created a space for an intellectual and political movement of the Young Turks to flourish. For further information and discussion on Tanzimat era, see İnalcık Halil Osmani İmparatorluğu: Toplum ve Ekonomi Eren Yayıncılık, Istanbul, 1993; Mardin Şerif ‘Tanzimat’, Türkiye’de Toplum ve Siyaset İletişim, Istanbul, 1990.

76 The Ottoman Empire extended its rule to three continents including Eastern Europe, Western Asia and Northern Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Republic of Turkey succeeded the empire in 1923, holding the land called Anatolia, a peninsula between the continents of Europe and Asia. Here, I would like to note the importance of the academic debate on whether the republic was a continuum of the empire or not as the debate provides a very insightful analysis of modern Turkey and its sociopolitical positioning. I will touch upon this discussion in the third chapter in detail. For example, see Gülalp Haldun’s "Capitalism and the Modern Nation-State: Rethinking the Creation of the Turkish Republic." Journal of Historical Sociology. 7.2 (1994); Savran Sungur’s ‘Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyete: Türkiye’de Burjuva Devrimi Sorunu.’ (From Ottoman to the Republic: The Issue of Bourgeoisie Revolution in Turkey) II. Tez, No. 1. 1985, Ünder Hasan ‘Türk Devriminin Felsefesi’, (The Philosophy of Turkish Revolution) Mürekkep, No.6. 1996.
of Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité of the French Revolution\textsuperscript{77} and created a space and a political ground from which they demanded a series of reforms, thus altering the governance of the Ottoman Empire through a new constitution inspired by European thought, including the principles of constitutionalism, positivism and materialism, as well as reforms for specific issues such as ethnic and religious minority politics and in education and taxation systems.\textsuperscript{78} In addition, they agreed on changes in woman issues, such as polygamy, marriage, divorce and heritage, as a necessity for the modernization process. Beyond the masculinity of the principles of “Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite,” Ottoman women were figured as significant “agents” for the construction of the new generation of modern Ottoman individuals since they were the mothers and wives of the modern individual\textsuperscript{79}. Young Turks’ agenda was shaped so that Ottoman women should be educated to grow into modern Ottoman individuals. Consequently, the existence of women in both public and private spheres, as defined by Sharia, should be revised and clarified. In such an atmosphere, a number of women supported those ‘egalitarian’ ideas and they expressed their opinions in various magazines and newspapers such as Garden (Şükufezar) (1887), Newspaper for Women (Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete) (1895-1908), Bouquet (Demet) (1908), Good Deeds (Mehasin) (1908-1909), Woman (Kadın) (1908-1909, Selanik; 1911-1912 İstanbul), Women’s World


\textsuperscript{78} For extensive analysis of this era see: Feroz, Ahmad. The Young Turks; the Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908-1914. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.

\textsuperscript{79} Sirman Nükhet. “Feminism in Turkey: A Short History”. New Perspectives on Turkey, 3:1 (Fall 1989):1-34.
Among the work by women, besides the essays on fashion, health, domestic work and childcare, there were a number of political essays too. In those essays, especially right after the Young Turk movement reached its political aim with a new constitution, critiques of Young Turks were quite common even though most of the authors were supporters of the movement. One of the most common arguments about Young Turks was that the promises that Young Turks made could not have been kept and that when they got the political power they forgot their promises regarding women’s liberalization. Some Ottoman Feminists such as Emine Seniye and İsmet Hakkı pushed their thoughts even further since they argued that it was impossible to hope for help neither from the Young Turks nor from other men. Hence women’s liberation could only be possible in the hands of women and that is why women had to be educated.

Women who got organized through those magazines and newspapers established associations and organizations, such as the Woman Department of Party of Union and Progress, the Association of Protection of Ottoman-Turk Ladies (Osmanlı-Türk Hanımları Esirgeme Derneği), the Committee for Raising Women (Teal-i Nisvan Hanımlarını Anma ve Yeni Yaşam Çarmıhı Kurumu) and the Association of Protection of Ottoman-Turk Ladies (Osmanlı-Türk Hanımları Esirgeme Derneği), the Committee for Raising Women (Teal-i Nisvan Hanımlarını Anma ve Yeni Yaşam Çarmıhı Kurumu) and the Committee for Raising Women (Teal-i Nisvan Hanımlarını Anma ve Yeni Yaşam Çarmıhı Kurumu).
Cemiyeti), the Association of Progress-Minded Ottoman Women (Osmanlı Kadınları Terakkiperver Cemiyeti)\(^3\). These associations and their organic relations to each other succeeded in terms of enabling the creation of spaces for women created in the public sphere. For example, the Women University (İnas Darülfünun) was founded on September 12, 1914 thanks to the debates in “The Women World” magazine and the Association of Protection of Women Rights (Osmanlı Müdafaai-i Hukuk-i Nisvan Cemiyeti), an organization that was founded by well-known author, Halide Edip. In 1920, the students of the Women University “protested against gender discrimination and occupied the classes of male students as they demanded the abolishment of Women University and the right to attend classes with male students”\(^4\). In terms of history, 1920 also signifies the change in power in Turkey and Ottoman feminists, too, were changing along with the local and global shifts in power dynamics of the state.

3.2 Kemalist\(^5\) Feminism:

The Establishment of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey hastened in the modernization movement. Women as the agents of the new era were on the agenda of the


new government as in the case of Young Turks. Women were the mothers and wives of the new modern Ottoman individuals, known as the Young Turks; the Young Republic did not change that ‘traditional’ role of women; yet it added the role of patriot citizen to the other roles and duties of women, including being mothers and wives, especially during the Turkish Independence War\textsuperscript{86}.

According to Saktanber\textsuperscript{87}, women who were disappointed by the Young Turks who did not keep their promises became the passionate supporters of Kemalist reforms. The children and grandchildren of the people who lived through the 1920s adopted Kemalist feminism as \textit{an inheritance} from their mothers and grandmothers and stood for the Kemalist reforms within the feminist wave that rose after the 1980s. Kemalist ideology as the state ideology was embraced by Kemalist feminists as they see this ideology as the indispensable part of their country, and in fact as embedded in their very essence. I will touch upon this embracement more in the following chapter in the light of examples from Kemalist feminists.

Nilüfer Göle (1991) argues that the Kemalist movement had two major assertions regarding women, namely, nationalism and modernization. It is possible to say that the nationalist base of Kemalism in its view of woman is directly related to populism on which nationalism leans its back. According to Göle, “In the same way Kemalism is fed by populism, Kemalist woman’s movement glorifies the Anatolian Woman against

\textsuperscript{86}Sirman Nükhet. “Feminism in Turkey: A Short History”. \textit{New Perspectives on Turkey}. 3.1(Fall 1989): 1-34.
Ottoman cosmopolitanism”. The glorification of this “Anatolian woman” can be best exemplified in these words of Atatürk, the founding father of modern day Turkey:

They were always those sublime, those self-sacrificing, those godlike Anatolian women who plow, cultivate, bring the wood and timber from the forest, change the products into money by bringing them to market, keep home steady; besides all of these; who carries the supplies to the front-line on her back, by her ox-cart, with her baby in her arms, through foul and fair, regardless of the cold or hot weather.

While the Kemalist idea of womanhood glorifies self-sacrifice for a greater mission of creating the new nation, there remains no space for the rejection of self-sacrifice, or at least a critique of that. As Arat argues, although Kemalism created a space for women, it could not conceptualize women’s exploitation and did not approach women’s issue from the perspective of domination and thus could not dissolve the underlying patriarchal social structure. Durakbasa, supporting Arat, asserts: “We can claim that Kemalism did not exactly comprehend woman’s exploitation. It gave the duty of “development” to women and made their burden even heavier”. In that sense, Kemalism’s modernization project deployed women as the agents of modernization and bearers of development. Moreover, Durakbasa argues,

89 Atatürk literally means “father of Turk(s).”
91 Arat, Necla. “Kemalizm ve Türk Kadını. (Kemalism and Turkish Woman)” 75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler (Women and Men in 75th Anniversary) Hacımirzaoğlu; Berktay. eds. İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası&İMKB&Tarih Vakfı 1998
92 Ibid
In non-western societies, cultural feminisms arose in the process of unification with the modern world. Turkish feminism of Ziya Gökalp as it is formulated in Turkey is based on equality of man and woman in the pre-Islamic nomadic Turkish hordes.

Besides Durakbasa’s harsh generalization of “non-western cultural feminisms”, her point on Ziya Gökalp’s theory is important to note as it provided the republic with theoretical and historical tools to define the new nation state on the basis of Turkishness. Settling new Turkish identity as a part of building the nation-state requires more than a constitutional amendment. In fact, it requires remodelling history, culture, and refashions one’s understanding and projecting of his or her self via a national entity. Gökalp’s Turkish Identity Thesis, as an anthropological work in structure, provided the republics reformers with a past, a root, a history which supported the Kemalist nation-state based on Turkishness. The equality between men and women in that history is I believe a happy coincidence for women in Turkey and not a conscious attempt to prove gender equality.

93 Ziya Gökalp was one of the most important ideologues of Kemalism and the republic, with his Turkish Identity Thesis. The claim of the thesis, which asserts that in pre-Islamic Turkish communities women were all equal to men, were utilized by the republican cadres as a tool to convince Islamic Conservatives among political elites about the woman-oriented reforms.


95 The Turkish Identity Thesis is commonly used in Turkish academia and intelligensia referring to Ziya Gökalp’s writings in general.

The modernization base of Kemalism, on the other hand, includes both legal reforms such as change in the civil code, the right of women to elect and be elected, change in clothing with the hat code⁹⁷ and agreement of unification in teaching and social transitions which were believed to be necessary for a “civilized” life style referring to Western style balls, tea parties, dance parties which men and women attended together, theatre shows, participation of women into education and business. It is also another burden on the women of Turkey: self-sacrificing is not enough; women should be visible in “pictures” of modern Turkey when they are needed. They may be workers in the field, they may be workers at home, they may be comrades in the front-line but at the end of the day they should be part of the new “civilized” life and play their part in the depiction of the modernized Turkey as tokens of the secular Turkish state.

It is possible to claim that there are two significant points that most Kemalist feminists agree on in relation to women’s rights and gains on the basis of nationalism and modernization. The first one refers to the argument which does not deny feminist movement and gains in the pre-republican period, though it argues that the actual breaking point from the Empire, especially at discursive level, was reached by Kemalist reforms. For example, Kırkpınar contends that

⁹⁷ I would like to clarify “the hat code” and dressing code following that change as it is quite often read incorrectly. The hat code did not ban veiling per se. Yet it introduced and encouraged the European way of clothing for both men and women, aiming to replace traditional garments such as the fez and niqab with hats and other European clothing. Ataturk introduced this code to the public with this speech: “Gentlemen, the Turkish people who founded the Turkish Republic are civilized; they are civilized in history and in reality. But I tell you as your own brother, as your friend, as your father, that the people of the Turkish Republic, who claim to be civilized, must show and prove that they are civilized, by their ideas and their mentality, by their family life and their way of living... My friends, international dress is worthy and appropriate for our nation, and we will wear it” (Atatürk, Mustafa Kemal cited in Yegenoglu Meyda Colonial Fantasies: Toward a Feminist Reading of Orientalism. Cambridge University Press, 1998: 133.
Although there was an intensive social change in the last 150 years and in this period of 150 years, Turkish woman continued to look for a new social status and identity; the developments that are witnessed in 75 years of the Republic have great difference and meaning compared to previous eras.  

In that sense, Kırkpınar acknowledges the existence of a feminist movement prior to the Kemalist revolution unlike many other Kemalist feminists, yet she still considers Kemalist republican era and its reforms as the optimum point for women’s social status and identity.

Moreover, arguing the transcendence of the republic in terms of region and culture, Kırkpınar suggests a second argument, the argument of Anatolian womanhood: “In short, Republican woman is disparately different despite the differences between regions and cultures and the contradictions experienced”. Kırkpınar can be criticized here since she reproduces the unitarian nation state ideology. That is, she celebrates the nation-state’s homogenizing character which erases the “the differences between regions and cultures”.

Another opinion that affirms Kemalist feminism from a different perspective shows the significance of Kemalist reforms for the rise of a feminist discourse in the country. Although they can hardly be categorized as examples of Kemalist feminism, the ideas of Nilüfer Çağatay and Yasemin Soysal are useful to explain the case of Turkey in the context of ‘universal feminist sisterhood’:

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99 Ibid
100 Ibid
The woman’s movement has had several accomplishments since the establishment of the republic. On the legal level, many rights have been recognized; the changes suggested by liberal feminism have been made; a strong group of professional women from middle class has been created; women gained experiences in political movements and there have been times women had a high participation rate in mass movements. Most important of all, woman’s/ feminist movement has gone beyond the national-local discussion in the daily politics to take part in the universal categories of feminism such as independent organizations, standing against patriarchy.  

According to Çağatay and Soysal, the feminist movement in Turkey benefited from the republican reforms directly in terms of the political, economic and legal mobilization of women. However, what I am interested in more in this quotation is Çağatay and Soysal’s embracing of “the universal categories of feminism” without any further discussion or critique. It is unclear what those universal categories are and whose categories they represent. I will discuss this unquestioning acceptance further in Chapter 3.

3.3 Criticism of Kemalism in the Women’s Movement After the 1980s

The 1980 military coup was a turning point in Turkish political history since every kind of political activity, from labour unions to student organizations, from political parties to associations, regardless of their political stance, was swept by the ruling generals. Members of politically active groups either got killed, imprisoned, exiled or had to flee the country. In this environment, women of different political circles such

as Islamic traditionalists, leftist, liberal, and nationalist feminist organizations started to get organized since, ironically, women’s gatherings were not paid close attention to by the state sanctioned junta. Those gatherings ushered a new ‘autonomous’ discourse of women although their political stances were different from one another\footnote{This period is commonly called the 2nd wave feminism of Turkey.}. Kemalism (which represented the official state ideology) was one of the hot issues of debates in those gatherings as different political circles experienced Kemalism in different ways. It is not an exaggeration to claim that those different experiences touched each other directly for the first time in those gatherings. The theoretical framework for those debates were pioneered by Deniz Kandiyoti and Şirin Tekeli.

In her article entitled *Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case*,\footnote{Kandiyoti, Deniz. “Emancipated but Unliberated?: Reflections on the Turkish Case” *Feminist Studies*. 13. 2 (Summer, 1987): 317-338} Kandiyoti presents an account of the discussions around Kemalist reforms and claims that those discussions mainly include class based analysis of the reforms. By arguing that the reforms were not influential in the rural areas and that they changed the lives of women from the middle and upper classes in the urban centers, she supports the positive effects of education on women’s lives. For her, the real problem lies in the relationship between the distinction between “gaining … rights” and “emancipation”\footnote{The changes in Turkey did not include the most intricate parts in gender relations and left out the issues such as the double standard in sexuality or the definition of women’s role. In that sense, it should be said that women in Turkey are liberated but...}.

The changes in Turkey did not include the most intricate parts in gender relations and left out the issues such as the double standard in sexuality or the definition of women’s role. In that sense, it should be said that women in Turkey are liberated but...
not emancipated because there is no obvious political activity to change the position of women.\textsuperscript{104} 

The male élité defined and/or constructed the positions and roles of women in very rigid ways so that no space remained for women to challenge those positions and roles. However, it is possible to criticize Kandiyoti in that “the women” in her work are presented as a homogenous category. In other words, the rural women’s positions in the reforms, which are “celebrated” by urban middle/upper class women of the time, are unquestioned and left without critique although there may have been a focus on class dimension; at least a critique on upper/middle class, between rural and urban populations of Turkey at the time.

The “Political activity” that Kandiyoti mentions also constitutes the base of Tekeli’s criticism. According to Tekeli, the dominant idea of the republican period was “state feminism”. In her opinion, the main reason why the Kemalist government put the focus on women’s issue was to show the world that it was different from its contemporary German and Italian dictatorships and it’s possible to argue that they succeeded in that sense especially considering that Turkish national modernization process was supported and considered as a pioneer for the countries endeavouring on the same “mission.”\textsuperscript{105} Besides, as a consequence of the state feminism, the women’s movement in Turkey came to a standstill: “For a long time, the new elite women of the

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid

\textsuperscript{105} Turkey’s position as the pioneer in modernization can be best observed in Iranian and Egyptian modernization histories. Also, for a very interesting record of Turkish modernization by women from other Middle Eastern countries during 1920s see: Weber, Charlotte. “Between Nationalism and Feminism: The Eastern Women’s Congresses of 1930 and 1932.” \textit{Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies.} 4.1 (Winter 2008): 83-106
republic repeated the mistaken belief that equality between the sexes has been achieved thanks to Atatürk”.

In that sense, it is important to note that the main “threat” in state feminism is that it creates a mass illusion which prevents the idea of change since it is believed that “every single change/reform is achieved” and granted by the state. Plus, gratefulness and glorification towards the reformers as the people who give Turkish women their rights “causes” the emotional bond between the Kemalist elité and “the mass,” thus breaking or even criticizing those reforms becomes a “betrayal” as it is defined in Ayşe Durakbaş’a’s work.

Durakbaş defines the Kemalist idea of womanhood through morality and relies on the metaphor of the father-daughter relationship. According to her, “The achievements of Kemalist reform encouraged women to take part in public sphere in several ways but the moral codes related to “family honour and dignity” continued to control them.” Her second argument is that the fathers of Kemalist women who were “perfectionist Kemalist men” desired to bring up perfect republican girls and this played a role in the construction of the Kemalist woman identity. The republican fathers wanted their daughters to get a modern education and to take part in circles where both sexes

socialized together as a sign of modernity. On the other hand, they followed a traditional restricted code in the issues of sexual morality and family honour.\textsuperscript{108}

3.4 The Revival of Political Islam

The 1980 coup d’
état was also a turning point for the Islamization of politics as well as politicization of Islam\textsuperscript{109} in Turkey.

The military rulers thought that what the country needed most was unity. They advocated the ‘Turkish-Islamic Synthesis’, a strategy that called for a startling return of religion in public life, including public education.\textsuperscript{110}

While the political parties including liberals, leftists and religious conservative parties such as MSP (National Salvation Party) were banned by the military rulers, MSP could succeed to rise with the name of RP (Welfare Party), especially in the first half of the 1990s. In this period with the development of the free market and liberal civil society, different religious (still all Sunni Muslim) groups started to be effective in the social and political arenas, as well as the economic sphere and the Welfare Party gained political power with the coalition of the liberal conservative party, DYP (True Path Party) in 1995. Erbakan, the leader of the Welfare Party, fuelled the radical Islamist agenda after the electoral triumph in 1995. His visits to Libya and Egypt in order to develop political

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid
\textsuperscript{109} Islamization of politics refers to a strong tendency to define political realm in accordance with Islamist ideology and law. The politicization of Islam, in relation to the Islamization of politics, refers to the end of re-creating a political discourse of Islam. Those two interrelated veins can be followed through examples of their applications as described below.
relations were almost non-existent until that time; his proposition for an Islamic monetary union as well as an Islamic currency for the economic pacts between Islamic countries and Turkey were considered the first steps for a counter-revolution to Kemalist modernization. Moreover, parliamentarians of the Party proposing an Islamist revolution, some local party branches organizing cultural and social activities in which international fundamentalist groups were praised, militant religious groups such as Aczimendis becoming more and more visible on streets triggered the “semi-military intervention”\textsuperscript{111} in 28 February 1997 which resulted in the decision to ban the Welfare Party.\textsuperscript{112}

According to Göle, the politicization of Islam led veiled women to be more active in politics, and veiling became the political symbol of this political activity since it signified the return to the pre-modernist Islamic traditions. She argues, “The image of passive, meeting the fate calmly, peaceful, obedient, submissive, traditional Muslim woman is broken by the Islamist woman who left the personal world of her house and joined the massive movements, active, demanding and even militant.”\textsuperscript{113} By getting organized and by becoming visible in public not as submissive Muslim women but as

\textsuperscript{111} Even if there is a debate on whether 28 February was a full-force military intervention or not, I keep using semi-military to define this intervention for two reasons. One is structural: in 28 February, the military did not overthrow the civil government \textit{per se} but with their threatening attitude they provided the ground to legitimize the decision of the Supreme Court to close down the party and ban any political activity for party members. The second reason is more political. Turkey experienced coup d’états throughout its history. I believe it is important to acknowledge the gravity of 28 February on Turkish politics, especially on Islamist wings, yet it is incomparable to 1980 coup d’état which literally killed thousands of people and mostly leftists. That is why I think a semi-military intervention would be more accurate to define that moment.


agents of a movement demanding immediate change, the Muslim woman’s image is challenged in secular public opinion and among political Islamist circles which are often male dominated spaces.

### 3.5 Veiled Feminism

The period of the early 1990s was important since Turkey met with the mobilization of women, who were affiliated with the Islamist agenda. They were affective in organizing people, especially women, and recruiting them to the Welfare Party in both urban and rural areas. The veiled university students demanding to abolish the ban on the veil became ‘visible’ since they held several demonstrations, including hunger strikes around universities. Moreover, some women, who were called “veiled feminists” by the mainstream media of the time, started the debates on feminism and women’s rights.

According to Göle, the visibility of those women, especially those who are in the metropolises of Turkey such as Istanbul and Ankara, and their demands such as

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114 Here I would like to note that secularism which is broadly defined as the separation of the state and religion by all means does not cover the Turkish case as Turkish secularism took the French model of secularism; namely laicité, which gives the state the power to control religion. To make laicité more clear; in Turkey the Department of Religious Affairs is authorized by the prime ministry and cannot act independently from the state. In that sense, it is possible to say that religion is a state-sanctioned practice in Turkey. That’s why from now on I will use laic (which is also commonly used in Turkish as laik) in referring the Turkish case of secularism.

115 For Turkish speaking readers, I’d like to note that I use Islamist for İslamci, Islamic for İslami, and devout, pious and religious interchangeably for mütedayyin or inançlı.

116 The religious headscarf, türban, is banned by the following regulation of 16 July 1982: “The clothing and appearances of personnel working at public institutions; the rule that female civil servants’ head must be uncovered.”

abolishing the ban on veiling in public premises were assumed as an abuse of the earnings of modernization in general and laicism specifically. However, she frames this group as a branch of radical Islamism that seeks an alternative system between Western modernism and Muslim traditionalism. Moreover, she claims that the ‘traditional’ modernist discourse has seen urbanization, education, especially higher education, learning second and third languages and having a profession, especially in the areas of medicine, law, and education, as the signifiers of a modern society. Veiled feminists have met these requirements of modernity by all means as these women mostly come from rural to urban for a university degree in mostly medicine and education faculties. Their existence in Western modern public sphere as the image of educated-Muslim-militant women challenges the modernist elites of Turkey.

This ‘intellectual Muslim woman’ image is also used frequently in the writing of Cihan Aktas, who has been one of the most important figures in terms of intellectual and theoretical background of the Islamist-feminist movement. She also plays an influential role in modern day politics via her work as a newspaper columnist. According to her, the term ‘traditional’ has always been used in Islamic discourse since the border between traditional/cultural and religious/Islamic is ambiguous. In that sense, the theorization of the Islamic woman’s image should start with the refusal of the ‘traditional woman

image.’ In other words, she claims that although it is implied that Islam and what is traditional, and what is oppressive and passive for women are the same, Islam is not necessarily traditional. Joining political activities, being outside of home and taking part in the intellectual, social and academic circles are the ways to construct the intellectual Muslim woman. In this way, she complicates and disturbs notions of modernity and traditionalism.

Another theoretical framework for the Islamist-feminists was the idea that in ‘authentic’ Islam, there was no gender inequality; to put it more accurately, Islam is authentically for equality and this includes gender equality. The emphasis on Asr-i Saadet (Golden Age) especially, which refers to the early ages of Islam and is studied via the sayings and acts of Muhammad (Hadith & Sunnah), can be interpreted as the utopia of Islamism. This utopia, however, opens the path for harmonizing Islamic identity and social and political demands such as division of labour in the domestic work and mothering. According to Göle, the Islamic utopia, however, differs from the ‘ordinary’ utopia idea since the Marxist socialist utopia signifies a classless ‘future’ while Asr-i Saadet refers to the past, as well as lost times which can be revived again. In that sense, Islamic utopia has a dynamic character where a past is sought to be revived in terms of the ideological background. This character supports Muslim feminism in the debates

over gender equality or equity and complicates the roles of men and women in private and public spheres with male Muslim traditionalism.

It is possible to argue that academic or intellectual debates over feminism and Islam, or to be more accurate, equality or equity\textsuperscript{122} between men and women in Islam were mostly inside groups of devout women of Turkey. However, I believe the example Merve Kavakçı’s case is worth mentioning here as it presents the psyche of the time in relation to Islamism and laicite.

Kavakçı, a veiled woman, was elected in Istanbul for the Parliament in the April 18, 1999 elections which was triumphed by a coalition between secularist and mostly Kemalist DSP (Democratic Left Party) and ultranationalist MHP (Nationalist Action Party). Her election campaign had the overt support from Necmettin Erbakan, who was the former yet one of the most influential leader of the radical Islamist politics in Turkey and was banned from the politics at the time by 28 February semi-military coup explained above. Erbakan’s support and her public speeches which implied that she would not unveil in the parliament caused tension all over the country\textsuperscript{123}. In the meantime, another veiled representative, Nesrin Unal from MHP made it public that she would follow the rules of the parliament and unveil during her office duty. This position

\textsuperscript{122} It is important to note the difference between equality and equity. In traditional Islamic writings regarding women’s status in society, the most common argument is that men and women are different in their nature (fitrat) that’s why they can’t be equals. What traditional Islamic interpretations suggest is equity as a notion for a just relationship between men and women.

was utilized to support the mounting public discourse against Merve Kavakçi’s case.  

On May 3rd, during the swearing in ceremony in which all 550 parliament-elects from all parties pledge their loyalty to the integrity of the state and devotion to Atatürk’s revolutions, Merve Kavakçi’s entrance with her veil to the parliament caused a storm of applause of support from VP and shouts of “get out! get out!” from DSP and MHP. In the following moments, the prime minister from DSP, Bulent Ecevit, approached the aisle and made a historic and quite significant speech which made Kavakçi leave the parliament with no return.

In Turkey, no one intervenes in a lady’s clothing in their private lives. But this place (the parliament) is no one’s private sphere. This place is the most supreme institution of the state. The ones who are in duty here must obey the rules and traditions of this place. This is not a place to challenge the state. Please bring this lady into line.

In this single speech, I believe it is possible to follow the complicated yet simple relationship of the state, or state ideology, to religiosity and women. In terms of laicism, it is evident in this speech that the split between the public and private spheres are more than a socio-political theoretical description but practically dictate how the state operates in Turkey. Without making the boundaries clear between private and public, laicism cannot function as a part of the state ideology. In that sense, veiling becomes an issue

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124 Kim Shively’s “Religious Bodies and Secular State: Merve Kavakçi Affair.” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*. 1.3 (Fall 2005): 46-72

125 The speech can be found in Turkish here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhQGiDyBlhU&feature=related. After a couple of months, Merve Kavakçi’s Turkish citizenship was revoked because she did not inform the Turkish authorities about her dual-citizenship as a Turkish and American citizen. According to the Turkish constitution, parliamentarians cannot hold dual citizenship.
when it becomes visible in public. Second, the parliament’s description in the speech is also quite significant for Kemalist laicist understanding. For example, when the parliament member says the parliament is the “supreme institution,” which, while representative of all in principle, has no room for a veiled woman even if she is elected by her constituents, he reveals how veiling renders women invisible to the state. The woman’s religio-political identity, which is embodied by the veil, is reduced only to the issue of veiling and whether it is permitted in the supreme institution of the state. This issue will be elaborated in the next section.

3.6 The Revival of ‘Moderate Islam’: Where Did Those Women Go?

In the 2000s, when the Justice and Development Party (AKP), whose members are mostly from ‘moderate’ or liberal Islamist wings separated from the radical political Islamists of the 1990s, became the ruling party, this signalled the beginning of yet another ‘social engineering project’ started in the name of ‘democratization’. In the early years of its ruling, during its first term in the parliament between 2002 and 2007, two democratization packages related to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and civilization of the Turkish army, which has been the most influential power of the Turkish political history, were passed for the sake of European Union Membership.

Internationally, since this democratization attempt coincides with the War on Terror, the AKP ruling led to debates, including considering the liberal Islamist rule as

126 For the impact of the military interventions in the history of Turkey, see Feroz Ahmad’s Making of Modern Turkey. London: Routledge, 1993.
the new model for the Middle East. Internally, gender reforms such as changes in the penal and civil codes providing more protection to women against violence, particularly against honour crimes, have been effective at least in the legal and constitutional terms. The laws of divorce, marriage and property gained a ‘positive discriminative’ characteristic for women.

In fact, since it came to power in 2002, the AK government has pushed through unparalleled reforms, giving women more rights than ever. Rape inside marriage is now a criminal offence. Penalties for ‘honour killings’ of women who mix with men to whom they are not married have been stiffened.

According to Turam, the reforms of the AKP “initially helped to integrate Islamic actors into the secular Turkish Republic” however, they also led to the sharpening of the ‘clash of modernizations’ in Turkey between two groups: the Kemalists and religious conservatives, and between two concepts: laicism and democracy. Gender reforms became the hot issue since it points to the ‘issue of veiling’ in the universities and official professions including public hospitals, schools, and courts. While Kemalists, mostly women, including Kemalist feminists, took a stand against veiling and got organized for massive demonstrations, veiled women, or veiled feminists remained silent in contrast to the last decade’s experiences.

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Turam’s study with “secularist and pious” women in Turkey seeks an answer for this “non-response.” According to the findings of the study,

…pious women under the AKP no longer mobilize collectively to defend their rights. The fact that some organized a decade ago shows that they are capable of doing so and were once willing. The current politics of non-defiance is a product of social and political conditions, which place these women in the center of clash that many of them do not seek and, indeed, wish to avoid.\textsuperscript{130}

However, it seems to be a weak argument since the movement of ‘veiled feminism’ was also in the middle of the clash, veiled women were considered as the symbol of radical Islamism by both their own companions and Kemalists. Moreover, there are still some organizations which focus on both feminism and their Muslim identity such as Gokkusagi Kadin Kooperatifi (Women’s Cooperative of Rainbow) and Baskent Kadin Platformu (Capital City Women’s Platform); however, their political discourse is more liberal and not militant since they stress the headscarf as a part of human rights and the ban on veiling as the offence against veiled women’s religious identity, individual freedom and personal choice.

I interpret this change from militancy to liberal discourse as a sign of the spread of ideology from top to bottom where women ‘used’ as the symbols of the new state organizations. However, after the ideological goals were achieved, women ‘were given’ some rights and then became silent. It is possible to claim that the same process through the modernization of the Kemalist cadres for women is being experienced by women of

\textsuperscript{130}Ibid.
Islamic cadres since the AKP is the moderate continuum of Welfare Party of the 1990s. In other words, although it seems that there is a political clash in relation to the emancipation of women between the Kemalists and Islamists, or laics and democrats, in fact, the same scenario continues: state feminism at the hand of the male political elite secures its position against women. Women are pushed back to their “traditional” places of being mothers in the home who fulfill their duties and thus open the path for male comrades to build their own rule. State feminism, which is utilized to define Kemalist feminism, can also be traced to this moment.

3.7 An Authoritarian Leader with a Democratization Package

The AKP’s second term in the parliament between 2007 and 2011 has been more complicated in terms of their democratization project. While the reform packages of the first term, specifically the ones that promoted neoliberal economic developments, gained positive reaction in and out of the country (especially in the West). Erdogan’s charismatic leadership influenced people not only in Turkey but in the Middle East and North Africa. Yet, during the second term, AKP almost reached the ultimate point of anti-democratic practices and enforcements including basic human rights violations as experienced after 1980 military intervention.

A significant doctrinal contrast remains over Kemalist secularism - a deeply illiberal, anti-clerical and control-obsessed

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131 Erdogan’s well-known “one minute” speech in Davos against Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Mavi Marmara flotilla attack in which 9 Turks were killed by the Israeli army can be considered two paramount moments in building Erdogan’s charisma in the MENA.
rendering of the relations between state and religion. But in other respects the AKP now looks as authoritarian and nationalist as its Kemalist predecessors, across a range of issues -such as violence against students protesting the government’s neo-liberal education policy, mounting pressure on oppositional newspapers, government initiatives to control the internet.  

It is obvious that Erdogan’s definition of Turkey as an “advanced democracy” is delusional, especially in light of the limited freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and freedom of political activity experienced in Turkey today. It is possible to argue that towards the end of his second term and as he moves towards a likely third term the clash is not with secularism or Kemalist ideology anymore but with democracy itself which is ironic considering Erdogan’s project was promoted as bringing democracy to Turkey.

Ever since Mr Erdogan won his battles with the army and the judiciary, he has faced few checks or balances. That has freed him to indulge his natural intolerance of criticism and feed his autocratic instincts. Corruption seems to be on the rise. Press freedom is under attack: more journalists are in jail in Turkey than in China.(...) On top of this, on the campaign trail Mr Erdogan has begun to take a more stridently nationalist tone: he and his party are no longer making serious overtures to the Kurds, Turkey’s biggest and most disgruntled minority.  

Given the examples which could be furthered easily, what is experienced in Turkey by all except AKP supporters is far from democratization. In fact, with, “natural intolerance of criticism”, “autocratic instincts” and amplified charisma of the Prime Minister, Turkey is being wheeled to an authoritarian regime.

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132 Oktem, Kerem. “Turkey’s ‘Passive Revolution’ and Democracy” http://www.opendemocracy.net. Here I would like to honor the memory of Metin Lokumcu, a retired teacher and a well-known socialist who was killed by tear gas while he was protesting against Erdogan on 6 June 2011 in Hopa, Turkey. Later that day, Erdogan called the protesters “bandits” and added “and one of them is dead. I don’t know who he is. And I don’t care.”

Moreover, at the beginning of the last week before the election to carry him towards his third term, Erdogan scrapped the ministry of women and introduced the ministry of family which obviously refers to the traditional definition of womanhood vis a vis motherhood\textsuperscript{134}. On the other hand, “traditionally”, AKP promised to abolish the ban on veil in public premises, yet it couldn’t achieve this since this first attempt was stopped by the Supreme Court in 2009. However, for the 2011 election, it was that the AKP would have a veiled candidate in its cadres. It was a disappointment when this did not happen, especially for the veiled women and Islamic feminist intellectuals, and mostly well-known journalists who are against the ban on veiling who started a campaign called “no veiled candidate no vote” which was supported by a wide range of political organizations. There is, however, only one veiled candidate running a campaign in Ankara. Aynur Bayram, who is not affiliated with any political party, could not gain a seat in the parliament. I believe Aynur Bayram’s independent candidacy did affect the result directly. After all, the AKP’s constituents generate an example of unquestioned loyalty to the party given the ascending results in three elections. There is no room for doubt that had Aynur Bayram been an AKP candidate, she would have gained the seat without special effort on her part. But the constituents, apparently, chose the party including its politics which left veiled women behind over veiling as an issue. In that

\textsuperscript{134} In a similar vein, the prime minister’s wife, Emine Erdogan announced that the government will aid single mothers by providing free or low-rate rental homes in an atmosphere where feminist organizations demanding shelters for women; mother or not, are penalized as illegal organizations.
sense, it is safe to claim that the veiling issue dropped down in the list of the priorities of demands among the constituents.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I summarized the political history of Turkey in relation to feminist movements, the reactions and gendered ideologies, as well as the two social engineering projects of modernization and democratization. As seen, even if the elite cadres change hands in Turkey from Kemalists to mild Islamists\textsuperscript{135} or from modernists to neo-liberals, and even if experiences of womanhood differ via women’s political orientation and state feminism which disregard women’s positionings in social and political resistance and their demands for social, political, economic and legal reforms, women continue to be deluded into a position where resistance is viewed as not being necessary anymore. However, state feminism is only one step in analyzing feminist endeavors in Turkey. In the following chapter, I will analyze secular feminist movement of Turkey in relation to not only their alignment with the state but also with the state ideology of Kemalism in order to understand secular feminist conversations with Islam and veiled Muslim women in Turkey.

\textsuperscript{135} “Mild Islamist” is a term commonly used to describe AKP to underline that it has Islamic roots in discourse but that it also remains in tune with global capitalism and neoliberal politics and practices.
Chapter 4
That Bridge We Stand On:
Secular Feminist Responses to Islamic Feminism in Turkey

We’re western minds trapped in these oriental bodies.¹³⁶

This project does not intend to describe Islamic feminism but to question the positive and negative reactions to it in the theoretical framework of postcolonialism and critical theory. This chapter of the project, too, does not include Islamic (feminist or not) demands or critiques in Turkey; not because they are not relevant to contemporary politics but because of the writer’s positioning as a secular socialist feminist. This chapter focuses on the attitudes of secular feminist women in Turkey against Islam, religiosity, the veil and the Orient as the ultimate others of Turkish secular feminists. Throughout this chapter, I will investigate the similarities and differences between Turkish secular feminists and western feminist scholarship in North America while analyzing the dynamic relations and intertwined discourses against specifically Islamic feminism as a movement and Islam in general.

The voices of secular feminists of Turkey resonate to some extent as the common sense in Turkey and it is therefore often not written down or recorded, tracking down the well-known but not publicly pronounced attitudes towards veiled feminism is not an easy task. However, the special edition of The Special Newspaper for Women: Pazartesi

¹³⁶Anonymous.
(Monday) Journal\textsuperscript{137} entitled, “Religion: Is Women’s Oppression God’s Order or Man’s Idea?,” provides a unique example of what secular feminists think about veiled feminism as the volume is a collection of the common sense attitudes that are publicly shared and discussed in Turkey. In short, then, in this chapter I will analyze this special edition of \textit{Pazartesi} in order to investigate the dynamics between secular and religious feminists of Turkey.

This is why I will take \textit{Pazartesi}’s special edition on religion as a departure point to first analyze it in relation to western academic feminist arguments and positions against Islamic feminism by linking it to the orientalist discourse embedded and second to trace how and by which means the rejection of Islamic feminism via orientalist positioning of western feminism is internalized by Turkish secular feminists.

This analysis will be divided in two sections: Part One is the critical discourse analysis of the journal \textit{Pazartesi} which will be thematicized under two titles, Veiling: A Right to Support and The Usual Suspects: The Orient of the Orientals. In Part Two, I will provide a brief description and a discussion on self-orientalism as a methodological tool to analyze and criticize Turkish secular feminist discourse as exemplified in the journal \textit{Pazartesi}.

\section*{4.1 \textit{Pazartesi}: A Popular Feminist Journal}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{137}I will use Pazartesi from now on.}
The Special Newspaper for Women: *Pazartesi* started its publication life in March 1995 as a “popular feminist publishing project” funded by the FSA (Frauenanstiftung) and the Green Party in Germany till September 2001.\(^{138}\) Between April 2002 and November 2003, *Pazartesi* had to shut down due to lack of financial support. Between November 2003 and early 2006 the newspaper transformed itself into a monthly journal and after 2006 it started to publish collection-volumes on specific issues, namely, love, sexuality, mothering, labor and religion.\(^{139}\) In 2007, the journal opened up a website to “share daily news;” however, the website has not been active since then.\(^{140}\)

In terms of politics, it is possible to say that there are two main or dominant streams reflected in the journal: radical and socialist feminists were predominantly active in the writing and editorial processes till 2000 when socialist feminists of the journal collective left the journal due to the internal political conflicts between socialist feminists and radical feminists of the journal. The core group of *Pazartesi* including ayşe düzkan\(^ {141}\), Gülnür Acar Savran, Filiz Koçali, Nesrin Tura during its early life was also active in other significant radical and socialist feminist journals such as *Somut* (Concrete), Feminism, and *Sosyalist Feminist Dergi Kaktüs* (Socialist Feminist Journal Cactus). They are all highly educated women with two or more languages, middle-upper class, urban-centered activists and academics. However, looking back through the

\(^{141}\) I use lower cases for ayşe düzkan’s name as she herself prefers so.
journal’s achievements, it is possible to say that it was open to women from various backgrounds in terms of politics, ethnicity, class and sexuality. The issues covered in the journal were not concerns of the women who share the same background with the core group but they were extensive and inclusive. A wide range of issues such as work and labor (domestic, home-oriented, sex), institutions and discourses (militarism, police, laws, nationalism, secularism, religion, ethnicity), violence (state, police, domestic, systemic) and movement (in Turkey, international, ethnic, religious, worker’s, student’s) and more have been discussed in the journal and not only academic terms but also by sharing daily experiences.142


The volume I am analyzing in this project, *Religion: Is Oppression of Women God’s Order or Man’s Idea?*, was published as the 113 volume of the journal in 2007. It consists of 49 articles in two parts: *Writings on Religion from Feminists* and *Pazartesi Articles*. The first part includes articles written for this volume. The content of this part is highly diversified as it touches upon topics ranging from Christian feminism to a review of Arab women’s writings. The second part, however, brings together the articles and interviews published in *Pazartesi* between 1995 and 2005. Considering the political atmosphere of this period, including the rise of radical Islamism, a semi-military coup and neoliberal Islamic government, the articles mostly raise concerns about the change of power in Turkish government and the impacts of this change on women as well as religion as a social and political phenomenon and its relations to women’s lives, especially their daily lives.

There are two main critiques to be addressed in terms of the journal’s structure: First, even though the volume claims to understand and challenge religion and religious terms (such as *sharia*, *fiqh* and *sunnah*); and assumptions about the ideology of Islam and social order (such as separation of private and public spheres, the understanding of male

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and female roles), the volume does not include any introductory or descriptive articles or any discussions of these issues from Islamists themselves. In that sense, the volume remains the space of and for laic feminists of Turkey where they share their ideas on aforementioned titles or issues. There is one interview with an Islamist woman named Sibel Eraslan. Eraslan was the most influential public figure in organizing women for the Welfare Party for 1997 elections and there are two articles from one Islamic feminist in a debate on the Welfare Party’s victory in the elections; three articles on an Islamic feminist, Konca Kuriş, who was kidnapped and murdered by Hizbullah in 1999, two of them written by secular feminists and one written as a collection of the views on Konca Kuris by secular and Islamist women\textsuperscript{144}.

The second critique is directly related to the first one to some extent and it is that from the very beginning of the volume and through all the articles it is made apparent that \textit{Pazartesi}’s secular(ist)\textsuperscript{145} position is solid regarding religion in general and Islam as a cultural and political determinant of Turkey. Without questioning the presumptions or a possible deception of ‘knowing-it-all’ about religion and without including the views that might have been useful for those presumptions and deceptions, the journal positions itself as:


\textsuperscript{145} I would like to note that I use secularist to highlight the tendency to reject religion as a whole, or certain connotations of religion; such as political Islam.
We prepared this special issue paying attention to the idea that the impact of dominant religious doctrines which condemn women to the sexist order does not change even though the political conjecture does.146

The significant point in this “introductory” sentence to the volume however stays in the rhetoric that “the dominant religious doctrines” of Islam in this case do not evoke liberation and emancipation for women and in fact that they “condemn women to the sexist order” even if the political structures are altered. Given that presupposition, it is possible to argue that the editors here start this work with the main argument that the religion of Islam, like other religions, is closed to change and is static and that, at its core, it remains sexist and thus detrimental to women’s empowerment. In addition, as it is the introductory and editorial article of the volume, this opening reveals the positioning of the journal as a collective body and as a host for “other” voices that collectively reject the compatibility of any religion with feminism and especially Islam with feminism.

Before I start a critical reading of this volume of Pazartesi, I would like to clarify one point: what I am striving to achieve here is not undermining the role and significance of Pazartesi journal in feminist publications in the history of Turkey in any way. Pazartesi carved its place into history with its advocacy for not only liberation but the emancipation of women regardless of their ethnic, religious, class and sexual identities and not by silencing or disregarding those backgrounds but by opening spaces for marginalized voices to discuss their differences. In fact, this volume I am working with

146 “Editorial” Pazartesi Vol. 113 July-August-September 2007:7
remains the only compilation to bring together religious and secular feminists of Turkey together even though those two “camps” have produced a considerable amount of literature in their own “safe” and separate spaces. That is why, as a starting point, I would like to take this opportunity to salute their enormous contribution to the feminist endeavour in Turkey and to my self-education in socialist feminism especially.

I will analyze the Religion volume of Pazartesi in two main themes. First, part one of this special edition, “Veiling: A Right to Support but Not a Freedom,” contains four articles and a debate including three short opinion pieces. This part will look into the position of Pazartesi journal on the veiling issue I described in chapter two as well as the question of Islam’s compatibility with feminism which has, I believe, an interesting resemblance with the debate on Islamic feminism in the North American academy. Part two, “Usual Suspects: The Orient of the Orient,” includes four articles: two of them can be considered as travel writings (one in Tehran, Iran and one in Kuwait) with a feminist outlook. I believe these two articles are significant in understanding the Turkish secular feminist view on the East as the oriental other to Turkey which also inevitably refers to the self-representation of Turkishness as westerner vis-a-vis the East on discursive and ideological levels. The last two, on the other hand, provide a background to the secular feminist position against Islamic feminists and the framework of othering that is used to construct a binary of us versus them between secular and religious feminists.
4.2 Veiling: A right to support but not a freedom itself

Considering the political atmosphere the articles were written in, it is neither a coincidence nor a surprise that *Pazartesi*’s writers produced pieces on their positions in the midst of the harsh arguments around the ban on veiling, as well as Islamist women’s movement for abolishing the ban. In this part of the chapter, I will describe and analyze the articles written on veiling specifically and veiled feminism generally.

In the introduction article to the Religion volume of *Pazartesi*, Islamic feminism is described as a “legitimate” feminist movement:

No one can ignore the power of an Islamic Movement with both men and women working together in harmony to advocate for women’s veiling. But there is also a dynamic that we can call the Islamic or religious women’s movement that would be wrong to consider just as a veiling movement. Today, Islamic women who were able to be a part of the intellectual life of Turkey opened a meaningful space of discussion with their critiques towards modernism and given Islamic *fiqh*.\(^{147}\)

It is unclear in this quotation how modernism and Islamic jurisprudence represent the two polar of a spectrum however it is evident that for the editors it seems like modernism and Islamic *fiqh* (or for a more accurate comparison in this context *ijtihad*; independent reasoning) cannot intertwine in any way since secularism is considered the inseparable notion of modernism. However, with a closer look to works of “religious women’s movement”, Islamic or not, it could be traced how modernism and reforms in religious readings feed each other on a theoretical level. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the editors acknowledge the movement not only as a rights and freedoms movement for

\(^{147}\)“Editorial” *Pazartesi* Vol. 113 July-August-September 2007:6
veiling but also as a theoretical challenge to the accumulated knowledge in and out of the religious context.

The editors move beyond acknowledging the movement as feminist and they frame their reasoning for legitimating Muslim women’s movement as such:

“To us, this movement earned its quality as a ‘women’s movement’ not by supporting veiling but at the rate of the struggle built against the patriarchal practices and thoughts.”

The authors make it clear that veiling in itself cannot be compatible with a feminist agenda but to question and criticize the structure and the context of the religion, including veiling, deserves “the quality” of a feminist movement. In other words, a movement cannot earn its position as “feminist” under the eyes of secular feminist by only demanding veiling because veiling in itself is contradictory to the emancipation of women. However, a movement that includes questioning this “character” of veiling in relation to emancipation and liberation can make its way into the approval of the feminist sisters.

In her article, *Is Woman’s Faith Man’s Pride?* Şebnem\(^{149}\) reviews not only Islamic feminism but religious feminisms, or feminist theologies to be precise, in general. She provides examples of feminist readings of the sacred texts in Christianity and Judaism as well as Islam by claiming that they are actually “so-called pro-woman

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\(^{148}\)“Editorial” *Pazartesi* Vol. 113 July-August-September 2007:9

\(^{149}\)Her second name is not given in the original article. Sebnem. “Kadının İnanç Erkeğin Kıvancı mı?” (Is Woman’s Faith Man’s Pride?) *Pazartesi* Vol. 113 July-August-September 2007:19-24
readings by male interpreters to answer the critiques of women”\(^\text{150}\) (who are also followers of those religions). In that sense, she admits that there have been critiques emerging from within religious circles. However, Sebnem argues that reinterpretation of the religion, or religious texts, are predominantly a male ‘business’ and those rereading in fact produce the same male hegemonic ideology with different words. In that sense, she adds, it is an extremely hard process “to struggle [against] those interpretations and to become aware of what has been internalized.”\(^\text{151}\) In other words, it is easy to fall for the male hegemonic understanding of the practices of the religion which is not deconstructed but disguised as “new” or “progressive” readings. That is why she adds that even though some readings may seem anti-sexist at first glance what they serve is to “soften” the readings and/or “to deceive” critical women into believing in a softer image of Islam.\(^\text{152}\)

Following that logic, she defines women supporting those readings as having a “false consciousness” which, in the end, “keeps feeding sexism”.\(^\text{153}\) In good Marxist fashion, or in a journal which is predominantly radical and socialist feminist, the term false consciousness serves to bring a discussion about religion to familiar terms. However, considering the broad definition of false consciousness in Marxist theory and the discussion around it\(^\text{154}\) by Marxists again, a socialist reader would have expected at least a footnote about how false consciousness as a theoretical tool has been used to undermine

\(^{150}\)Ibid:20

\(^{151}\)Ibid:21

\(^{152}\)Ibid:20

\(^{153}\)Ibid:21

\(^{154}\)“False Consciousness” refers to ideology dominating the consciousness of exploited groups and classes which at the same time justifies and perpetuates their exploitation.” “Glossary”. http://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/f/a.htm
certain activisms among Marxists and socialists. I believe this critique of Sebnem is another example of how false consciousness, which may be a useful tool for understanding certain dynamics in society, is being abused to disregard or ignore activisms that do not align closely or comfortably with socialist or Marxist theory and activism.

Moving towards Sebnem’s conclusion though, she suggests that devout women should lead the readings of the sacred texts and dismantle the patriarchal hierarchy created and recreated by the male clerics, participate in the academic, professional and intellectual spaces that have been dominated by male intellectuals and clerics in order to break the circle of false consciousness. A closer look at feminist theologies which Sebnem over generalizes even though she gives one example from Christian feminist theology (the feminist reinterpretation of adultery in the Bible) would be more adequate before criticizing the feminist theologians and religious feminists as in every religion there has been an enormous accumulation of literature which should not be ignored.

Sebnem’s last and most significant suggestion is that “religion has to be excluded from the public spaces and sent to where it belongs, meaning individual conscience, and it has to be completely taken apart from its ideological-political context.” It is possible to argue that Sebnem shies away from uttering another reference to Marxist theory which

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155 Sebnem. “Kadının Inancı Erkeğin Kıvancı mı” (Is Woman’s Faith Man’s Pride?) Pazartesi Vol. 113 July-August-September 2007:23
is directly related to the religion\textsuperscript{156}; however, she utilizes a softened version of that reference as, according to her, religion is not a opium as long as it stays buried in the consciousness, false or not. In that sense, Sebnem does not reject religion as a social structure which is expected in a Marxist reading but proposes a sub-structural reconfiguration; taking away religion from public eye into personal, private sphere.

It is also possible to read Sebnem’s conclusion as a rejection of Islamic feminism or any other religious feminism. Assuming that feminism is an “ideological-political context,” taking religion apart from that context would nullify Islamic feminism. In a framework in which religion and politics are separated, Islamic feminism can be seen as an oxymoron. In another reading though, it would also be possible to read this last suggestion of Sebnem as a contradiction with socialist feminism as even though the religion remains in the private sphere, socialist feminism’s motto “private is political” prevents any notion, religious or not, being out of political or ideological contexts.

Another article which touches upon devout women’s movement and its nature in terms of feminism is an interview with Sibel Eraslan, a well-known Islamist woman, with the title “I am a feminist of faith”.\textsuperscript{157} I would like to start with who Sibel Eraslan is, what she presents and how and why she finds her place in the journal of \textit{Pazartesi} in 1995.

Sibel Eraslan was the chairwoman of the Welfare Party’s (RP’s) Ladies Commission and one of the most influential and well-known people of the RP’s victory

\textsuperscript{156} “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.” Marx, Karl. “Introduction.” \textit{Marx’s Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right (1843)} Joseph O’Malley ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

\textsuperscript{157} Tura, Nesrin. “Ben İmanlı Feministim: Sibel Eraslan’la Röportaj (I am a feminist of faith: Interview with Sibel Eraslan)” \textit{Pazartesi} Vol. 113 July-August-September 2007:78-94
in the 1994 local elections, in which the RP won the municipalities in major metropolises including Istanbul where Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who had been the prime minister of Turkey since 2001, was elected as the mayor of Istanbul. However, after the elections, Sibel Eraslan was not given any position in the party or in the municipality despite the expectations of the party circles and the general public. Instead, people close to the newly elected party members, like relatives or friends, were appointed in the party and in the municipality. Due to this personal disappointment, as well as structural conflicts with the party, Sibel Eraslan stayed out of politics till the reformation of radical Islamism into mild Islamism led by the current Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in early 2000s. She has written nine books and has been working as a columnist in the newspapers which are predominantly Islamist or at least conservative, mostly in support of the current government. She is also well-known in the right wing of Free Palestine Movement in Turkey.

During the 1994 local elections, Sibel Eraslan worked with 18,000 women to

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158 Ibid: 78-79
159 In fact, the poetic article that she wrote in a column has almost become an anthem for that group and read by masses out loud: Move! / Pray to Allah! / Send Qunut, Send Fetih, Send Salavat [names of prayings] / Get in motion! Go out! / Protest on the streets! / Write a letter! Read a poem! Shout a slogan! / Spare a slice of bread for Palestine! / Carry a sign! Collect signatures! / Collect medicine! Collect aid! / Crowd in front of the doors! / Draw a picture! / Distribute a manifesto! / Write on the walls! / Knock on the doors! Gather your friends! / Take your kids, and today is Friday, go out! / Get organized! Get organized and get organized! / Do not ever look back, at the night and at the betrayal! Do not care! Recover and get organized! Get organized like the birds the prophet Abraham put on four mountain tops followed his order: “get together!” and collected their pieces together and started flying again...Raise and stand up like the lives that Jesus the prophet ordered to do so by uttering Bismillah!...His God never left Muhammad the prophet alone! Don’t be afraid and Walk! Eraslan Sibel. Toparlan (1) Intifada (Get Organized (1) Intifada) Star: 02.01.2009 Istanbul.
mobilize other women and include them in the election race for the Welfare Party. She recalls that in a month they met 200,000 women face to face.\textsuperscript{160} This incredible work, as mentioned in the second chapter, and is considered the most significant key for understanding the victory of the Welfare Party in 1994. In the interview at hand, she mentions her disappointments after the elections, her “new life at home”\textsuperscript{161}, her aspirations and more. However, for this analysis, I will not touch upon what Sibel Eraslan had to say but how the interviewer, Nesrin Tura, approached Sibel Eraslan as a “feminist of faith” in her introduction and conclusion of the interview.

First of all, in the introduction, Sibel Eraslan’s conflict with the party is highlighted in various ways while her work in organizing and mobilizing women is mentioned in a sentence which starts with “it’s rumoured”\textsuperscript{162}. However, Eraslan herself mentions that work by citing numbers and figures in the interview. Frankly, in Turkish feminist history that kind of a mobilization and organization in terms of numbers has not been achieved for a really long time. Sibel Eraslan, as the woman behind that work, could have been interviewed in order to share her experiences in activism if Nesrin Tura’s focus was the activism. However, Tura argues “No doubt Sibel Eraslan is a special woman. [But] for sure, it is not possible to say this for all women of the Welfare Party.”\textsuperscript{163} In that sense, according to Tura, the quantity of the movement disappears in the “quality” of the women. In the end, Tura argues, the women who got organized are not that special. I will

\textsuperscript{160} Tura, Nesrin. “Ben Imanlı Feministim: Sibel Eraslan’la Röportaj (I am a feminist of faith: Interview with Sibel Eraslan)” Pazartesi Vol. 113 July-August-September 2007:84
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid:79
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid:78
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid:79
return to this issue of the “quality” of the Islamic feminist movement according to secular feminists later.

Another point is how Tura positions herself in relation to Eraslan:

We did not discuss Islam or the program of the Welfare Party with her [Sibel Eraslan]. It is not possible to convince each other (at least in one day). We tried to understand her. It will be easier to discuss if we start understanding each other.

The assumption of the differences being too deep to reach each other and the positions being so static is over emphasized in this interview. Difference is seen in this opening as extraordinary, unchanging, and impossible to overcome and this is further explained in the conclusion:

Political Islam is more than faith and an issue between God and its creature, it has a social and political project: this is a project which bases the sexual and social roles on the difference coming from the creation and which includes the organization of both private and public spaces in accordance with the religious principals and in the frame of Sharia view. And this is exactly why we think that political Islam involves a very serious obstacle and danger in terms of the projects of women’s liberation and emancipation. We believe that even though they are quite different from one another, just like Kemalism, political Islam too constitutes an impediment to question the separation between public and private spaces and this is the very obstacle before women in political Islamic movement to question sexism fully and consistently.

Although Tura does not disregard this movement in general, she generalizes the ways of a feminist movement, the tools and paths of liberation and emancipation as “projects”. I believe it is important to note that Tura’s link to Kemalism as another

\[164\] Ibid: 79
\[165\] Ibid: 92
ideology to define public and private spheres for women is uncommon, but not new in the writings of secular feminists and Islamic feminists alike. So to say, as discussed in the second chapter, state feminism, coined by Deniz Kandiyoti and Sirin Tekeli to criticize Kemalism’s relation to women, is based on the argument that Kemalist practice of defining and fixing the public and the private as two distinct spaces where the state is responsible for the public while the private sphere is left to the family head’s control, which makes the private a male dominion. Moreover, considering the veiling ban which prohibits women wearing veil in the public premises, this Kemalist understanding of the separation of public and private spheres directly affects the veiling issue in Turkey which in turn makes this separation and the Kemalist ideology creating it the core of Islamist critiques. However, what Tura accomplishes in her article is to bridge secular and Islamic critiques to Kemalist view on public-private dichotomy, which are presumed as two polar of a spectrum. Moreover, Tura considers Sibel Eraslan’s conflict with her party, which results in her staying out of politics and staying at home, and she concludes by asserting Sibel Eraslan’s position as a special woman. In other words, Sibel Eraslan’s experience becomes a unique case, an exception, an unusual example for the Islamic feminists which is threatened and prevented by an ideology called political Islam.

Beyond the lack of a definition of political Islam itself, it is implied that “the religious

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principals” and “the sharia view”, as if there is only one, prevent women from questioning sexism in terms of the separation of public and private spheres.

The next article, *Refahyol Debate Continues: Whose Tribune is Pazartesi?*, is written by a collective of ten Kemalist feminists, namely, Songul Cetin, Nazire Ertürk, Suat Çoban, Serap Arpaslan, Nur Gürsu, Petek Bayramoğlu, LeylaYıldız, Hanife Aliefendioğlu and EmineAzboz, as a harsh critique towards a short opinion piece regarding the Refahyol government written by Ayşe Doğu, a known Islamic feminist and appear in a previous volume of *Pazartesi*. As it is evident in the title, the collective questions and criticizes *Pazartesi* journal and its editorial board for presenting the opinion of Ayşe Doğu, who is in the collective’s words, “the spokesperson of the tyranny [in the Middle East],” and makes their position against her as they consider her the embodiment of what they reject in their Kemalist fashion. I will touch upon the reasoning of their critiques more in the following part but it is also worth mentioning here how they see *Pazartesi* journal and what it stands for in the eyes of collective. They argue that *Pazartesi* cannot be “so open to their [Islamists’] disgusting efforts.” by letting them publish an article on where and how feminism relates to Islamist politics and Islamic women’s movement. Because, according to this Kemalist feminist collective, Islamists are not only ignorant of the gains of the modernization processes of Turkey and their feminists but they are a threat to those gains:

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167 Cetin, Songül *et al.*, “Refahyol Tartışması Sürüyor: PazartesiPazartesi Pazartesi Neyin Kürsüsi?” (Refahyol debate continues: whose tribe is Pazartesi?) *Pazartesi* Vol. 113 July-August-September 2007:105-109. From now on, the authors of this article will be referred as the collective.
168 Ibid: 105
169 Ibid: 109
Our grandmothers [feminists of late Ottoman and early republican era] (...) pioneered a noble and honourable fight towards laic family, laic state, liberation and freedom. Their fights and gains were not limited to this land; they inspired women in other countries who were intended to be suffocated by the sharia laws. Their enthusiasm, their revolutionary vibration, very valuable endeavour, labour and works they built a path of light to the women of the laic republic. 170

Two main points are worth mentioning here: First, as in Shahrazad Mojab’s critique of Iranian Islamic feminists explained in detail in the second chapter which considers Islamic feminism as an obstacle before the secularization of Iran, here for this collective too Secularism, or in Turkish case laicism, is considered as one of the ultimate virtues of a state as well as an essential system for feminist gains. The positive correlation between “laic family, laic state liberation, and freedom” as uttered in this quotation is clear and close to discussion in the case of Kemalist feminism. Keeping in mind the state feminism I discussed in the second chapter, for Kemalist feminists, with the establishment of the laic state and its re-organization of public and private spheres which is highlighted in this quotation, the laic family is reckoned as a quintessential gain for all women. It is important to note that what is criticized or problematic in terms of feminist gains in this quotation is not (modern) family per se as an oppressive institution. Because in the eyes of the collective by making the family secular, the republican reforms achieved what can ever be achieved by feminists in terms of women’s position in family and in society. I will come back to this discussion in the following part.

170Ibid:106
I would also like to highlight the term “a path of light” [ışıkta yol, in the original text]. Considering the Kemalist modernization project as westernization in which enlightenment ideals are valued at the utmost level, in Kemalist writings, feminist or not, words such as light, dawn, daylight, illumination and ignition are commonly used to describe the reforms and revolutions, Kemal Atatürk himself or “the new state”.

Another point in this quotation is the emphasis on “other countries”: without naming any but by giving the so-called “characteristics” of these countries; i.e. “sharia law” and “women’s suffocation,” the average reader is expected to picture those countries. In the following quotation, the collective gives another “hint” to the reader:

In the process of feminist rebellion and gains, they became our national and international honours. They rejected political Islamization and the ideology of desert which declare women as slaves and men as masters. Because Islam could not comply with feminism, it could not make up with women’s rights and freedoms.(emphasis added)\(^{171}\)

It is possible to claim that the symbolic value of desert and what it is associated with (the Middle East, ‘Arab world’, Iran, sharia, etc.) is the symbiosis of the symbolic value of the light in Kemalist writing. In other words, an enlightened Turkishness cannot exist without its counterpart, its other which in this quotation is the ideology of desert, backwardness, oppression of women. This phrase also reveals the idea that “the evil” Islam is imported from the desert, Arabs and Iranians, along with inherited violence against women at the hands of Islamists of Turkey who do not appreciate the feminist history of gains and rejections but look to a religious feminism which cannot exist:“Because feminism could

\(^{171}\)Ibid:106
not comply with Islam”\textsuperscript{172}. Then, Kemalist feminist women consider Islam as an essentially misogynist religion which brings them closer to the debate on Islamic feminism in the North American academia which also rejects the relevance of Islamic feminism to the feminist movement in general on the basis that a movement bringing together feminism and the religion of Islam is an oxymoron.

However, for the collective, it does not stop when they describe what “our feminist past” is or what should not be considered feminist but they also justify their position by another argument about Islam itself:

Feminism rejects every backwardist\textsuperscript{173} stream and ideology. Islam which is constructed with the motives of male violence and which takes this construction as a guidance to its every practice builds (itself) over women’s rights and freedoms. \textsuperscript{174}

There are similarities in points of view here between this quotation and the works of Moghissi, Mojab and Shahidian regarding feminism’s character and Islam’s so-called nature. One is that Islam is violent and backward in nature and second is that feminism (western feminism precisely) is universal and progressive in nature. In the following article, \textit{Refahyol Debate Continues: ‘We Cannot Surrender to the “Modernization”’ Discourse}, Gülnur Savran and Nesrin Tura\textsuperscript{175} provide an answer to these arguments to some extent. First they criticize the devotion of Kemalist feminists to laicite or modernity in general:

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid:107
\textsuperscript{173} In Turkish, gerici. Supporting, demanding what is backward.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid p:106
\textsuperscript{175} SavranGünnur, Tura Nesrin. “Refahyol TartışmasıSürüyor: ÇağdaşlaşlaşmaSöylemineTeslimOlamayız.” (Refahyol debate continues: we cannot surrender to the “modernization” discourse) \textit{Pazartesi} Vol. 113 July-August-September 2007: 109-112
... the term laic family reveals a lot: ... laic does not mean “modern” or “equal”. That’s why nothing changes when you add laic in front of the family which is the castle of sexist oppression, male violence, social exclusion and slave labour considering women.... In fact feminism starts with bringing the experiences regarding how oppressive the modern institutions are with the disguise of being so egalitarian [to the surface of] consciousness.  

What Savran and Tura refer to in this critique is state feminism where the legal and social reforms of a male state are considered the ultimate achievements for a feminist movement. As Tekeli argues, it is this assumption that feminist movement in Turkey could not achieve much in terms of getting organized from the early republican period to the 1980 military coup because they believed that there was nothing left to fight for after the republican reforms. Feminist women of Turkey, mostly secular, had to deconstruct what is internalized first in terms of modernity, modern state, nation-state, secularism or Kemalist state ideology during the 1980s in order to create an independent feminist voice in Turkey.  

Savran and Tura’s second critique refers to the assumption of universal feminism:

Another extension of women’s solidarity is not to be in a position to deceive yourself that you are emancipated and not belittle any women for their differences.  

This argument, in relation to the first one, of Savran and Tura can be utilized to argue against the opposition of Islamic feminism. That is, as I argued in the second chapter,

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176 Ibid:110  
178 Ibid:111
disregarding, or belittling a feminist movement which seeks its own path through emancipation framed in its own terms cannot be a feminist critique as, feminism, from what I understand, cannot build a discourse, theory or movement claiming it is the only, absolute, universal path to be followed by all women regardless of their race, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexuality and more unless it accepts being oxymoronic itself let alone colonialist, orientalist and hegemonic. Moreover, the feminist history, especially in the western academia, presents patriarchy as a system of oppression on its own and the feminist movements as an independent system of liberation and emancipation. As Mohanty argues, “To define feminism purely in gendered terms assumes that our consciousness of being “women” has nothing to do with race, class, nation or sexuality, just with gender.”.179 In that sense, critical feminism as a social theory and as a movement cannot disregard the interlocking points of the systems of oppression such as nationalism, racism, classism and (hetero) sexism in order to question the relevance or usefulness of endeavours for liberation, emancipation or critiques to those systems. In short, then, the rejection of Islamic feminism, in Turkish feminist movement as well as in North American academia falls short not only in their critiques to Islamic feminists but from the very beginning of their expectations and purposes in universalized, homogenous western feminism.

The articles I analyzed so far focus on Islamic feminism, or veiled feminism as commonly used in Turkey, as movement and the arguments on why and how Islamic feminism is considered an oxymoron. The following articles, on the other hand, even though they are related to the previous ones in terms of mindset, are about veiling and focus on the questions of veiling as a right and veiling as freedom.

The first quotation is from the interview of Nesrin Tura with Sibel Eraslan that I analyzed earlier. In the concluding part of the interview, Tura defines how “they” presumably the Pazartesi journal as a collective, regard veiling:

> We are against forcing women to veil as much as to unveil. Even though the relation of veiling to woman’s reclaiming her body is contradictory, we believe that the right to veil and the right to unveil are the one and the same right.\(^{180}\)

While restating her point regarding the similarities of Kemalist and Islamist/Islamic ideologies in of the public and private spheres, she also discusses the issue of veiling. In other words, she makes the journal’s (their) stance clear in that they are against Kemalist ideology which in a way forced women to unveil as much as Islamist ideology which, presumably, forces women to veil. Yet, it is also clear that they are against veiling in terms of body politics in that they consider veiling not as a freedom in terms of the relation of women to their bodies but as a right which they collectively support.

\(^{180}\)Tura, Nesrin. “Ben İmanlı Feministim: Sibel Eraslan’la Röportaj (I am a feminist of faith: Interview with Sibel Eraslan)” Pazartesi Vol. 113 July-August-September 2007:93
Another article in the journal edition about veiling is titled *Veiling Debate is in the Parliament: is it the Veiling Banned or Women?*\(^{181}\) and is written by ayşe düzkan. According to düzkan, besides the politics of veiling or banning it, a ban on veiling serves as another platform where women are discriminated as:

> Men who are also Muslims enter the spaces from which we exclude Muslim veiled women. ...There is not much to identify them other than their beards which they don’t grow all the time. But for women, this is not the case. They carry their faith not only in their hearts but on top of their heads.\(^{182}\)

In that sense, düzkan raises the issue of visibility of the veiling which makes Muslim women *visible* and considering political atmosphere; this visibility makes veiled Muslim women more vulnerable than Muslim men to discrimination. She also adds that a ban on veiling is considered a tool to fight political Islam; however. At the end of the day, it is women of political Islam who suffer that fight:

> ... it is not an answer to the political Islam rising [lately] identify and exclude Muslim women because when a Muslim woman is excluded, it doesn’t mean that Muslims are left out of another door but that a woman is closed down at home. And every woman who was prevented from a job or an occupation because of her veil has every right to be angry. I don’t want to be the person that anger is addressed to. That’s why I am against the veiling ban.”\(^{183}\)

This argument reflects a position I find compelling because it represents a powerful position against the oppression of women through the banning of the veil; I would like to

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\(^{181}\) düzkan, ayşe. “Türban Tartışması Mecliste, Yasaklanan Örtü mü, Kadınlar mı?” (Veiling debate is in the parliament: is it the veiling banned or women?) *Pazartesi* Vol. 113 July-August-September 2007:123-127

\(^{182}\) Ibid:124

\(^{183}\) Ibid:16

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further it with a concrete example regarding those closed “doors” düzkan mentions. Turkish universities are the battlefields where the effects of the ban can be felt in the most visible and conflicting ways. In front of the gates of most Turkish universities, veiled Muslim women are required to unveil or cover their veil with a wig or a hat if they want to enter the university. However, there is no requirement for men as their political identity is not visible to the gatekeepers of the universities. Besides, Muslim men demanding to attend Friday prayer, which is religiously required only for men but open to women too are mostly tolerated even if the prayer time is in conflict with their class or exam hours. Muslim men’s demands for their praying are mostly considered as either religious tolerance or respect for the freedom of religious practices. On the other hand, women’s demand to wear veil as the requirement and an expression of their religious belief are considered as militancy for their politics. And their politics are considered as radical especially as they insist to keep wearing their veil. Thus, Muslim women are marked and punished as both veiled and radical while Muslim men are spared from discrimination.

The journal of Pazartesi reflects two main arguments: one is that veiling is a right to support but cannot be a way of emancipation and liberation for women. This argument is accepted by almost all writers in this volume and presented as the position of the journal. The other argument is regarding the question of whether the veiled women’s movement can be considered a feminist movement or not. Although the discourse and justifications differ from one another dramatically as in Kemalist collective’s article and
Savran and Tura’s response, they more or less agree that Islam itself cannot be compatible with feminism. In the following part, in order to shed light on this agreement of incompatibility of Islam with feminism, I will look into the place and significance of Islam in Turkish Secular feminist mindsets.

4.3 Usual Suspects: The Orient of the Orientals

The religion volume of Pazartesi journal I analyze in this chapter includes a number of short articles regarding “other countries” such as Afghanistan, Iran, Kuwait, Algeria and Morocco in the framework of women living under Sharia law, the women’s movements in those countries (such as The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan RAWA in Afghanistan) and Arab women’s writing in relation to barbaric state hegemonies. In the first part of this section, I will focus on two “travel writings” in the volume as I believe observations made by feminists in Kuwait and Iran reveal a lot about Turkish attitudes towards the eastern countries of Turkey. In the second part; however, I will turn my focus on the gaze of secular feminists on Islamist women and men alike in order to highlight the correlation between the two groups as they are seen in domestic and in international spheres.

In the article by Tulin Bozkurt in this volume entitled, “Exploitation of the Religion and Arab Women,”184 the writer shares her observations during her stay in

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Kuwait. However, those observations are not only about Kuwait as she encountered “many female university students from different Arab countries” on her trip.\(^{185}\) That’s why, we as readers assume that we are given a lens to the “Arab world” to see “the impositions on daily life and on women’s lives really”\(^{186}\) by “the Arab men who exploit to the maximum extent the parts of our religion that are complicated and open to discussion.”\(^{187}\) Then, unlike Sebnem’s article discussed in the previous section, for Bozkurt what is problematic in “our religion” is not the religion per se, or its practices and interpretations, but the Arab men who make the religion exploitative and oppressive for women.

Throughout the article, the reader travels through darkness as the writer mainly lists the bans, restrictions, censorships in the dormitory she was staying at in Kuwait, and in accordance with her introduction, in the Arab world in general. She takes those restrictions and punishments out of context and utilizes them as headlines to ridicule the environment she was in. The restrictions such as “closing time” of the dormitories for the girls or censoring sexuality in the movies shown in common entertainment areas are showcased as examples of the inherently oppressive culture in Kuwait as an Arab country. However, the writer could have extended her analysis to include Turkey where those restrictions are utilized in state-owned university dormitories and private-owned dormitories outside of the university campuses alike. This type of ethnocentric division in

\(^{185}\) Ibid:15
\(^{186}\) Ibid:15
\(^{187}\) Ibid:15
which the Turkish case is taken apart from the other countries as if they are different (read: better) is not limited to the restrictions in Bozkurt’s article. Her position as a visiting student from Turkey is implied as a position of being not only different and but also superior in terms of freedoms, which is apparent in the following quotation:

I have even heard the critiques from some Arab friends who watched Turkish TV channels previously about how immoral our tv channels are.188 (emphasis added)

In this quotation, Bozkurt underlines who we are not by explaining what those TV channels had to offer but by underlining how unbelievable the critiques themselves are especially coming from “Arab friends.” Arab friends of hers in this quotation represent the Arab idea of the Turkish feminist mind that implies irrationality and inferiority of Arabs to Turkish progressive daily life vis-a-vis culturally imbedded obsession to morality and immorality (ahlak, namus) of the Arab countries. In short, the critique of Turkish TV channels by those Arabs are utilized as tools to prove the superiority of us in Turkey in terms of our minds and positioning against an irrational mindset for morality, reflected in curfews and censorship in Kuwait. In a similar vein, Bozkurt extends her “representation” of Turks versus Arabs through the issue of polygamy and secularism:

One of the contradictions was that most of the Arab women I talked with condemned the laic system’s ban on polygamy in Turkey by seeming to be in favour of polygamy as they claim it has a place in our religion. Yet they refuse it (polygamous relationship) when it comes to their husbands and they even

188Ibid:16
stated that they would kill their husbands (if they demanded polygamous relationship).\textsuperscript{189}

In this quotation, too, Arab women’s critiques are represented as signs of 	extit{being better} as women of Turkey. For Bozkurt it seems like as much as Arab friends criticize 	extit{our system} we can be sure of our system since at the end Arabs are inherently culturally backwards in terms of matters of women’s positions in society.

It is not a coincidence or an unconscious mistake that Bozkurt 	extit{forgets} to mention Turkish husbands, or brothers or fathers, who actually kill their wives, mothers or sisters on the basis of morality and /or honour in a “laic system”. In fact, as discussed earlier, the laic system, or westernized modernity of Turkey itself does not 	extit{rescue} women from male violence. In that sense, her observations are not meant to open a discussion in solidarity with women experiencing polygamy in Turkey and elsewhere, to bring together those experiences to build a possible international movement with Turkish and Arab women. Yet, Bozkurt intends to mark her position as a Turkish woman coming from a secular system against Arab women’s position to show the differences that are as deep as the west and the east: the occident and the orient. And, in doing so, she reaffirms the superiority of the secular system of morality and order for society as whole but Turkish women in particular.

My interest in this article does not stem from the restrictions and bans which are common in Turkey and in Kuwait and which are ridiculous indeed not only in Kuwait

\textsuperscript{189}Ibid:16
but in Turkey too; rather, it stems from the resemblance of Bozkurt’s article with the well-known British and German Orientalists of 18th century:

   Even if the people seemed to agree with the restrictions, I observed that the real situation was so different than that and in practice there were lots of contradictions. Not only in the university but in the whole country to consume alcohol and extra-marital sexual intercourse were prohibited. Yet, alcoholism, drug usage and homosexuality were so common. Regardless of those restrictions, inter-marriage sex was considered highly important. Sexy lingerie that is hard to find in Turkey or even in Europe were sold everywhere and with a reasonable price.\textsuperscript{190}

The fascination of western orientalists with, for example, opium and alcohol usage in the Ottoman coffee houses during the 18th and early 19th century resonates in this quotation in a remarkable way. Alcohol, drugs and homosexuality are highlighted as perversions of a close-minded, backward society which are simultaneously used to condemn Turkish society as a whole and voyeuristically detailed to exoticize and eroticize that society and its titillating sins. It is not clear in the quotation how the writer became sure of the usage of sexy lingerie in the private lives of those Arab friends, but the point of view of the author to the spectrum of geographies anchored in lingerie sale represents a spectrum of inferiority (the Arab land) and superiority (Europe) and where Turkey stands like a bridge standing between the west and the east. I will come back to the positioning of Turkish self-representation in orientalism in the following part of this chapter.

   In the following quotation, Bozkurt’s voyeurism reaches its peak point:

\textsuperscript{190}Ibid:17
It was really normal and common that those without veil (veiling was not obligatory) dye their hair blonde, wear blue contact lenses, have aesthetic surgeries and use skin-whitening creams that were sold highly in the supermarkets. It was an interesting spectacle to see women who were chic and (even if they were veiled) wearing tight clothes with over makeup and along with them men with dishdasha (white traditional clothes worn by Arab men). 191

One could expect a critical view from an author who is really interested in body politics and sexuality like Bozkurt; however, in this quotation that type of critique is left untouched. How the ideology of whiteness is promoted and has in fact succeeded in controlling, shaping, and disciplining Middle Eastern and South Asian women’s bodies and lives is also not discussed by the author. Instead, Bozkurt chooses to highlight the spectacle of the contradiction and the gap that is impossible to fill in between eastern and western bodies, presumably represented as traditional (Arab, Middle Eastern, brown) men in their out-dated garments and modern-looking, western-like (white, blue-eyed, small-nosed, chic) women.

In another “encounter with the other” article, entitled Being a Feminist Visitor in Tehran192, Handan Koç shares her observations and experiences in Tehran, which she visited as a Turkish feminist for a feminist conference. Before starting the analysis, it is worth mentioning that Iran after the 1979 revolution of Khomeini became the usual suspect of discussions on radical Islamism in Turkey. Especially during the late 90s when radical Islamism succeeded in the elections and formed a government with majority, the

191Ibid:17

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title “Will Turkey be Iran?” was utilized in the media over and over again to show the threat of Islamism. In that sense, it is possible to argue that Iran has a special meaning in secular minds, as I will demonstrate in Koç’s case. In her article, Koç follows a similar path and shares Bozkurt’s tone in the previous article. In other words, she falls into the trap of orientalism as she describes the oppression faced by Iranian women without giving any context by implying it is inevitably embedded in the culture of Iran after the Islamic revolution of 1979. Unlike Bozkurt though, she links Iranian feminist experiences in relation to the state to Turkish feminist cases. For example, she underlines the similarities between the President Ahmedinejad’s and Prime Minister Erdoğan’s attitudes towards the traditional roles of women in the family and how those roles are promoted by government channels such as ministries of women and family. In that sense, unlike Bozkurt, Koç at least traces ways of alliances with Iranian feminists in the fight of state patriarchy, or patriarchal states. However, her tools for that alliance create even more racist and orientalist language than the Bozkurt’s article.

The subsection where she describes the discussions on Qur’anic reinterpretation for a more feminist or at least gender-neutral reading in the locality of Iran is titled “the language of bigotry”\textsuperscript{193}: Arabic\textsuperscript{*\textsuperscript{194}. She mentions that in the conference some prayers are said in Arabic and adds as Turkish secular feminists they could not understand which verse it was or what it was about so they asked an Iranian sitting next to them just to learn

\textsuperscript{193}I would like to note that in the original text the author uses the word taassub which, ironically, has an arabic root in terms of etimology that can be translated in to english as either fanaticism or bigotry. I choose bigotry here due to the context in which this word is commonly used in daily language and the tone of the author in the rest of the article.

\textsuperscript{194}Ibid:48
that they did not know Arabic, either. Koç concludes this anecdote by claiming that in both countries, Turkey and Iran; the radical Islamists use Arabic in their daily languages as a marker even though their first languages are Turkish or Farsi.

Taadüt-ü Zevcat [polygamy], mehir [reimbursement money paid to women in the event of a divorce], irs [heredity, inheritance] are also Arabic words in the tongues of Islamists in Turkey. The only difference is that while ours praise these words; Iranian devout women do not find the predominant interpretations of Islamic civil law fair and just. \(^{195}\)

The emphasis here is not clear as she actually underlines those words not because of their context in relation to women’s rights (even though she explains their harms to women in the following sentences in the original article by acknowledging Iranian devout women themselves are against them) but because they are Arabic words. The flow of logic in this article is really significant as the writer links Arabic directly with bigotry and oppression of women. While she tries to understand the case of Iranian women in relation to Turkish women and build an alliance, she creates the common *enemy* as the Arabic language and everything coming with that language package: oppression of women, obstacles for women’s rights. In other words, while she succeeds in dismantling the presumptions about the usual suspect of Iran, the author offers another usual suspect or enemy that could be internalized and feared by both Iranian and Turkish feminists, secular and religious alike.

\(^{195}\) Ibid:49
In my opinion, racist assumptions towards Arabs and Arabic and orientalist views of the countries to the East of Turkey and in relation to them, the rejection of Islamic feminism cannot be explained as individual or isolated cases. In fact, as evident in the following excerpt from ayşe düzkan’s article the rejection of Islamic feminism signifies more than a theoretical debate on diverse feminisms as the distinction between us the secular feminists and them religious women stems from the secular feminist alignment against Islam:

Let’s look at this (issue) from our viewpoint for a moment: on this land, everyone who has a general freedom demand has an issue with Muslimhood. This issue is even bigger for those who advocate for women’s liberation and emancipation. Even though some Muslims claim otherwise, what we see and know as Islam is that women’s lives are restricted [in Islam] and I think this image is fairly realistic. In that sense, it is not hard to grasp why every egalitarian startles when they see a veiled woman, hence a Muslim.

In this excerpt, “a veiled woman, hence a Muslim,” signifies further connotations and associations such as impossibility of a movement which seeks freedom from within the religion itself, hence Muslim women as victims of that religion and in need of rescue by the secular feminists of Turkey. Even though Pazartesi journal presents an example here, the vigilant if not violent attitude towards the other of secular feminists of Turkey goes deeper than the quotations analyzed in this part of the chapter. This is why, in the following part of this chapter, I will touch upon the cognition of Turkish secular

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197 Ibid:242
feminism by explaining the process of construction of the various untold associations and connotations of Islam, the East and the Orient in relation to secular and religious feminisms in Turkey.

4.4 Orientalism of the Orientals

In an age of Western-dominated modernity, every nation creates its own Orient.\textsuperscript{198}

Edward Said’s work \textit{Orientalism}\textsuperscript{199} is considered one of the most influential breakthroughs in critical post-colonial studies. In his work, Said problematizes the binary between the west and the east or the occident and the orient as an imperialist epistemology which is based on the presumption that two bodies of knowledge, history and culture, called the orient and the occident, are ontologically antithetical to each other and mutually exclusive in self-representation. He concludes that this binary is in fact essentialist in its nature and hegemonic in its existence since the west represents itself as superior to the non-west historically, culturally and intellectually by creating, shaping and in the end ruling over the orient systemically and discursively.

Self-orientalism as a methodological tool to understand and analyze historicity and modernity in the disciplines of cultural studies and history; and specifically, but not limited to, in Asian and/or Chinese studies with the scopes of tourism, architecture and

\textsuperscript{198} Makdissi, Ussama. “Ottoman Orientalism” \textit{American Historical Review}, 107 (3) (Jun 2002) : 768-796
media challenges Said’s work as it describes orientalism as a dualistic if not binary system in which the orient finds almost no space in the construction of or resistance to that system. Self-orientalism, in that sense, brings the orient into the process of the construction of the hegemonic power dynamics between the west and the east.

It is possible to claim that there are two main arguments among the scholars working on self-orientalism. The first argument is coined by Arif Dirlik, a well-known scholar in history and Asian Studies. According to Dirlik, Western orientalism directly affected the self-representation and self-inclination of Eastern cultures and societies through not only western perception of the east but also extreme internalization of that perception by the Asian\textsuperscript{200}. In turn, western perception may become almost inseparable from or unnoticeable in Asian self-description.

On the contrary, the very transformation of power may have culminated in the reification of orientalism at the level of a global ideology. Orientalism, which earlier articulated a distancing of Asian societies from the Euro-American, now appears in the articulation of differences within a global modernity as Asian societies emerge as dynamic participants in a global capitalism. In this contemporary guise, orientalism provides the site for contention between the conflicting ideological loyalties of elite that is no longer easily identifiable as Eastern or Western, Chinese or non-Chinese.\textsuperscript{201}

In that sense, according to Dirlik, self-orientalism as a third place in between the binary of the west and the east may not offer a momentum of resistance or a difference. According to Dirlik, self-orientalism is utilized as “cultural nationalisms” to be able to

\textsuperscript{200} I use the Asian to follow Dirlik’s work as he mostly refers to the East or the Orient as the Asian in his works.

exist as a part of global capitalism. In other words, non-western cultures, or the Asian cultures, adopt a nationalism which highlights the pleasurable parts of the culture to the western eyes in order to accommodate and survive the global capitalist relations.

Anchored in this argument of Dirlik, Grace Yan and Carla Almeida Santos in their article, ‘China Forever’:Tourism Discourse and Self-Orientalism take Dirlik’s understanding of self-orientalism as a departure point and question the Chinese tourism video called China Forever in this framework. According to Yan and Santos, the images of Western orientalism for China, such as “a pond with bright green water; lily leaves fill the pond and the women play the Chinese pipa” are reproduced by the China National Tourism Administration in order to “assist China in achieving an overall brand image of a healthy, safe and environmentally friendly destination” or in other words to increase the marketability of China as a touristic destination for westerners. This kind of a cultural nationalism or self-orientalism can be traced in Turkey, the field of this project, too such as especially in tourism highlighting whirling dervishes to mystify Anatolia or belly dancers to eroticize the Ottoman past which Potuoglu-Cook calls “neo-ottomania”.

According to Oyku Potuoglu-Cook, Turkey, or Istanbul to be precise, has undergone gentrification projects, both in architectural and/or urban and social terms; which served the “neo-ottomania” project which

203 Ibid: 310
played on familiar 19th-century Orientalist fantasies: the architectural style faithfully reflects European travelogues at the turn of the 20th century, and the opulent interior decor evokes a timeless Ottoman glamour. 204

This is especially in Istanbul, the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, through historic venues such as imperial palaces and historical buildings and arts such as culinary and belly dancing (which Potuoglu-Cook calls “performative neo-ottomania”), exotic and erotic Ottoman empire is marketed to the western tourists’ orientalist fantasies. Taking Dirlik’s argument as a departure point, Turkey, too, carves its way to the global capitalism through tourism by meeting the western expectations in an oriental city in terms of history, space and performance.

With Dirlik’s framework of self-orientalism in mind, it is possible to further those examples of self-orientalism in relation to representation in tourism. However, for this project I’d like to focus on the second approach of self-orientalism: the orient’s desire to be “modern” as the secular(ist) understanding of Islam especially in the realm of feminism in Turkey as discussed earlier in this chapter lean its critiques of Islamic feminism on the presumption that modernism is intrinsic to progress. Turkey’s modernization project during the nation-state building process based itself on this presumption.

Partha Chattarjee, an influential scholar of postcolonial theory, questions this presumption in his book “Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: a Derivative Discourse?”. He writes,

The problem of bourgeois-rationalist conception of knowledge, established in the post-Enlightenment period of European intellectual history, as the moral and epistemic foundation for a supposedly universal framework of thought which perpetuates, in a real and not merely a metaphorical sense, a colonial domination.  

In this framework where nationalism is constructed in the premises of the Enlightenment thought and values and perpetuate itself as a universal, non-western nationalisms find themselves in the contradictory position to the modernity as progress. While they consider and aspire to modernization as progression to attain Enlightenment values, they also reclaim an authentic, original cultural and national identity. The contradiction of modernization without subjugation to Western hegemony, Chattarjee warns, does not imply the desire to duplicate colonialismand/or orientalist values. Rather, he argues, “nationalist thought is selective about what it takes from the West” in order to assert its difference, originality, and authenticity in comparison to the West. Chattarjee’s definition of the contradictions in the processes of nation building and modernization is exemplified in the work of Ussama Makdisi, entitled “Ottoman Orientalism.” Makdisi defines Ottoman Orientalism as

A complex of Ottoman attitudes produced by a nineteenth-century age of Ottoman reform that implicitly and explicitly acknowledged the West to be the home of progress and the East, writ large, to be a present theatre of backwardness.

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206 Ibid:41
208 Ibid:769
In that sense, the Ottoman reform movement of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, or Young Turks movement studied in the second chapter, accepted western values of Enlightenment as the prerequisite of reform and progress.

Following the path of Chattarjee, Makdisi argues, “Ottomans recognized and responded to the power of Western orientalism by embracing the latter’s underlying logic of time and progress, while resisting its political and colonialist implications.” The resistance to those implications, according to Makdisi, is accomplished through the oriental Ottomans creating their own orientals in the empire.

through efforts to study, discipline, and improve imperial subjects, Ottoman reform created a notion of the pre-modern *within* the empire in a manner akin to the way European colonial administrators represented their colonial subjects … Ottoman reform distinguished between a degraded Oriental self embodied in the unreformed pre-modern subjects and landscape of the empire and the Muslim modernized self represented largely (but not exclusively) by an Ottoman Turkish elite who ruled the late Ottoman Empire.²⁰⁰ (emphasis added)

While all subjects, Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Greeks, Bulgarians, Muslim and non-Muslims, were expected to actively take part in the process of nation building by first accepting being an Ottoman as their nationality and perpetuate the elites’ reform movement in their own territories, the elite marked certain ethnicities (specifically Arabs) to connect to the center of the imperial rule with more essential and useful methods (such as railroads and telegraphs) because those groups were considered the most “backward

²⁰⁰Ibid:769
²¹⁰Ibid:769
and not-yet-Ottoman, hindrances to as well as objects of imperial reform.” Makdisi argues, reconnecting with the Arab provinces has reflected the Ottoman Orientalism during the reform movement: “as the provinces were brought ever closer into the reformist imperial gaze, a general discourse of modernizing imperial reform battling backwardness justified Ottoman Turkish rule over not-yet-Ottomanized Arabs.” since Arab provinces were demarcated the landmarks of backwardness to be rescued by Ottoman elite with their modernization agenda.

Ottoman Orientalism, then, is highly significant in two terms: First, it helps explain the dominant orientalist discourse in Turkey towards the countries in the East of Turkey, especially Arab countries and Iran as exemplified in the previous section of this chapter analyzing “traveling articles” in Pazartesi. It is evident that to see the orient of Turkey with a racist and orientalist lens dates back to the earliest attempts of modernization in the history of the land, called Anatolia. Second, Makdisi’s analysis of Ottoman Orientalism showcases the continuity between Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. As I mentioned in the second chapter, the debate on whether Turkey is a continuum of the empire or a break from it can be compassed in a different direction: following Ottoman Orientalism, it is possible to claim that the establishment of the Republic and its own ideology of modernization signifies both a continuity and a break when it comes to creating a nation and official nationalism based on othering certain groups, geographies or histories. That is, the republican modernization and nation-state

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211 Ibid:770
212 Ibid:771
building situates two important momentums, or key points in my opinion: modernization as a divorce from the empire and modernization as westernization.

Even though the modernization movement in Turkey dates back to the late Ottoman Empire, from the very moment of the establishment of the republic in early 1920s, we observe that the discourse of the republican founders divorced itself from its “oriental” Ottoman roots, and set forth a distinction between oriental Ottomans and modern western Turks. In the discourse of the republic, not only were the Arab provinces the Oriental Others of Turkey but the empire itself with its legacy and history signified that oriental other as backward, out-dated, pre-modern, static and violent. In that sense, the official ideology presented itself as new, progressive, modern and western. Then, in relation to his first momentum, a second key point is the construction of modernity or what and how the modern subject after oriental ottoman was identified. Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of the Republic, defines the ultimate point for the “new society” is “to reach the level of contemporary modern civilizations”\(^{213}\). The modernization project of the republic sought a way to reach those “modern civilizations” via not only accepting the values of the western Enlightenment but in fact by becoming a westerner. Considering the reforms studied in the second chapter such as the modern civil code, the “surname law” as the basic and essential modern bureaucratic tool, the Latin alphabet instead of the Arab-Persian hybrid ottoman alphabet, the “hat code” as the

\(^{213}\) Atatürk, Mustafa Kemal. “Speech for the 10th Anniversary of our Republic”. 29 Ekim 1933, Ankara, 107
“western way of clothing”, republican modernization not only westernized the new-nation but made it (at least) look western.

Keeping those two moments of Turkish modernization, I argue that the republic presents a continuum with the imperial reformers as the republic, too, othered certain histories, groups and characters in order to represent itself as progressive and modern. However, it also represented a break from the empire, as it chose the empire itself at a discursive level as the oriental other even though the people and the land are shared with the empire, That is why, I call the Turkish republican modernization a case of self-orientalism: the orientals divorcing themselves and creating an understanding of life on the basis of western values, as cutting the link between the past/the orient/Ottomans and the present/the western which was done internally.

4.5 In Lieu of a Conclusion: Self-Orientalism of Turkish Secular Feminists

It is not surprising that the secular feminist movement of Turkey, at both discursive and activist levels, is shaped around the predefined framework for modernity, the modern subject, or the modern feminist subject of the Republican modernization that rejected imperial past as oriental and embraced westernization as the only way of progression. Keeping the examples of secular feminist discourse in Pazartesi journal, I analyzed in this chapter in mind, it is sufficient to say that Islamic feminism, or the veiled woman’s movement in Turkey, has been excluded and alienated from the feminist circles on the basis of western orientalist viewpoints which see Islamic feminism as an
oxymoron. While the modernization project in Turkey has divorced itself from its oriental Ottoman roots and has adopted euro-centric westernization as its ultimate goal, feminist discourses have been under the influence of this official discourse. For example, Kemalist feminists view the existence (read: visibility) of veiled women in public, who demand rights and freedoms, as a threat to the reforms or “the gains” of the Republic. Socialist feminists consider Islamic feminism as either false consciousness and in need of rescue or as not as freedom movements but as women demanding their rights.

Even for the feminists questioning or criticizing Kemalism as an official discourse and its totalitarian nature, it is a hard task to be aware of how deep that official discourse, as in all state ideologies, goes and Turkish secular feminists critiques analyzed in this chapter fall short of criticizing Kemalism’s positioning against the Orient or even recognizing how the state ideology of Turkey others and alienates Turkish secular mind to the Orient. The attitude towards the Arabic language, for instance, is one of the most illuminating examples for how deeply embedded the racist and orientalist tone against the eastern countries and cultures with the help of official discourse. Reforming Turkish as the official and national language required the rejection of Arabic and Farsi rooted words and phrases as the modernization project of the republic required a certain level of westernization and divorce from Ottoman Empire as the Oriental other. For secular feminists, how and why they connect every Arabic or Farsi word to Islam(ism), which is also seen as backward, primitive, and savage, is not even questioned, let alone criticized.
Regardless of their ideological or political standpoints, secular feminists of Turkey have not conversed with Islamic feminists. Secular feminists agree, however, on the very presence of veiled women in the public sphere as a signifier of the Ottoman roots, the orient, backwardness, victimhood and oppression. Beside the parallel reactions to Islamic feminism in both Western academia and feminist circles in Turkey, the case of Turkey constitutes an example of self-orientalism. In other words, it is an example of the orient looking at itself through orientalist eyes.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

It is a loving commitment to live in a way that does not oppress other people.\textsuperscript{214}

My aim for this project was to question western hegemonic discourses about the non-western \textit{Other}, specifically the Muslim woman subject, through a post-colonial critical point of view. I took the debate on Islamic feminism as a departure point of a discussion that relates this discourse to western feminist arguments over the usefulness and \textit{nature} of Islamic feminism.

In the first chapter, I mapped the debates on Islamic feminism in the North American academy and analyzed the two main camps the supporters and opponents of Islamic feminism. The supporters of Islamic feminism, as named in this project include Afsaneh Najmabadi, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Nayereh Tohidi, Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, and argue that Islamic feminism serves as a middle-ground between secular and religious feminisms, an agent in geographies where modernization is ongoing such as Egypt and Iran, and an alternative discourse to the orientalist and colonialist viewpoints of western feminism towards Muslim women and women living in Middle East North Africa region in general. On the other hand, opponents of Islamic feminism such as Haideh Moghissi, Shahrazad Mojab and Hammed Shahidian, reject Islamic feminist

movement as they argue Islamic feminism is an oxymoron since Islam and feminism are in essence incompatible with each other. In that sense, they approach Islamic feminism based on two interrelated assumptions. One is that Islam is a misogynist monolith that is closed to any reinterpretation project, feminist or not, and second is that feminism is universal, unique and applicable to all women. Moreover, Islamic feminism is criticized for jeopardizing reformist movements with socialist and Marxist bends since it is not seen as a revolutionary movement but as an adjustment to the hegemonic discourse in religion and in society.

In this debate, I positioned myself as a supporter of Islamic feminism. Besides agreeing with most of the arguments made by the supporters of Islamic feminism, what I find most problematic is the approach of the opponents of Islamic feminism as I consider their understanding a reflection of western feminism which constitutes and in fact forces hegemonic universalist knowledge not only for Islamic feminism but all non-western feminist movements and theories.

That positioning helped me analyze secular feminist discourse in Turkey in terms of not only Islamic feminism per se but also through analyzing how Islam, Muslimhood and the orient are understood and reproduced in the debates over women’s rights and issues of gender equity. I utilized two interlocking body of knowledge to enhance my analytical views. First, I looked into the relations of political history of Turkey which marks continuous modernization processes starting from the late Ottoman Empire and forms the state ideology of Kemalism, as well as democratization project fueled with the
neoconservative government of AKP which has been in power since 2003 and feminist alignments in relation to these two dominant ideologies. Second, in the third chapter, I analyzed an issue of the secular feminist journal of *Pazartesi* in order to track the discursive relations of Turkish secular feminism to Islam, a non-Turkish East and Islamic feminism.

Through this work, I reached two conclusive arguments. One is that state feminism is a highly important theoretical tool to understand mainstream feminist discourse in Turkey. Feminism refers to the assumption that equality is promoted by the state and mostly for the sake of modernization; it creates this kaleidoscopic view as all is achieved for women and there is nothing left to struggle for but to be good mothers, wives and citizens. As Şirin Tekeli argues, because of this assumption, the feminist movement in Turkey could not achieve much in terms of getting organized from the early republican period to the 1980 military coup because it believed that there was nothing left to fight for after the republican reforms. Feminist women of Turkey, mostly secular, had to deconstruct what is internalized first in terms of modernity, modern state, nation-state, secularism or Kemalist state ideology during the 1980s in order to create an independent feminist voice in Turkey.  

My second argument in analyzing secular feminism in Turkey is based on the term self-orientalism which refers to the internalized and reproduced orientalism of the

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orientals. Self-orientalism of secular feminist movement in Turkey I argued is interlocked with the state ideology which marked not only the East as the oriental other but also the legacy of Ottoman Empire as backward, primitive, and savage. As evident in the articles of the special edition on Religion of Pazartesi journal, Turkish secular feminist alignment with Islam, Islamic feminism and countries like Iran and Kuwait, is not only shaped by western hegemonic knowledge on the orient and Islam but is reproduced while criticizing, or as in most of the cases alienating, Muslim women’s movement in Turkey.

I argued that the discursive resemblance between Turkish secular feminism and North American academic rejection of Islamic feminism is indisputable. Western hegemonic knowledge over Muslim women’s bodies and Islamic feminism utilized by the North American Islamic feminist critics is ascribed and reproduced by Turkish secular feminists, which has meant that both camps reproduce homogenizing notions of Muslim women and condemn not only their feminist movements and even their demands.

I would also like to note that there are three points that can be considered limitations of the study. First, I did not utilize further examples from secular feminists other than those contributing to Pazartesi. Besides its practical reasons, I would like to underline once again that in Turkey, as a secular country from its foundation, it is hard to track the records of secular feminist critiques and opinions on Islam and Islamic feminism. There are two main reasons for this: One is that Islamic feminism is a relatively new movement not only in Turkey but globally. Also, in the locality of Turkey, as I mentioned in the third chapter, the Islamic feminist movement too fell for state
feminism. In other words, Islamic feminists’ radical spirit in the movement was compromised with the power change in the government which was viewed as a victory for Islamist women. They, just like Kemalist women, mostly gave up their demands for rights and freedoms with the hope that their government would have solved their problems. In another account, the ban on veiling prevented veiled Muslim women from acquiring academic positions in Turkish universities and thus veiled Muslim women were excluded from academic knowledge accumulation. Under these circumstances, the Islamic feminist movement, or Muslim women’s movement in general, has lost its visibility in public and power in the feminist circles and discussions regarding Islamic feminism especially by secular feminists almost disappeared as it has lost its popularity.

More importantly though, in an environment where mainstream discourse is secularist and Islamic feminism is marginalized, discussions on Islamic feminism from secular feminism are not written down, whether it is academic or not, as they are taken for granted and even accepted as a priori.

The second limitation of this study is the lack of Islamic feminist voices from Turkey. I would like to say that this was a deliberative choice stemming from my personal understanding of feminist and academic ethics. From the very beginning of this study, I said the analysis of Turkish secular feminism was a self reflective critique. As a secular, socialist feminist from Turkey, I believe it is my position to engage and hopefully challenge the discourses I grew in first before even trying to be in a conversation with Islamic feminism. The third limitation is the lack of face to face
conversations with secular feminists in the forms of, for example, in-depth interviews. Further studies can be designed and conducted in a way that includes those conversations, especially with a motivation of comparative, discursive analysis between Islamic and secular feminists.

To conclude, in this project I looked into the complex yet interlocked relation between North American academic debates on Islamic feminism and Turkish secular feminism vis-à-vis orientalist and in Turkish case self-orientalist discourses against Islamic feminism. My endeavour for this project was to open up a critical, inter-relational and transnational conversation between Third World feminism, North American academia and Turkish feminist praxis; and I hope this study presented here will constitute the very first step towards this aspiration.
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