WOMEN BETWEEN MODERNITY, ISLAM AND ORIENTALISM
A CASE STUDY: THE HEADSCARF DILEMMA IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

This project looks into the concepts of Orientalism, Modernity, and Islamic Revivalism, and considers the debate on the “new veiling” of women in Turkey as the intersection of them. It explores modernity and its applications both in the East and in the West in terms of the woman question. It examines the orientalist view of the Middle Eastern cultures, and its applications for the Muslim women in Western scholarship, and feminist scholarship. Orientalism has not been limited to the West, in fact, internal Orientalism emerged in the Middle East through the adoption of Western modernization, thus creating tensions in Middle Eastern cultures, especially in terms of religion and women’s issues. While some states embraced modernity and imposed it on their people, some others seem to have rejected it altogether. Nevertheless, modernity has existed everywhere and has affected a vast number of people in the Middle East one way or another and to different extents. Young, educated Islamist women of the last two decades who claimed their rights in the public realm have become the salient symbols of the debates on Islam and modernity in Turkey, and perhaps elsewhere.
To my mother Naile Keskin,
my father Fedai Keskin, 1941-1978,

and

to the women of my generation in Turkey
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INTRODUCTION

The discussions on women’s entrance to the public sphere, the duality created by the separation of the public from the private, and the various implications of these issues have been on the agenda for Western feminists since the eighteenth century. These ideas have gained momentum in the late twentieth century. As the private domain has begun to be studied, the dualism perceived in Western cultures has been maintained in feminist work and generalized to describe other cultures as well.

Originating from Enlightenment philosophies, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed an age of revolution that encompassed both women and men. As civil rights and constitutions were debated at the political level, women of different social groups were also considering inequities. Women were among those who marched on the Bastille and Versailles, supporting the ideas of the revolution, namely “liberty, equality, and fraternity.” However, by the end of this era, republican ideas on women’s roles had become widespread. Emerging at the end of the eighteenth century, the idea that women should concentrate on domestic life dominated the first half of the nineteenth century as well. In contrast to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century witnessed “positive” changes for the women of Europe. The same changes that are attributed to modernity affected Middle Eastern women’s lives as well. For instance, the first radical
changes in the position of Ottoman women came out in the same century, during the Tanzimat Period (1839-1876).

In the most general sense, modernity at its core was a Western project and thus problematic for the East one way or another. It created Orientalism in the West and Islamic revival and fundamentalism, along with internal Orientalism and Occidentalism in the East – all of which affected Middle Eastern women in a number of ways. Although, it brought “positive” changes for many women, it also created new problems for both “modernized women” and traditional women.

Women have been put at the center of countless debates throughout the world and history, and this trend still continues within today’s debates. Women are still the symbols of civilization, modernity, tradition, religion, progress, backwardness, etc. The way women live their lives, the way they look, the way they dress, and the way they think are considered to be the indicators of a society. When Western modernization was adapted in the Middle East, the debates became even more complicated because of the different religions that dominated the Western and the Middle Eastern cultures. Thus, religion played the central role in the West/East dichotomy. The most salient symbol of this dichotomy became the veil that women in Muslim cultures used as part of their attire and religious requirements. In other words, the veiled women became the most popular symbols of the East in the West despite the fact that veiling predated Islam, and did exist in Christian and Jewish cultures, as well.

The country in which I was born and raised, at once a fiercely secular and yet 99% Muslim Turkey, has struggled from its inception as a Republic to obliterate all vestiges of Muslim and Middle Eastern tradition from its public landscape. Having taken
on this modern project with a vengeance, the Republic of Turkey, founded by Kemal Atatürk, continues to fight a kind of cultural and political war, the most powerful symbol of which has become the headcovering of women in public space. Culturally, I am an insider and yet an outsider to the actual practice of headcovering. I grew up not liking the idea of women covering their heads. As a child and a youth, I believed that it was one of the reasons that women were behind men in our society. I put covered women and uncovered women in different places in my mind. The women who wore the headscarf were almost all uneducated and homemakers or field workers, while the ones who did not wear the headscarf were usually educated professionals. I thought I would be one of those educated ones, since I went to school and did not cover my head. In the secular school system of Turkey, which is compulsory up to the eighth grade, girls go to school with their heads uncovered, no matter where they live – in cities, towns, or villages, and no matter what kind of families they come from, modern or traditional. The ones who continue their education at the university level, and enter white collar professional life after school, generally remain uncovered, and this is usually the case for girls in towns and cities since village girls did not have the same educational and professional opportunities. Those who do not continue their education after the compulsory period might go back to a more traditional life and cover their heads, depending on their place of residence and their family structures.

This somewhat simple reality has become more complicated as I have grown older and witnessed and read more about how the meanings of veiling (head covering) have changed. I had basically only seen traditional women wearing the headscarf until I met my peer university students who were also covered during my college years. This
reality became even more personal to me when one of my best friends, who was not
much different than the rest of us, suddenly began covering herself. She began to wear
the long loose dress called a *pardesii* and the long headscarf that covered all of her head
and shoulders. I knew that she had somewhat strong feelings about religion, but she still
looked like most of the college girls, who would be defined as “modern” in the simplest,
most popular sense.

The concepts of veiling, covering, and wearing a headscarf became even more
complicated when I began to live in the USA. Having encountered the concept of
Orientalism, I found myself defending the covered women and Islamic cultures, as they
meant different things in this part of the world. Bothered by misconceptions of Middle
Eastern women in general and the representations of veiled women in particular in the
West, I decided to make this issue part of my study. In order to explore the roots and the
development of the veiling issue, I found it necessary to investigate not only Orientalism,
but also Modernization and Islamic revival, the former as the cause and the latter, to
some extent, as the effect.

In my study, I examine Orientalism and its critiques in terms of modernity,
Islamic revivalism, and feminism in a number of scholarly works which look to these
issues from a point of view that focuses on women and veiling. As I read the critiques of
Orientalism, of anti-Orientalism and of Islamic fundamentalism, I came across two main
approaches. The first one criticizes the West for the Orientalist discourse and the second
one defends the West in the name of the progress that Western modernization brought
into women’s lives. As I found these two approaches reflecting reality in many ways, I
wanted to think about how these two approaches can be dealt with together. My main
concern is to see if these two discourses can be merged on grounds on which it would be possible to both criticize the Western Orientalist discourse and also accept the advances that Western thought contributed to women’s lives. In that respect, I would like to see how these different approaches view the concept of women’s veiling.

As a case study, I look at the “headscarf issue” in Turkey, for it is viewed as a danger to the secular modern Turkish Republic by the state and by many secular feminists, and as a right to practice one’s religious requirement by those who wear the headscarf and by others who support their action, usually in the political sphere.

Modernism has been on Turkey’s agenda since the nineteenth century. Before and to some extent after the modernization project took place, the Ottoman Empire was at the heart of the Orient and thus was the object of Western Orientalism. Changes that affected women began to take place during the Ottoman Empire and continued more drastically throughout the founding years of the Turkish Republic in the early twentieth century. The modernization project of the newly founded republic brought positive changes for women, however it also created problems that Turkish society in general and Turkish women in particular still face today. The Turkish modernizing elite began to look at its own society and its people with a Westerner’s eyes, creating a sort of internal Orientalism that still exists, especially in terms of secularism and the veiling issue. On the other hand, traditionalists responded to this modernization project by reviving Islam, which to some extent led to Islamic fundamentalism in its popular understanding. I will examine the concepts of Orientalism and Modernity in a more general sense and try to go on to Turkish modernization and internal Orientalism in order to investigate the veiling issue that has become the most visible symbol of these debates in Turkey. I find parallels
between Western Modernity/ Orientalism, and the Turkish modernization/internal Orientalism. I will explore how women were put at the center of all debates related to Modernity, Orientalism, and Islam.
‘Pierre Loti’ by Nazım Hikmet

‘Opium!
Submission!
Kismet!
Lattice-work, caravanserai fountains
a sultan dancing on a silver tray!
Maharajah, rajah
a thousand-year-old shah!
Waving from minarets
clogs made of mother-of-pearl;
women with henna-stained noses
working their looms with their feet.
In the wind, green-turbaned imams
   calling people to prayer;’

This is the Orient the French poet sees.
This is the Orient of those books
that come out from the press
At the rate of a million a minute.
But
yesterday
today
   or tomorrow
an Orient like this
   never existed
and never will.

(from Selected Poems Nazım Hikmet, trs. Taner Baybars, 1967)
I. THE DEBATE

One wonders how the word Orientalism came into life in the first place, and what it was originally intended to mean. It is certain that the meaning(s) has changed and begun to mean various things in time.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1989 Second Edition), the word orientalism is used to refer to Oriental character, style, or quality; the characteristics, modes of thought or expression, fashions, etc. of Eastern nations. Oriental scholarship is used to refer to knowledge of Eastern languages and literatures. Orientalist refers to scholars who are versed in languages and literatures of the Orient, and also for those who are the members of the Eastern or Greek Church. As far as these days are concerned, Oriental can refer to anything as long as it belongs to or comes from the Orient or the East (in the Westerner’s mind).

In terms of cultural studies, the term Orientalism is considered to be somewhat ambiguous. In this regard, the most notable contemporary use is attributed to Edward Said, whose book Orientalism in a way marked the beginning of the contemporary debate over Orientalism. Before going to the more contemporary meaning and Said’s Orientalism, I find it necessary to investigate the history of the term in order to understand its roots.

According to Anour Abdel Malek although the foundation of traditional Orientalism was decided in 1245 by the Council of Vienna, in terms of the studies of the Arab world and the Far East, the real impulse of Oriental studies roughly dates from the period of colonial establishment, specifically from the domination of the “forgotten
continents" by European imperialism which corresponds to the middle and second half of the nineteenth century. He writes:

The first wave was marked by the creation of orientalist societies (Batavia 1781; Societe Asiatique, Paris 1822; Royal Asiatic Society, London 1834; American Oriental Society, 1842; etc.); the second phase witnessed the appearance of orientalist congresses, the first of which took place in Paris in 1873; sixteen congresses were then held up to World War I (the last congress was the one in Vienna in 1912); since then only four have taken place (Abdel Malek, 2000 [1963]: 48).

The use and the understanding of the word Orientalism itself seems to have changed especially in the last few decades, becoming a more complicated concept. Although it has always had various meanings, a recent shift has given it a new, more negative meaning. As John MacKenzie points out, "the word originally had a wholly sympathetic ring: the study of the languages, literature, religions, thought, arts and social life of the East in order to make them available to the West, even in order to protect them from the occidental cultural arrogance in the age of imperialism." Referring to Edward Said's work MacKenzie notes:

Oriental studies became themselves an expression of intellectual and technical dominance and a means to the extension of political, military and economic supremacy. Orientalism came to represent a construct, not a reality, an emblem of domination and a weapon of power. It lost its status as a sympathetic concept, a product of scholarly admiration for diverse and exotic cultures, and became the literary means of creating a stereotypical and mythic East through which European rule could be more readily asserted. It is this new and negative meaning which has come to predominate in the 1980s and 1990s (MacKenzie, 1995: xii).

Edward Said and Orientalism

A lot has been said and written about Orientalism, starting especially from Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which was first published in 1979. In his book, Said offered several definitions of Orientalism. The first is the academic one that includes teaching,
writing about, and researching the Orient. According to Said, the second more general meaning of Orientalism is “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’” He defines the third “Orientalism” more historically and materially, as “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient: Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” He argues that Orientalism as a discourse of European culture “was able to manage - even produce - the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.” According to Said, the Orient is an invention of Europe as its other, “us” as the superior against “them” as the inferior non-European peoples and cultures (Said, 1979: 2-6).

Although Said’s book is acknowledged as a pioneering work and has attracted immense attention, it has also created further debates among the scholars of cultural studies. It was completely or partly acknowledged by some, and severely criticized by others. Critiques have focused on Said’s approach and methodology. Some have found parallels between his work and Orientalism itself in terms of his approach and called his study anti-Orientalism, finding it empirically suspect and methodologically contradictory in spite of “all its strength and moral importance” (Sharafuddin, 1994: xvii). Some found his approach reductionist for “charging the entire tradition of European and American Oriental studies” and blamed him for making the same mistake as the Orientalists (Kerr, 1980: 544). In his response, Said focuses on the misconceptions or, in his words “uncomprehending” critiques. His reaction focuses on the book’s supposed anti-Westernism, and Islamism. He defends his position against these by pointing out that he
is "radically skeptical about all categorical designations such as 'Orient' and 'Occident', and painstakingly careful about not 'defending' or even discussing the Orient and Islam". According to Said, the kind of opposition to books like Orientalism "stems from the fact that they seem to undermine the naïve belief in the certain positivity and unchanging historicity of a culture, a self, a national identity" (Said, 1995: 4).

Islam and Orientalism

For centuries Islam has been defined and portrayed as irrational, backward, and uncivilized in at least part of Western literature, arts and history. To the Orientalist Westerner, the Orient is what the West is not; it is everything that is opposed to Western values and the modern, enlightened Westerner. In Ernest Renan's words:

Islam is the complete negation of Europe... Islam is the disdain of science, the suppression of civil society; it is the appalling simplicity of the Semitic spirit, restricting the human mind, closing it to all delicate ideas, to all refined sentiment, to all rational research, in order to keep it facing an eternal tautology: God is God (Kurzman, 1998: 3).¹

Quoting from Ernest Renan, Charles Kurzman points out that "these themes continue today, as Western perceptions of Islam identify the religion with threatening images of theocracy and terrorism" (Kurzman, 1998: 3).

Another question arises as to how religions are considered to be Western and Oriental. In this regard, Bryan Turner draws attention to the ties between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, emphasizing that "Islam as an ‘oriental religion’ raises major difficulties for an orientalist discourse." Referring to the arguments that regard Islam as a

variant of the general Abrahamic faith along with the other two, Turner suggests that
"Islam has been a major cultural force inside Europe and provided the dominant culture of many Mediterranean societies." Drawing attention to the problem of defining Islam Turner adds, "Christianity as a Semitic, Abrahamic faith by origin could be regarded as an 'oriental religion' and Islam, as an essential dimension of the culture of Spain, Sicily and Eastern Europe, could be counted as occidental" (Turner, 1994: 22).

II. "THE ORIENTAL WOMAN" AND "VEILING" IN THE ORIENTALIST DISCOURSE

Feminist Perspectives and the Others

Since a discussion of the whole discourse of Orientalism is beyond the scope of this study, for my purposes I will mostly focus on the sexual reading of it. Even though the debate on "Orientalism" is not very old, the images of the East, positive or negative, are centuries old, and "Oriental woman" played a significant part in those images, and in the creation of them. Starting from medieval times, from travelers to politicians, and from painters to novelists and poets, "oriental woman" has been a popular subject. This interest had reached its peak in the early nineteenth century (Queijan, 1996: 1). Lord Byron's Oriental Tales were followed by accounts by writers like Pierre Loti and Gustave Flaubert and painters like Ingres and Gerome throughout the century.

In her book Pierre Loti and the Oriental Woman Irene Szyliowicz writes of Loti:

Loti's 'foreign' fiction is almost formulaic: in each instance a handsome, usually French, sailor travels to a distant land, there to fascinate, and in turn be enthralled by, an 'Oriental' woman. The charm of this relationship and the allure of the seductive female provide the intrigue of the novel and these features, along with their exotic setting, were primarily responsible for the popularity of his books (Szyliowicz, 1988: 15).
Szyliowicz finds Loti’s treatment of Oriental women troubling despite his positive statements about them. She claims that “because Loti couches negative attitudes in positive terms his mistreatment of women is insidious.” According to Szyliowicz, Loti talks of “Oriental” women “with a certain sameness, a lack of intellect”; to him, they are “generally idle, self-indulgent, and vacuous” (Szyliowicz, 1988: 52). This position is maintained even though the women Loti describes in his novels, at least some of them, might have been stand-ins for men, since some critics attribute homosexual tendencies to him (Szyliowicz, 1988: 5). Still, his portrayals of women from the Orient were still representations of women since he is attributing those characteristics to women.

In his “Lettre a Louise Colet,” (Correspondance 1853), Gustave Flaubert writes:

The Oriental woman is a machine, and nothing more; she doesn’t differentiate between one man and another. Smoking, going to the baths, painting her eyelids and drinking coffee, such is the circle of occupations which make up her existence. As for physical pleasure, it must be very slight since they cut off that famous button, the very place of it, quite early on. And for me, this is what renders this woman so poetic, that she becomes absolutely one with nature (Lowe, 1991: 75).

Lowe suggests that this is “a narrative that ultimately subordinates the woman as a sexual subject.” She is a productive machine, racially inferior, the Other as opposed to human, European, and the Self. Lowe claims that Flaubert’s famous example of oriental woman, “‘Kuchuk Hanem’ is a masculine fantasy of pure erotic service in the industrialized age of French imperialism: she generates sexual pleasure, yet she is impassive, undemanding, and insensate herself; her oriental mystery never fails to charm, her resources are never

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2 Szyliowicz refers to one of the books about Loti, Clive Wake’s The Novel of Pierre Loti, which according to her, claims that “the novelist was actually a homosexual who perpetrated a heterosexual myth upon his reading public.”
exhausted” (Lowe, 1991: 76). On the relationship between Flaubert and his character “Kuchuk Hanem” Edward Said argues that Flaubert’s position of power was not an isolated case. He suggests that “it fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled” (Said, 1978: 6).

Referring to the Western attitudes toward Turkey\(^3\) and toward the Islamic world in general, Irvin Cemil Schick talks about “Oriental sexuality, a theme deploying an entire arsenal of fictionalized devices such as the harem, the public bath, the slave market, concubines, eunuchs, polygamy, and homosexuality.” Schick notes that sexualized images of Turkish women have been essential to the works of various painters and writers and thus to European culture. He writes:

> Sexualized images of women and men were used, in European discourse of the other, as key markers of place, and hence as determinants of identity and alterity. In other words, these images were among the building blocks with which a political discourse of spatiality was constructed and the world discursively territorialized (Schick, 2000: 83-84).

*The Harem and the Veil in the Construction of the “Oriental Woman”*

The harem and the veil have been used more than anything else in the construction of the Oriental woman. Fascinated by the fact that they both hid something behind or within them, Orientalist writers made the harem and the veil their primary subjects. What is more important than this is that, as the usage of these themes expanded and became fashionable, what is real and what is imagined became unclear.

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\(^3\) Shick’s main concern is Turkish women here, as the title of his article suggests “The Women of Turkey as the Sexual Personae: Images from Western Literature.”
According to Billie Melman, most eighteenth and nineteenth century writers looked at the Orient through the *Thousand and One Nights* or *Arabian Nights*. Many travelers did not produce their accounts on an informational basis; rather they produced literary imaginations. The female stereotypes and the typical presentations of feminine (oriental) sexuality and the harem of *Arabian Nights* had a significant effect on writers and readers of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Melman draws attention to the fact that the collection of these texts was transcribed in French and English even before they were printed in Arabic. “Western audiences became familiar with the imaginary, exotic harem through Antoine Galland’s immensely popular *Mille et une nuits* which appeared in twelve volumes between 1707-14.” Melman notes that Galland’s collection sustained its popularity for more than a century until the publication of Edward William Lane’s *Nights* between 1838 and 1841. Meanwhile, Melman also mentions the critical readings of these texts starting with Montagu, and writes “they are conscious of the difference between observable reality and fantasy, fact and fiction” (Melman, 1992: 63-67). It seems like there are different layers and characteristics of Orientalist literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While some writers wrote only for the sake of oriental romance, which did not have to be related to the truth or fact, some others used the Orient - the Other, one way or another, to express cultural differences. In different ways, consciously or unconsciously, both writings helped create the Orientalist discourse, which maintained the ultimate superiority of the West.

Although the use of the harem is not a common symbol any more in the recent accounts of women of the East, particularly Middle Eastern or Muslim women, the veil continues to be at the center of the Orientalist attitude. As Gustave Flaubert admits,
“Neither you nor I nor anyone, no ancient no modern can know Oriental woman for the reason that it is impossible to visit her” (Dobie, 2001: 1). No European men could visit a harem. Nonetheless, the imaginary harem was used in the writings and the paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century European literature constantly. The stereotyped women figures of the harem were pictured as the Oriental woman. Leila Ahmed puts it this way:

What recurs in Western men’s accounts of the harem is prurient speculation, often taking the form of downright assertion, about women’s sexual relations with each other within the harem. Yet, however confident their statements, Western men had in fact no conceivable means of access to harems. Nevertheless, they wrote often with great assurance, as George Sandys did in describing the women of the sultan’s harem. He reported that “it’s not lawful for anyone to bring ought in unto them with which they may commit the deeds of beastly uncleanness; so that if they have a will to eat cucumbers, gourds, or such like, they are sent in unto them sliced, to deprive them of the means of playing the wantons” (Ahmed, 1982: 524).

III. FEMINIST ORIENTALISM

The Orientalist discourse that assumes the West’s superiority over the East was recreated in Western feminist scholarship, which also used the harem, polygamy and the veil as central images representing Muslim or Middle Eastern women. Beginning in the eighteenth century, the images of the harem, the veiled women, sultans and their slaves became primary subjects of a new feminist discourse, which is now called feminist Orientalism.

Feminist Orientalism is a special case of the literary strategy of using the Orient as a means for what one writer has called Western “self redemption” … Specifically, feminist Orientalism is a rhetorical strategy (and a form of thought) by which a speaker or writer neutralizes the threat inherent in feminist demands

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and makes them palatable to an audience that wishes to affirm its occidental superiority... Orientalism – the belief that the East is inferior to the West, and the representation of the Orient by means of unexamined, stereotypical images—thus becomes a major premise in the formulation of numerous Western feminist arguments (Zonana, 1993: 165).

**Feminist or Orientalist**

Among the early female writers who wrote on oriental women, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is the best known. She is considered to be one of the great letter-writers of the eighteenth century. As she accompanied her husband Edward Wortley Montagu to Turkey where he was appointed as the British ambassador, she had a chance to observe “the oriental woman.” She wrote letters to family members and friends to inform them about the real life of “the oriental woman” which was for her different than what was known back home.

She is also considered a feminist, although some find it questionable. Did she write about the Oriental woman from a feminist point of view or an orientalist point of view? Or can these two go together? In other words, can she be both an Orientalist and feminist at the same time? The views on this issue are divergent: While some claim that she was a feminist, some others claim that she was merely an Orientalist with a positive approach about the Orient and the Oriental woman. In his introduction to *the Selected Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Robert Halsband describes Lady Mary as one of feminism’s founding mothers: “By reason of her practice as well as her preaching Lady Mary deserves a place in the history of women’s emancipation” (Halsband, 1970: 2).

Montagu criticizes earlier travel writings about Turkish women. In her letter to Lady ____ on 17 June 1717, Montagu expresses her thoughts as the following:
Your whole letter is full of mistakes from one end to other. I see you have taken your Ideas of Turkey from that worthy author Dumont, who has writ with equal ignorance and confidence. 'Tis a particular pleasure to me here to read the voyages to the Levant, which are generally so far removed from truth and so full of absurdities I am very well diverted with them. They never fail to give you an account of the women, which 'tis certain they never saw, and talking very wisely of the genius of men, into whose company they are never admitted, and very often describes mosques which they dare not peep into (Montagu, 1993: 104).

In her examination of Lady Mary Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters*, Lisa Lowe suggests that “An emergent feminist discourse provides Montagu with the language, arguments, and rhetoric with which to interrogate traditional travel writing about the Orient while furnishing her with a critical position from which to write,” although she admits that “Montagu’s *Letters* occasionally resonate with the dominant British orientalist discourse” (Lowe, 1991: 51). In this sense, it seems to be appropriate to call her an orientalist feminist; feminist for she had the courage to speak out for women’s emancipation. Furthermore, when she was in Turkey, she seems to have seen Turkish women that she observed as individuals, rather than mere slaves. On the other hand, overall her attitude seems to be one that was within the dominant Orientalist discourse. She was an “enlightened” English woman (a Westerner), in an Eastern place, and she perhaps “naturally” looked at this Eastern culture and its women from a Westerner’s point of view. In other words, for her, she was in a position to determine what this culture was and what the position was of women in this culture according to her Western culture. The reference point was the civilized, Christian British (the Self), as opposed to the uncivilized, Islamic Turk (the Other). The assumption of being superior exists in the first place; her positive assertions do not set her totally apart from the male travel writers that she condemns. Meyda Yeşenoglu puts it this way:
The Orientalist universe, in its unity, is a multifarious or voluminous textuality, but these characteristics do not make it more vulnerable, or these characteristics do not in any simple way constitute a subversive challenge to its power and unity. On the contrary, they enrich the Orientalist discourse. Thus, I would prefer to be more cautious about locating the challenge of Orientalism either in the multivalent position of texts, or in attempts which offer a more "positive" and "good" picture of the Orient and Oriental women as opposed to "negative" and "bad" images (Yeğenoğlu, 1998: 81-82).

When Meyda Yeğenoğlu offers a sexual reading of Orientalism, she makes a broad analysis of it applying several Western theories from colonialism to psychoanalysis. Emphasizing the sexual nature of Orientalism, Yeğenoğlu explores how the discursive constitution of otherness is accomplished simultaneously through both sexual and cultural manners of differentiation. Yeğenoğlu opposes Lowe for defining Montagu’s writing as challenging to the representations of women by the earlier travel writings for she claims that “despite their apparent divergence from male travelers’ texts, they are inevitably implicated and caught within the masculinist and imperialist act of subject constitution” (Yeğenoğlu, 1998: 81-82).

According to these feminist perspectives, being a feminist has not prevented some from being Orientalist. Still, it would be unfair to put writers such as Montagu in the same category with the earlier romantic imaginative Orientalist writers. Moreover, it is not only the Western feminists who are writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and falling into the trap of Orientalism. Ironically it is very likely for a feminist (although not only feminists) in the East to fall into the same trap, even today, for many look at their own culture from the Westerner’s point of view. In fact, as many Middle Eastern nations adapted the Western modernization project, it became the general tendency,
especially among the state or educated elites, to look at their people with a Westerner's eye, and criticize it as an Orientalist does. This attitude created "Internal Orientalism" in these cultures.

IV- ORIENTALISM WITHIN "THE ORIENT"

Once the modernization project of the West was adapted in the Middle East, women were put at the center of modern/traditional debates. As the reference point of these debates, women's lives, appearances, activities, etc. gained enormous importance. Within the context of a binary opposition of the West and Islam, the West represented the modern, and thus civilized, while Islam/the East was assumed to represent the traditional, the backward and even the uncivilized. Therefore, similar to their Western counterparts, the modernizing elites of the Middle East understood women who looked traditional and Islamic as symbols of the backward, uncivilized East, and of Islam, while those who adopted a Western appearance were considered to be modern and civilized. Although Westerners and Easterners did not see and practice things exactly the same, the reference point for both was the same: the Western, modern world.

While the modernizing state elites did have the power and tools to change things accordingly on the institutional level or in the public sphere, the changes were not carried on to the social level as thoroughly and rapidly. Thus, other binary oppositions within society, such as modern/traditional, Western/Eastern and Islamic religious/secular, etc. came into life. In other words, the modernization projects did not alter all parts of society, but in fact left most of it outside. Looking at their own society with a Westerner's eye, one way or another, the Westernist/modernist Eastern elite created its internal orientalism
towards its own society, culture and people. Women became the most salient symbol of these oppositions, since they were considered to be the reference point of a society. The way women looked represented either modernity or Islam, because of the fact that Muslim women wore the veil or headscarf, while Western women did not. I will come back to this issue later when I examine the “headscarf dilemma” in Turkey.

At this point, I think it is necessary to investigate modernity, in order to see what it really is, what it promised and what it brought into life. As modernity seems to be the central issue in figuring out the complex characteristics of both Orientalism and Islamic Revivalism, it is important to look at it from the perspectives of both Orientalism and Islamic revivalism. As Orientalist discourse seems to be backed by Modernity, and in a broader sense, Islamic revivalism and fundamentalism seem to be a reaction to Modernity, it would be impossible to analyze these without talking about Modernity.
CHAPTER 2

MODERNITY, ISLAMIC REVIVALISM AND WOMEN

I. THE MODERNITY DEBATE

There is no one answer to the question of “What is modernity?” More importantly, some even suggest that “modernity turns out to be enigmatic at its core, and there seems no way in which this enigma can be ‘overcome’. We are left with questions where once there appeared answers…” (Giddens, 1990: 49). However, one has to use some definitions of it in order to examine it, and for my purposes, I will use some more basic and general definitions. According to one dictionary definition, “modernity comes to characterize the Christian epoch (from the fifth century, in the writings of St. Augustine), in contrast to pagan past” (Edgar, 1999: 244). In this sense, Christianity seems to be modern, as opposed to paganism. The meaning shifts in time, and “in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries modernity came to be associated with the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement that was characterized by a faith in the ability of reason to solve social, as well as intellectual and scientific problems, an aggressively critical perspective on what were perceived as the regressive influences of tradition and institutional religion” (Edgar, 1999: 244, 125-6). In this respect, belief in reason was modern as opposed to belief in religion in solving the problems that humankind faced.
However, according to Anthony Giddens:

Enlightenment thought, and Western culture in general, emerged from a religious context which emphasized teleology and the achievement of God’s grace. Divine providence had long been a guiding idea of Christian thought. Without these preceding orientations, the Enlightenment would scarcely have been possible in the first place. It is no way surprising that the advocacy of unfettered reason only reshaped the ideas of the providential, rather than displacing it. One type of certainty (divine law) was replaced by another (the certainty of our senses, of empirical observation), and divine providence was replaced by providential progress. Moreover, the providential idea of reason coincided with the rise of European power over the rest of the world. The growth of European power provided, as it were, the material support for the assumption that the new outlook on the world was founded on a firm base which both provided security and emancipation from the dogma of tradition (Giddens, 1990: 48).

Although many have assumed modernity to be a movement free from religious aspects, that does not exactly seem to be the case. More problematic than that for the Muslim societies in general, modernity had Christian roots, meaning it did not embody Islam in the first place. Thus, in the simplest sense, what the Westerner in the West or in the East has been trying to do, in a way, is to impose a Christian project on Muslim cultures. In light of this, negative reactions to the modernization projects in the Muslim Middle East seem inevitable. Although modernization projects found a ground to live and have been accepted to some extent in the Middle East, the reactions to them seem to have become even more severe in time, which gave way to Islamic revivalism and/or fundamentalism. In the traditional Islamic cultures modernity, which brought secularism, symbolized the Christian West. For a traditional (pious) Muslim, it was something against his/her religion, beliefs, way of life etc. However, most of the modernization projects were carried forward in these same cultures by their local elites. Therefore, we see two kinds of reactions, one to the external or original modernity (or the Christian West) and the other to the internal modernity of state elites.
*Modernity and Women*

What modernity offered to women seems to be another question that does not have one answer. The views are divergent in terms of what modernity brought into women’s lives. While some believe that modernity improved women’s lives in many ways, for some others, it is a part of Western imperialism and Orientalism.

It is obvious that modernity was a male project. It was man in the first place who initiated the project in the name of society. As “individual” became central to the project of modernity, it was the male to be individuated, since women were not apparent outside the home, as Barbara Marshall puts it, “thus, it was the males, and male activity, that constituted the public sphere of ‘society’.” Marshall also draws attention to “the disappearance of women from the realm of the social in even the most recent contributions to the discourse of modernity.” She suggests that “as modernity created the modern ‘man,’ women were left behind. The construction of what is human is implicitly male, white, ruling class and Western, and largely based on a reification of economic individualism” (Marshall, 1994: 14-23). Similarly, Lieteke van Vucht Tijssen finds the consequences of modernity paradoxical in terms of women’s emancipation. She accepts the fact that modernity was not wholly negative for women. However, she claims that “in terms of economic and social developments, modernization can be understood to have created for women precisely the conditions against which feminists have rebelled.” She blames the Enlightenment philosophers for not favoring the emancipation of women in their writings (Tijssen, 1990: 149-155).

In response to feminist arguments, which claim that modernity has been ambiguous for women, because it was only males who were recognized as the individual
in the public sphere of society, thus excluding females, Haideh Moghissi takes the opposite position. She claims that although bourgeois development was discriminatory in nature, it brought positive changes for women. She suggests that pre-modern social formations were far from being advantageous and humane for women, and that women's entrance into the paid workforce with the rise of capitalism and modern industry at least challenged male power in the private sphere and social and legal practices in the public sphere (Moghissi, 1999: 81).

Moghissi does not agree with what she calls the anti-Orientalist discourse which, according to her, ignores the problems of women in Islamic societies for the sake of respecting cultural difference. She criticizes the intellectual tendencies that abandoned women to the rule of fundamentalist Islamic regimes. Calling these tendencies neo-Orientalist, she considers a link between this discourse and Islamic fundamentalism, for they both reject the reforms of gender relations, and appreciate everything “non-Western”. Moghissi finds anti-Orientalist argument useless, even dangerous, for women under fundamentalist Islamic regimes (Moghissi, 1999: 78-81).

At this point, we come face to face with the question, “Do Middle Eastern women have to choose between modernity which is implicitly Christian and foreign but potentially progressive and positive for women— and tradition which is native and Muslim, but can be oppressive in practice?” Whatever women have to live with (which is not always their choice), they are bound to face serious problems. The question becomes, “What would bring women out of this double jeopardy, closing doors to the West and the Western ideas, or to the traditional ones?” We should also ask ourselves, does the “woman question” have to be situated within the dichotomies of East versus
West, or tradition versus modern? Leti Volpp finds these kinds of binary oppositions, such as feminism versus multiculturalism, or universalism versus cultural relativism, troubling. She draws attention to culture’s “constantly negotiated”, “multiple and contradictory” character and “the forces besides cultures that affect women’s lives” all of which are ignored by these false dichotomies. She calls for “not a refusal to criticize but a more careful examination of the particularity of women’s relationships to specific patriarchies, as well as to geopolitical and economic relationships” (Volpp, 2001: 1181-1218). This kind of approach to the societies and the women of the Middle East seems to be much more constructive.

Modernity is rooted in the application of male-centered ideas and values to the rest of humankind. However, it is also important to point out that, as time passed (Western) women figured out ways to benefit from the reforms of modernity, and did change things for themselves. In that regard, “man’s modernity” was at least a starting point for women to change the world to their advantage. Where does this leave us then? If we accept the fact that modernity was “good” for women, then we need to ask another question: Good for which women? In spite of its boundaries, it essentially brought positive changes into Western women’s lives, but did it also do so for the Middle Eastern women? Or did it only, in a way, worsen women’s position by colonizing and orientalizing the East? Why did previously unveiled women choose to veil in Iran, against the Shah’s modernization practices, which prohibited chador?

Although they embodied some local aspects, modernization projects in the Middle East initially were imported from the West and were imposed upon the people. The modernizing elite decided that society needed to be modernized, and since the West was
modern, the modernization project had to be brought from the West. It is true that “the East” and “the West” have influenced each other throughout history; Western philosophy borrowed from the Muslim philosophers, and Eastern philosophy borrowed from Greek philosophy. In other words, we cannot talk about pure Western and Eastern cultures as we cannot talk about pure Western and Eastern philosophies. However, in terms of the modernization projects of the Middle Eastern states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the changes came as a package, and people were expected to change accordingly and rapidly without understanding the need for the change. When the changes reached their private sphere, and attempted to affect the religious aspects of their lives, the resistance became inevitable and even grew stronger in time. Since individuals did not have much control on the institutional level, institutional changes came about more easily. However, on the social level, especially in the private sphere, individuals (meaning mostly men) continued to hold the control. This gave way to the coexistence of two different cultures in one society. Looking at the debate from another perspective, Sharabi suggests that “the marriage of imperialism and patriarchy produced not genuine modernity but helped instead to create a hybrid sort of society/culture, a kind of ‘modernized’ patriarchy, namely, neopatriarchy” (Sharabi, 1992: 128-9). Thus, in this sense, modernity has not had the same ‘positive’ effects on many women in the Middle East; on the contrary, it had some negative impacts on their lives due to reactions to it. Similarly, as she takes a defending position for Modernity, Moghissi suggests that the Middle Eastern women “have not fully benefited from the forces of modernism, despite the fact that their lives have been touched by modernization processes one way or another” (Moghissi, 1999: 83).
II. ISLAMIC REVIVALISM AND ISLAMIC FEMINISM

It is probably appropriate to note that, no matter where and when, there have always been reactions against new sociological trends in every society, along with acceptance. When it comes to religions, which involve hundreds and thousands of years of evolving beliefs, the reactions have been naturally immense, and more complicated. For instance, in the West, fundamentalism emerged as a reaction to liberalizing tendencies within the Protestant institutions to defend “orthodox” Protestantism in the late nineteenth century. According to Margaret Lamerts Bendroth, “Fundamentalist leaders were men determined to stop the spread of liberal and secularizing trends in a society once defined by Christian values” (Bendroth, 1993: 6-7). She adds that fundamentalism also attracted large numbers of women, which seem to have been an important force in the fundamentalist movement. However, as women demanded more power in the denominations they served, fundamentalism opposed female leadership both in the home and in church. Islamic revivalism/fundamentalism too, rises as a reaction to secularizing trends, which derive from modernity. Similarly, Middle Eastern women take part in the revivalist movements, and as they demand more share in the public sphere, they also face oppositions from the male dominated realm. There are nevertheless various revivalist movements, which make any kind of generalization difficult. In the most general sense, the supporters of Islamic revivalism denounce the customary and secular interpretations of the Koran and promote a more literal reading of it, which would for them mean returning to the origin of the Islamic doctrine as they understand it.

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Liberal Islam versus Fundamentalist Islam

Islam has been interpreted in various ways since its emergence fourteen hundred years ago. However, European Orientalists have been insistently focused on “radical” Islam and have simply ignored other interpretations of it. Calling this attitude the Orientalist view of Islam, Kurzman talks about three traditions in Islam: Customary Islam as the combination of regional practices and those that are shared throughout the Islamic World, and revivalist Islam (also known as Islamism, fundamentalism, or Wahhabism) which attacks the customary interpretation of Islam and emphasizes Islamic doctrine. The last tradition that Kurzman mentions is the one that has been ignored by the West, which he calls liberal Islam. Criticizing the Orientalist view of Islam, Kurzman writes:

Many analyses of Islamic debates stop with these two traditions, the customary and the reviver, and ignore a third major tradition... Liberal Islam, like revivalist Islam, defines itself in contrast to the customary tradition and calls upon the precedent of the early period of Islam in order to delegitimate present day practices. Yet liberal Islam calls upon the past in the name of modernity, while revivalist might be said to call upon modernity (for example, electronic technologies) in the name of the past (Kurzman, 1998: 4-6).

Many Muslim writers and scholars are frustrated by the “Orientalist view of Islam”, especially when it comes to the question of women. According to Kurzman, although there are variations in Liberal Islam, one common understanding among them is that “Islam, properly understood, is compatible with – or even a precursor to- Western liberalism” (Kurzman, 1998: 4-6). For instance, Fatima Mernissi claims that there are traditions within Islam that “bring up the question of reason and personal opinion as did the Western philosophers of the Enlightenment.” She blames political Islam for not resolving the issues that are inherited in these traditions of Islam (Mernissi, 1992: 21).
“Can this be called the modernity of Islam or Islamic modernity?” is a question that requires more attention than it has received.

**Feminism and Islam**

Once again, words that are used to identify positions gain a lot of importance, particularly when talking about feminism in Muslim societies. Not only the words themselves, but the way one puts them together also becomes important: Islamic feminism, Arab feminism, feminist Islam, Muslim feminists, Islamicist or Islamist feminists, secular feminists, state feminists, etc. Therefore, it seems impossible to come up with one definition that would encompass all of these terms. The debate of whether some kind of feminism is possible within an Islamic framework has been on the agenda for both western feminists and Islamists. Is an Islamic feminism possible? What does one mean by Islamic feminism, or Arab feminism? Is there a singular Islamic feminism that everybody talks about?

In terms of the emergence of Arab feminism, Margot Badran draws attention to the nationalistic causes in the Arab World. “The story of Arab feminism is a story of intersections between feminisms and nationalisms, both those identified with individual Arab countries and those transcending territorial boundaries. It is also a story about disjunctures between national feminisms of colonized Eastern countries and Western-dominated international feminism” (Badran, 1995: 223). In this sense, Arab women were trying to establish their native feminism apart from a Western feminism. However, this feminism was not Islamic at its core; it did not situate itself in an Islamic framework, rather in a secular, nationalistic framework. There were at the same time Islamist women,
who like their feminist counterparts, according to Badran, “underscored the need for women’s political participation” (Badran, 1995: 229). Miriam Cooke considers the prominent Islamist leader of this time, Zaynab al-Ghazali, a feminist too, for she and other gender conscious women were “learning how to take advantage of the transnationalism of Islam to empower themselves as women and as Muslims” (Cooke, 2001: 61).

Referring to the Western (and also some Eastern) writings about women in the Middle East and North Africa, Marnia Lazreg draws attention to the bias that has been created against Islam through these writings. She criticizes U.S. feminists, who, according to her, “have attempted to accommodate Christianity and feminism and Judaism and feminism”, while presenting Islam as antifeminist. This, according to Lazreg, proves “an acceptance of the idea that there is a hierarchy of religions, with some being more susceptible to change than others. Like tradition, religion must be abandoned if Middle Eastern women are to be like Western women” (Lazreg, 2001: 325).

On the other hand, Haideh Moghissi asks “how could a religion which is based on gender hierarchy be adopted as the framework for struggle for gender democracy and women’s equality with men? And if Islam and feminism are compatible, which one has to operate within the framework of the other?” She opposes Anouar Majid’s view, which sees “an indigenous path to women’s emancipation” in Islamic discourse by “a redefinition and a thorough reassessment of Islamic traditions” (Majid, 1998: 322, Moghissi, 1999: 136). However, believing that feminism seeks justice wherever it can find it, Miriam Cook draws attention to the possibility of the coexistence of Islam and feminism. She asserts, “Islamic feminism is not a coherent identity, rather a contingent,
contextually determined strategic self-positioning”. She finds Moghissi’s argument problematic, for according to Cooke, “she confounds Islam and Islamic fundamentalism, as though the two were the same” (Cooke, 2001: 58-9). In other words, according to her argument, there seems to be one or more interpretations of Islam which would allow a feminism that would mean a “double commitment: on the one hand, to a faith position, and on the other hand, to women’s rights both inside the home and outside”. Cooke sees this self-positioning of Islamic feminists as a new identity that embodies “multiple belongings” rather than a fixed one. In her view, Islamist feminists are not necessarily “politically insubordinate”, rather they just claim women’s rights that Islamic tradition, according to their understanding, in the first place granted them. Cooke writes:

Whenever Muslim women offer a critique of some aspect of Islamic history or hermeneutics, and 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. It does not describe an identity, but rather an attitude and intention to seek justice and citizenship for Muslim women (Cooke, 2001: 61).

Cooke’s major examples of Islamic feminists are those who use writing as “a vital weapon in the fight to establish justice within a system that “draws its authority from the autocratic power exercised by the ruler of the state, and that of the father or the husband in the family” (Cooke, 2001: 75). In that regard, Cooke’s Islamic feminists seem to be educated women who in fact express themselves through writing that can be called Islamic feminist literature. Their basic concern is to draw attention to a different interpretation of the Koran and Islamic traditions, on behalf of and to the advantage of Muslim women. One might wonder about the position of “regular women” in this. How do the young, educated veiled women who seek opportunities in the public sphere throughout the Middle East identify themselves? Or can we define them as Islamic
feminists, for they demand a share in both professional and political domains? I will come back to these questions later with the Turkish case.

III. THE VEIL: A TOOL OF EMPOWERMENT OR A SIGN OF OPPRESSION

For the “modern”, “civilized” West, a woman’s position in the East indicated that these cultures were “backward” and “uncivilized”. Thus, modernizing women would mean modernizing these cultures. Since the most popular of these indicators was the veil, the modernization project had to start with lifting the veil. The West was also aware that the veil had a tremendous significance for Muslims. Therefore, dealing with the veil meant dealing with Islam, and Islamic ways of life. Referring to the discourse of Enlightenment Yeğenoğlu notes, “It was believed that the conditions that perpetuate the non-modern social structures and values of Oriental cultures needed to be uprooted for new and modern conditions to be put in place to produce the desired effects in women’s status in the Middle East” (Yeğenoğlu, 1998: 98).

Veiling had various meanings and functions throughout history. In her book Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance, Fadwa El Guindi talks about five distinctive patterns. She writes:

The patterns are (1) complementary, as in Sumaria; (2) exclusionary and privileging as in the Persian-Mesopotomian case; (3) egalitarian, as in Egypt; (4) hierarchical, as in Hellenic culture; and (5) seclusionary, as in Byzantine culture. (El Guindi, 1999:13).

One wonders how all those meanings and functions in different cultural and historical contexts have been re-combined and the veil has come to Symbolize the Muslim woman and the whole religion of Islam. Whether the veil is an Islamic practice in its historical and canonical context has been a subject of a wide literature. Similarly, the meaning of
the veil for both women who practice it, and for those societies in which it is an important part of the attire, has been discussed extensively. As in the interpretation of the Koran, there are deviant perceptions of the veil throughout Middle Eastern societies. One can find contradictory perceptions and practices even within one society when it comes to the veil. Therefore, we cannot talk about a single “veil concept”. In today’s Muslim world, some women wear the veil (either a headcovering or hejab (that is the cover of the entire body except the face and the hands) because they grow up with it, in other words, it is part of the traditional attire, a social pattern. These women are not necessarily more religious than those who do not use the veil, although some of them may be. Some women would wear it only for religious reasons. Some others would wear it for both religious and political reasons. Not only the reasons, but also the way or styles of the practice itself, change from one place to another, and even for the same woman in different stages or contexts of her life, which makes a generalization unattainable.

Contrary to its various meanings and practices, the Orientalists have perceived the veil either as a somewhat sexual object that hides the imagined Oriental woman, as in the early Orientalist writings, or as a tool of oppression of women in Muslim societies. A third perception, which is rather new, is the one that supports the veil and the veiled women. Nawal El Saadawi pays attention to this new tendency in the West, which supports the veil for the sake of multiculturalism “as a symbol of the authentic identity of Muslim women”. Emphasizing that “the veil is just a piece of clothing”, she questions “How can an authentic identity be reduced to a piece of clothing? How can multiculturalism depend on confining women or hiding their faces?” She goes even further, saying that “We (Arab and Muslim women) know that veiling of women is the
other side of the coin of nakedness or displaying body. Both consider women as sex objects" (El Saadawi, 1997: 96-97).

When she talks about the meaning of the veil for the Orientalists, Meyda Yegenoglu draws attention to the power that is attributed to it. For instance, in the case of Algeria, she suggests that “in the colonizer’s eye Algerian resistance is condensed in the veil, which is seen as an obstacle to his visual control. Conquering the Algerian women is thus equal to conquering Algeria, the land, and people themselves.” Emphasizing the obsession about the veil, Yegenoglu suggests that for the Western subject, the veil does not simply mean “loss of sight but a complete reversal of positions: her body completely invisible to the European observer except for her eyes, the veiled woman can see without being seen.” As she is assumed to be hiding something behind the veil, “it is through the inscription of the veil as a mask that the Oriental woman is turned into an enigma” (Yegenoglu, 1998:40-44). This point can be easily traced in Pierre Loti’s writings about the Oriental woman. Because he cannot actually get to know her, Loti constantly speculates about who she is, how she is, etc.

Haideh Moghissi strongly opposes the idea of empowerment in women’s veiling and identifies this view as “myopic”. Drawing attention to the case of Iran where after the 1979 revolution women were forced to practice hijab, and punished if improperly veiled, she claims that these realities do not reconcile “with ideas of the veil as a conscious and well-considered choice by ‘Muslim women’”. Emphasizing that for many women, as in the Algerian case, the choice between wearing and not wearing the veil is in fact a choice between life and death, Moghissi draws attention to the imposition of the veil by fundamentalists, either states or groups. She argues that, “many of the writings on women
and Islam discuss specific practices without any meaningful references to Islamic fundamentalism, one of the most potent ideological, political and philosophical challenges of our time to feminism and the feminist concept of women’s individual autonomy and the right to choose” (Moghissi, 1999: 43-46). Moghissi’s main concern is the ignorance of anti-Orientalist scholars who, according to her, abandoned women to the rule of fundamentalist regimes for the sake of respecting cultural difference and cultural authenticity. Concerned with the treatment of women who choose not to veil, Moghissi asserts that “in the name of validating women’s ‘self perceptions’ and ‘hearing women’s own voices’, only the voices of particular groups of women are heard and that then these voices are broadcast as the unanimous expression of ‘women in Islamic societies’. She draws attention to the danger in this, which is to help make the severe boundaries of fundamentalism look soft (Moghissi, 1999:41-43).

While some scholars such as Fatwa El Guindi and Leila Ahmed draw attention to the empowering character of the veil in some contexts, some others such as El Saadawi and Moghissi draw attention to its oppressive character. Although all these scholars have Middle Eastern backgrounds, they have different perspectives on this subject, which gives a clue about both the varied perceptions and the multifaceted character of the veil. As the practice and the meaning of the veil change from one place to another and from one woman to another, the empowerment and oppression that are attributed to the veil in different contexts depend on the context in which it is viewed. I would suggest that a statement that favors any of these sides would not be quite defensible. Factors such as class, education, family structure, place of residence (urban/rural), etc. need to be considered. Moreover, one should keep in mind that current social, economic and
political trends also affect people and cultures, as neither of these is stable in any time and space.

The veil would definitely mean oppression for a woman who is forced to wear the veil, while it would mean part of her attire for a woman who is an observant Muslim, and who believes that it is a religious requirement. On the other hand, it can be a powerful tool for a woman who is newly veiled for political reasons, as in the case of Iran where previously unveiled women wore the veil and marched in the streets, in solidarity with women who refuse to unveil after the Shah’s imposition of mandatory unveiling. In this regard, it would probably not be wrong to say that forcing a woman to unveil is as oppressive as forcing a woman to veil. Thus, not the face but the agency behind the veil also gains a great importance. Then in order to make a healthy analysis about the meaning or the function of the veil one needs to look for the agency. Are the women themselves agents when they veil or fight to veil or unveil? Or is it men, culture, or politics that function as agents? And, probably more importantly, how do the women who are involved in these situations view all of these issues attached to the veil? I will come back to these questions while examining the Turkish case.
CHAPTER 3

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TURKISH MODERNIZATION

I. HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

My dear! We, Turkish women, are not known in Europe at all. I can even say that we are much less known than Chinese and Japanese women. Regardless of how far Peking and Tokyo are from Paris... Istanbul is nearby, though. They make up really unimaginable stories about us. Not important! They anticipate us to be slaves, to be imprisoned in rooms, to live only behind lattice windows, to be chained up and watched over by ferocious black and other slaves who are armed from head to foot and who are also thought to put us into sacks and then throw us into the Bosphorus from time to time. We are assumed to live in a group of numerous rivaling wives, and they expect every Turkish man to have a harem of his own, that is to have at least eight or ten wives

Princess Seniha Sultan

In her letter to her French friend Madame Simone de la Cherte, dated 30 December 1910, Princess Seniha Sultan complains about how Turkish women were known (or not known) in Europe. Whether she was aware of the concept or not, Seniha Sultan complains about Western Orientalism. This letter was written seventy years after the first radical improvements in women’s lives came about in Turkey in 1839 through the declaration of Tanzimat Fermani. The letter was written after the Second

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6 Tanzimat Fermani is the reformation decree of the Ottoman Sultan.
Constitutional Revolution, generated in 1908 and granting women further rights, but before the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 which initiated more “radical” reforms for women. In Europe, on the other hand, this was the time of the “new woman” or the “modern woman”. In other words, it was the time when women became “liberated.”

Today, as we enter the twenty-first century, it is very common to hear or read Turkish women, both scholars and citizens, expressing similar concerns. It seems as though Turkish women have not been able to “catch up” with their European counterparts yet, no matter how many revolutions they have been through and no matter how many want to be among those who define themselves as European. This description is partly true, yet also problematic, since every analysis has applied European measures to Turkey since the nineteenth century, forgetting about the Islamic and Middle Eastern characteristics of the space itself. This in turn is because, since the first revolutions, the official policies of the Turkish State have been leaning towards the West/European, and not the East/Islamic, World. More importantly, women have always been at the center of this debate, situated as the reference point of civilization and modernization or tradition.

In order to understand Turkey’s various interpretations of modernity in general, and secularism in particular, it is necessary to investigate both the discourse of the Turkish Republic, and the heritage of the Ottoman Empire.
Ottoman Empire and Ottoman Women Prior to the Reform Periods

Until the founding of the Turkish Republic in the early twentieth century, the Ottoman Sultan held the position of the caliphate\(^7\), and Ottoman law was based on the Islamic law (sharia).\(^8\) It is important however to mention the complex character of the Ottoman administration here in order to understand the applications of the Ottoman law. As Mardin points out, the "two-headed" system of administration was divided territorially (meaning it was divided into provinces) and religiously (meaning Muslims, Christians and Jews had their own internal administration, that governed their civil matters). In other words, the Ottoman laws that governed the civil affairs of Muslims included the Muslim community, regardless of their nationality (Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Albanians, and Circassians), but not the people of other religions (Mardin, 1993: 355).

Keeping this fact in mind, the laws regarding women’s rights and mobility were applied to Muslim women of the Empire. In the most general sense, the Ottoman laws that governed Muslim women’s lives, in the public sphere and to some extent in the private sphere, were based on inequity and separation of the two sexes. The laws that regulated women’s lives were mostly about their public appearance and public behavior, which demarcated the private sphere from the public sphere rigidly. Until the 1844 census, it was only men who were counted for demographic reasons (Alkan, 1990:86-87).


\(^8\) Shariah is defined as "the canonical law of Islam as put forth in the Koran and the Sunnah and elaborated by the analytical principles of the four orthodox schools, the Shafii, Hanbali, Hanafi, and Maliki, together with that of the Shiites, the Jafari. Cyril Glasse, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991). However, "The realities of social life have never exactly reflected the sharia, the ideal Muslim Law corresponding to God’s will. This is true not only in regard to the ritual provisions of this Law, but also and even more so in regard to its juridical aspects. It is not of course, the modern reforms of Muslim law in various countries that are envisaged here, but the survival of pre-Islamic custom (ada or urf)." *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, Ada (A.) custom, customary law. (CD-ROM Edition v.1.1, 2001).
women had the right to own land and inherit, however, they were only granted half as much as men. Polygamy was allowed and the husband could easily divorce his wife, at least on a theoretical level. Children were under the legal guardianship of the father. Women (upper and middle class) were not allowed to work outside the home, were not allowed to go out freely and when they did - had to veil (Berktay, 1994: 19).

However, in terms of women’s mobility and empowerment two points have to be made clear regarding the Ottoman period. First, it is important to distinguish between urban and rural, and also the upper and middle classes (elite) and the lower class of the society. For instance, men with limited livelihood did not have the same material sources to afford more than one wife, thus monogamous marriage was the common practice among lower class people. Similarly, as rural family members worked side by side in fields and homes, seclusion was not practiced as firmly. Besides, customary laws that were mostly derived from pre-Islamic traditions, rather than the official Ottoman law, were practiced more extensively in places apart from the centers of the Ottoman Empire. Likewise, lower class women and slaves worked outside in palaces, other wealthy homes and home workshops.

It is also important to point out that Ottoman women were not absolutely powerless. Within their boundaries, (which is the inside of palaces, harems or konaks and yalts in the elite Ottoman women’s case) they had hierarchical powers as the wife or the mother to manage the household and the lower range of women and household employees (Berktay, 1994:19). Furthermore, as mother and wife of the Sultan, women

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9 Konak is as a large house or a mansion, and yali is the waterside version of a mansion. They both refer to the residences of the Ottoman Elite.
held powerful positions, thus even affecting the Sultan in his decisions. Overall, although Ottoman women’s rights and mobilization were limited by law and also by customs, as opposed to men, they held some sort of power as wives and mothers in their private domain. Since the reforms that changed Muslim women’s lives began in urban areas among elite women (in the public sphere), I mostly refer to this segment of Muslim women for my purposes.

Modernization and Changes in Women’s Lives in the Ottoman Empire

In its most general sense, the modernization process began in the eighteenth century with the reorganization of the military, which was a result of the need for a solution to territorial losses and administrative problems in the Ottoman Empire. However, the first radical changes in women’s lives came in the nineteenth century beginning in 1839 with the declaration of Tanzimat Fermanı. The word Tanzimat refers to a period in Turkish history (1839-1878) during which a considerable number of Western-inspired political and social reforms were carried out. As Şerif Mardin states:

When, on November 3, 1839, Mustafa Reşid Paşa, then the Foreign Minister, walked up to a podium in the middle of the Imperial Park of Gülhane and read to the dignitaries of the Porte and the foreign diplomats summoned for the occasion the Imperial Charter known as the Hatt-i Hümâyûn of Gülhane, all those present realized that an important step had been taken in the direction of the modernization of the Ottoman Empire. The reaction of Europe was prompt and enthusiastic. To many Europeans, it seemed the Sultan was suddenly falling in with the contemporary inclination of formerly wicked monarchs to grant their people a constitution. This undoubtedly was, in their opinion, “a good thing” and represented no mean achievement in the direction of Westernization (Mardin, 2000: 155).

The Tanzimat reformers saw a parallel between the backward position of women and the backwardness of the Ottoman Empire in the eyes of the West. During this period,
even though the legislative improvement concerning women was limited, some important developments took place in the areas of education, intellectual life, family life, clothing, public appearance and behavior. It is probably accurate to say that new educational opportunities affected women’s lives more than anything else. The first junior high school for girls (1858), the women’s teachers’ college (1870), and the first arts and crafts schools were established during the Tanzimat Era.

Another process that affected the social life of this era was the economic integration with the West, which came to be essential for the survival of the Ottoman State. In 1838, right before the Tanzimat was declared, a commercial treaty was signed between Britain and the Ottoman State. Thus, European consumer goods came to the urban areas of the Empire and some European styles such as clothing were adopted first by the non-Muslims of the Empire, then gradually by the upper class Muslims.

The most important characteristic of Tanzimat was the “equality” that was promised between Muslims and non-Muslims, and between men and women. Before Tanzimat, the non-Muslims of the Empire did not have the same political and legislative rights as the Muslims. Inspired by the “equal rights” movements of the French Revolution, the reformers of Tanzimat based their reforms on “equality” of all peoples and both sexes of the society. Similarly, French laws were used as models in many regulations of the new period.

Tanzimat created two new kinds of women who were not familiar to Ottoman society until then: the working woman and the intellectual woman. Until that point, women were regarded solely as housewives and mothers (İşin, 1988: 22). Furthermore, since the developers of Tanzimat thought saw women’s emancipation as crucial in order
to integrate with Europe both economically and socially, they considered improving women’s lives to be essential to the process of modernization.

Women first began to express themselves through the press. In 1868, the newspaper *Terakki* published anonymous letters that were sent by women. These letters complained about unfair practices towards women. For example, one letter questions why men get better seats in the ferryboats although they pay the same price as women. Another woman, who was illiterate and had somebody write the letter for her, questions polygamy. The first women’s magazine appeared in 1869 and mostly published letters from women, again anonymously. The letters are mostly complaints regarding inequities between men and women, and stress the importance of education. This magazine was followed by others that aimed to improve women’s household lives and general knowledge. However, the first entirely female owned and staffed magazine *Şükifezar* came out in 1886, and for the first time women used their own name instead of their fathers’ or husbands’ names in the writings. In August 1895, a magazine called *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (literally A Newspaper for Women) published its first issue. Although the owner of this magazine was a man who was the head columnist of another newspaper, the head columnist and almost all the writers of Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete were women. This magazine was the longest published women’s magazine between 1895 and 1908, publishing a total of 604 issues in 13 years. (Çakır, 1994: 23-27).

The writings of this and other magazines that originated in this period were mostly about womanly duties and maternal concerns. As in the European case, women did not have political rights at that time and maternalist ideas helped them to enter the public sphere. As Seth Koven and Sonya Michel put it:
Maternalists not only concerned themselves with the welfare and rights of women and children but also generated searching critiques of state and society... Maternalism always operated on two levels: it extolled private virtues of domesticity while simultaneously legitimating women’s public relationships to politics and the state, to community, workplace, and marketplace. In practice, maternalist ideologies often challenged the constructed boundaries between public and private, women and men, state and civil society (Koven, 1990:1077).

Although the first modernization attempts, the Tanzimat Regulations (1839) were initiated by Sultan Abdulmecit (1839-1861) and his vizier Mustafa Reşit Paşa, the intellectual thought of the Tanzimat period emerged in the 1860s, when a group of Turkish intellectuals, called Young Ottomans (or New Ottomans) became known for their political ideas.

The Second Constitutional period (1908-1919) began with the Young Turk coup in 1908, which ended the brutal regime of Sultan Abdülhamit (1876-1908). The Young Turks, emerging along with the Turkish nationalistic movements at the end of the nineteenth century, inherited Young Ottoman thought to some extent, but with one important difference. The common focus of the Young Ottomans\textsuperscript{10} was the desire to free the Ottoman Empire of its inferior position in its relations with the West and make the Ottoman state a constitutional one. However, the Young Turks wanted to dismiss the Ottoman State and establish a Turkish State. As the official organization of the revolution, “The Committee on Union and Progress” formulated the “New Life” ideology, which required radical changes in the social structure and norms of Ottoman society. Turkish nationalistic ideology considered the emancipation of women as one of the prerequisites of the “New Life” and defined a “certain model of woman”, or “New

\textsuperscript{10}The Young Ottomans were either dismissed from their governmental jobs or were sent in exile in 1876, when Sultan Abdülhamit dismissed the Parliament (Mardin, 2000).
Woman” as determined by their nationalistic ideology. Therefore, the nationalistic character of the Young Turks movement affected the new women’s movement in major ways. This bias was carried out throughout the founding years of the Turkish Republic as well, since the Young Turks were considered to be its intellectual source.

Many women joined the Young Turks in the National Liberation Movement as ammunition carriers, nurses and even soldiers. The most prominent of these women, Halide Edib, became one of the most significant symbols of the Turkish independence movement.

You are the first woman in Turkish history to be honored with a death sentence for political treason,” an officer arriving from Istanbul told a fellow nationalist fighter, Halide Edib, as he bowed low to kiss her hand.” An eminent writer and the daughter of a palace official, Halide was one of seven leading nationalists to be condemned by the Sultan for inciting the Turks to resist his surrender to the Allied powers, after World War I. (Minai, 1981: 62).

Halide Edib joined the struggle in various front lines during the Independence War and was honored with corporal and major ranks. She was one of the advocates of Turkish nationalism, and also a prominent writer and educator of her time. Although she was educated in Western schools and her thoughts were formed under the influence of Western ideas, she remained strongly connected to her Turkish and Muslim roots. Especially after the war years, when she saw the ‘bad side of the West’, she not only considered the Ottomans equal to the West, but even greater than the West.

By the proclamation of the Second Constitution (1908), not only did the number of women’s magazines grow, but women also started to write in other daily newspapers. In these newspapers and in many women’s magazines, women began to express feminist ideas regarding women’s rights, women’s issues, and politics, and embraced the European style of fashion, clothing and so on.
The number of working women also increased after 1908. Before this date, in the Ottoman era, women basically worked as handicraft workers, and carpet weavers usually in home workshops. After the revolution, women began to work under very severe conditions in factories in various industries, such as tobacco, leather, fabric, and the silk industry. Along with the hard conditions of war and revolution, this participation in the labor force led them to take important roles in strikes (Güzel, 1985: 868-869).

Although the family law remained under the control of Sharia, several changes were made regarding inheritance, religious courts and marriage, such as raising the marriage age for girls to 16. Furthermore, women were encouraged to involve themselves in social events, and middle and upper class women began to be visible in the public domain, both socially and politically. Girls were included in compulsory primary education in 1913, and teachers’ training colleges provided the first higher education for girls, whose opportunities were expanded to attending Istanbul University in 1914 (Zürcher, 1998: 126).

Like their Western counterparts, Turkish women gained respect and rights, thanks to the wars. The need for women workers increased during the First World War and then also during the Independence War years in Turkey, when men were on the front. Furthermore, during the war years, women also took on ‘manly’ jobs such as construction work and street cleaning as their European and American counterparts of the same period did (Güzel, 1985: 871). The first women’s organization that helped soldiers was established during the Balkan Wars (1911-12).\footnote{The first woman novelist Fatma Aliye Hanım was the president of this organization.} This organization continued to operate throughout the First World War and the Independence War (1919-1923). Since women
played a crucial role during the war years, their image in the larger society changed. From then on, women were no longer considered only through their domestic roles, but also through their public roles to some extent. Women in this period established many other associations and clubs supporting feminist ideas and the improvement of women’s lives in every division of life: education, politics, work etc. Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti, (Women’s Advancement Association) founded by the prominent woman writer Halide Edib, was one such organization that developed close relations with the English suffrage movement (Berktay, 1994: 20).

**Founding of the Turkish Republic: 1920s and 1930s**

The new Turkish republic emerged from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire in 1923. Mustafa Kemal, the leader of the War of Independence, was appointed the president of the new state by the National Assembly, and was determined to shape Turkey into a “modern country”. In the process of modernization, during the period of 1923-1938, a series of radical changes were carried out. The Caliphate and the Islamic law (Sharia) were abolished, and modern western laws were adopted. Medreses (religious schools) and religious courts were closed. Compulsory and free primary education for all children was instituted by law, and co-educational modern schools were opened. The adoption of the Turkish Civil Code in 1926, inspired by the Swiss Code, outlawed polygamy and marriage without the consent of both partners. Divorce was made equally obtainable by either party through civil courts. Inheritance rights were equalized for male and female heirs. The right to own and dispose of their own property was granted to women. The principle of equal pay for equal work regardless of sex was established. The
right to vote and stand in municipal election (1930), and in the national election (1934) was granted to women (Browning, 1985: 1).

II. THE ORIGINS OF INTERNAL ORIENTALISM

Young Ottomans, the intellectual leaders of the first reform period in the Ottoman Empire, criticized the “secularism” of the Tanzimat reforms, but still were inspired by similar Western ideas of progress as they attempted to formulate the modernization process in terms of Islamic values and principles. This is why Young Ottoman thought is important in understanding today’s controversy over modernization and religion. Serif Mardin points out the significance of the Young Ottomans in his book, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*:

There is hardly a single area of modernization in Turkey today, from the simplification of the written language to the idea of fundamental civil liberties, that does not take its roots in the pioneering work of the Young Ottomans. Paradoxically, any serious attempt to reinject Islam into the foundations of Turkish state, were it to appear today, would also have to look back to their time. This is so because the Young Ottomans were at one and the same time the first men to make the ideas of the Enlightenment part of the intellectual equipment of the Turkish reading public and the first thinkers to try to work out a synthesis between these ideas and Islam (Mardin, 2000: 4).

Has this synthesis ever taken place in Turkey? Was/is it possible? According to Serif Mardin it did not come true in the Young Ottomans’ time. As he points out in his book, “the Young Ottomans did not realize that the modern Western theory of representation depended on a belief in the intrinsic worth of the subjective will of the individual. Neither Islamic nor Ottoman consultative practices rested on such a basis” (Mardin, 2000: 399). In any case, whether it was logically possible or not, the Young Ottomans could not achieve their modernist Islamist synthesis in the short time before
Sultan Abdulhamit II suspended the constitution and dismissed the Ottoman parliament in 1878 within a year of its establishment. It would not be wrong to suggest that today’s debate on religion and modernization in Turkey started about a hundred and fifty years ago and continued during the founding years of the new Turkish Republic as well.

On the other hand, despite his intention to create a modern nation like the Western ones, Kemal Atatürk's secularism was not exactly of the western kind that decrees a separation of Church and State. According to Mardin:

Laicism was a concept which emerged from French constitutional practice in the nineteenth century and referred to the necessity that the state refrain from lending its positive support to any one religious denomination. It was considered to have been fully achieved in France in 1905 with the definitive separation of Church and State. In Turkey, laicism amounted to more than the official disestablishment of religion, since Muslims did not dispose of an autonomous religious institution such as the Catholic Church, which could carry its religious functions independently of the state. In France, religion and the state already operated on two distinct institutional registers and were eventually separated in the law of the land. In Turkey, a limb of the state was torn out of its body when laicism became the state policy. This is the reason why Turkish secularization is considered a momentous achievement (Mardin, 1993: 347).

In this sense, the new Republic did not have an environment for free expressions of religious belief in public structures. As Mardin notes, “although in a general sense the experiment in the westernization of Turkish culture has had great success since the 1930s, this is the very point where a note of pessimism has to be introduced” (Mardin, 1993: 371). The revival of Islam, starting from the transformation of Turkey into a multi-party democracy in the 1950s, was the other side of this coin. Thus, the Islamic awakening in Turkey can be seen as a reaction to the suppression of religious expression in the public realm and to some extent a response to the modernization project of the Turkish Republic since its founding years. In this matter, Mardin emphasizes the social changes in Turkey, such as the growing population and influence of media, and draws attention to the
increasing social mobilization of people which "increased the insecurity of the men who have been projected out of their traditional setting. This insecurity is sometimes 'cognitive' and appears as a search for a convincing political leadership or a bountiful economic system. Here Islam assumes an ideological guise and competes with marxism" (Mardin, 1993: 372-73).

One important characteristic of the revolutionary reforms is that they never extended to the rural Turkish women as quickly or completely as they did to urban women. This was the case during the Ottoman reform periods, as they were initiated among urban, upper-middle class male intellectuals and then were joined by their female counterparts. Among others, a few factors can be mentioned here in terms of urban/rural difference of applications of reforms. First, urban and rural lives were based on different practices and needs. Second, changes that happened in urban settings did not reach rural areas, because of the lack of transportation and communication. Even if they reached rural people to some extent, they did not have the same meanings for them, thus keeping them from applying the changes to their lives. The initiators of the reforms were the educated elite, while the rural population was largely illiterate and did not have access to either education or to written material. Nevertheless, during the Republican period, in order to fill this gap and establish connections between the urban and the rural and to transfer information and projects to the masses, the People's Houses (Halkevleri) were founded in 1932. In addition, People's Rooms (Halkodalari) were established in 1940, in smaller towns and villages. In spite of that, the historically great gap between the urban and rural parts of the society remains a fact even today. In many aspects, women's lives have still not changed drastically in rural settings. Village women work in fields side by
side with men as they did long ago. Similarly, rural people practice many traditions of hundreds of years ago, such as social activities, and rituals. Once women go and begin to live in urban areas, they then experience some changes in their lives. Once they go to school or enter professional lives, they meet with newer concepts and gradually adopt at least some of them. This has been happening in Turkey in the last fifty years or so. Therefore, as opposed to the early years of the Republic, rapid urbanization of the last several decades increased the urban population, thus giving way to a different kind of rural/urban populace with different aspects, needs, and various levels of adaptation of modernization.

As Western modernization was adapted by the newly founded Turkish Republic, so was the Orientalism that it created. The Turkish modernizing elite began to look at the Turkish society from a Westerner's eye, thus creating an internal Orientalism that still lives on in today's Turkey. This discourse finds ground not only among the modernizing elite (meaning the state elite, bureaucrats, and technocrats) but also among "modernized people" (meaning upper and middle class, well educated, mostly urban and white-collar professionals). This fact remains today on various levels as the divider of society into the camps of modern and traditional, secular and religious, Western and Eastern. In the next chapter, I will explore the reflections of this division on the headscarf issue in Turkey.
Atatürk’s Republican People’s Party ruled from 1925 to 1945, and after a transition period to multi-party democracy, the Democrat Party was elected to establish the government in 1950. When the Democrat Party lost some of its support in the 1957 elections, due mostly to an economic crisis, the party leaders hoped to gain it back by exploiting religious feelings. Although they did not undermine the secular basis of the state, during this time, the restrictions on the expression of religious feelings were relaxed, religious education was extended, the number of schools for clergy and mosques increased, and religious organizations such as brotherhoods were legalized (Zürcher, 1998: 243-245). As Zürcher puts it:

The relaxation of secularist policies under the DP made Islam much more prominent in everyday life in the cities, where the culture of the countryside was anyway becoming more visible through massive urbanization. Turkish intellectuals at the time -and later- saw this as a resurgence of Islam, but although there were fundamentalist groups at work, it was really only the existing traditional culture of the mass of the population, the former subject class, reasserting its right to express itself (Zürcher, 1998: 245).

Whether it is called Islamic resurgence or reasserting the culture, the Islamic character of Turkish society that had been suppressed in the public domain by the secularist,
modernist state of the Turkish Republic awakened during this time. This trend has continued in various forms through today. The ‘Turkish-Islamic Synthesis’ ideology of the Aydınlar Ocağı (Hearths of the Enlightened) influenced many right wing politicians, including even some military leaders starting from the 1970s. As socialism and communism were considered to be the biggest enemies of the Turkish Republic, religion was used in the political agenda to attract the masses as opposition to these political ideas and movements. From the 1980s on, religious schools, the building of new mosques, and Islamic publications increased enormously. Rapid migration to the big cities created a new kind of urban/rural population with different needs, which attracted the right wing parties, especially the Islamist ones. This along with other elements helped the rise of political Islam during this period. By the middle of the 1980s, the debates about Islamic revival and secularism were focused on the headscarf issue, when the ban on wearing the headscarf in public buildings and universities was creating a lot of tension, especially between university administrations and Islamist students.

Since Turkey is considered one of the few countries in the whole Muslim world that has practiced liberal democracy for a long time, the headscarf issue has also taken on international importance. As Andrew Davison puts it, “Taking place on the geographic edge of the Islamic world and Europe, between East and West, the dialogue over the meanings and ends of secularization and modernization since the founding of the laicist republic in the 1920s has had world historical significance both for Turks and for interpreters of Turkey” (Davison, 1998: 9).
From Traditional to Modern: To What Extent?

The traditional Islamic way of life required women to be invisible at least in the public domain. On the other hand, the modernization project required them to be as visible as men, at least on a theoretical level. As Zehra Arat points out, "Once Europe became 'modern' and asserted its hegemony over other regions, it fixed both the parameters and paradigms of modernity". Parallel to this conception of culture and modernity, "Turkish culture" has been characterized as a "traditional Islamic culture" that changed very little for centuries (Arat, 1999: 6). In order for traditional Turkish society to become Western, it would have to change its "backward" appearance into a modern one. In this path, freeing the women from their veils and houses, in other words pulling them from their private (mahrem) sphere into the public sphere, was one of the most important steps. According to this Western perception, modernity could only be achieved if women were emancipated from Islamic traditions, and roles.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Republican reforms that affected women were embraced rapidly by urban, upper-middle class, and somewhat educated women and men of Turkish society, since they had already been exposed to these new ideas, imported European styles, etc. In fact, this part of society played a role in the establishment of these ideas, which led to reforms during the founding years of the Turkish Republic. However, as mentioned earlier, the lives of traditional women in urban and rural areas did not change to the same extent. Rather, traditional lifestyles remained mostly as they were in rural areas, while in cities modern and traditional have survived in their somewhat divided realms.
Traditional Veiling versus Islamist Veiling and Arguments on Private/Public Spheres

It is important to define various types of veiling in order to understand the different interpretations of it in Turkey and elsewhere. In Turkey, one can distinguish between the traditional veiling of the Turkish women and the veiling of “Islamist” women. Although there is variety in traditional veiling, the clothing is not intended to cover the whole body to make it invisible. The difference is in the practice of dressing. In other words, some women dress in a more “liberal” way, while others dress in a more “conservative” way. The most common thing for all of them is the headscarf, which covers only the head and some part of the neck. This headscarf may leave some part of the hair out, again depending on the woman (or in many cases, woman’s husband or family) being more “liberal” or “conservative” in the dressing. On the other hand, the “headscarf” worn by Islamist women is different from this traditional headcovering. As Aynur İlyasoğlu explains, “The new veiling of today’s Islamist women is based on the principles of tesettür, the Islamic dress code for women as proclaimed by the current Islamist movement and ideology. This kind of veiling requires the complete concealing of the hair, the bosom, the arms, the legs, and the curvatures of the body” (İlyasoğlu, 1999: 244). Thus, Islamists consider traditional veiling as yarım tesettür (half covering), as opposed to tesettür which, from their point of view, is the appropriate way of covering.

12 My use of the word “Islamist” does not embody a negative connotation, as it may for some. I use it, because it is the most widely used term among intellectuals of both Islamists and secularists.
According to many Islamists, women with yarım tesettür "have not reached the same level of religious consciousness as the younger and better educated generation of believers" (Özdalga, 1998: xvii).

Veiling as the Symbol of the Islamist Movement in 1980s and 1990s

Before all these debates, the practice of wearing the headscarf was not so complex; the message of the statement “her head is covered” was that the woman was somewhat traditional, usually uneducated, and most of the time non-professional. However, the meanings that the headscarf represented have changed tremendously and gained different dimensions in the last two decades.

After the 1980 military coup, the National Security Council - the military government - closed all political parties and trade unions. Although there has never been a law prohibiting head covering, regulations related to clothing of civil servants have always been in practice. The first regulations that prohibited headcovering in schools were brought about by the National Security in 1982 through the decisions of the YÖK (the Council of Higher Education). After parliamentary democracy was restored in 1983, Turkish politics in general became more Islamic in character. Religious notions have been used more extensively by the right wing political parties and the governments since the 1980s, to attract the masses after an unstable period and also to challenge the left. Triggered by the prohibition of headcovering and supported by the Islamic rising of the 1980s and 1990s, the so-called veiling movement found the ground to proceed.

It is not only the form of veiling that distinguishes the Islamist students from traditional religious people. They are also different from their traditional parents, as
Nilüfer Göle notes, "not only because of their higher educational level but, most important, because of the fact that they reject traditional interpretations of Islam. They embody the urban, educated, and militant new countenance of Islam" (Göle, 1996: 88).

The common characteristics of the new Islamist women are very distinct from those of traditional veiled women. These women either attend a university or hold a degree from a university and are engaged in gainful employment. They are either city-born or have been living in urban areas for a long time. (İlyasoğlu, 1994: 93). Another important point is that most of the first wave Islamist women began veiling during their university years. The first wave of Islamist women attracted the most attention and in a way portrayed the "newly veiled woman" in the 1980’s no matter what their individual perceptions were about certain aspects of Islam and the Islamic way of life. This wave was characterized by the protests of university students who attempted to enter classes with their head covered in spite of the ban. It is important however to point out the fact that Islamist women today vary in their perceptions, as they probably did to some extent even among the first wave of veiled university students in the 1980s.

Islamists, considering the headscarf as a symbol of identity, defined the ban on it as an injustice to people who are simply practicing their religious requirements. One of the main characteristics of these protests by the 1990s was that the Islamist protesters started to raise a universal human rights discourse instead of just the religious arguments. For instance, on March 3, 1999, religious students organized a meeting at the historic Beyazıt Square. The pro-Islamic newspaper Akit’s headline was “Honorable Resistance of the Students: The Unity of the Students Against Oppression was Supported by the People” (March 4, 1999). However, as it was represented in the secularist media, the
boycotts and protest demonstrations for the right to wear the headscarf were perceived by others as symbols of radical Islam, which eventually aimed to ruin the Turkish Republic and establish a state based on the Islamic law.

In her book *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling*, Nilüfer Gôle explores the significance of “the veiling movement” in Turkey, where the headscarf issue has come to represent a number of debates: secular/Islamist, modern/traditional, Western/Eastern and so on. She writes:

> No other symbol than the veil reconstructs with such force the “otherness” of Islam to the West. Women’s bodies and sexuality reappear as a political site of difference and resistance to the homogenizing and egalitarian forces of Western modernity. The contemporary veiling of Muslim women underscores the insurmountability of boundaries between Islamic and Western civilization... Hence as a contemporary emblem for the Islamicization of a way of life and the politicization of religion, Islamic veiling cross-cuts power relations between Islam and the West, modernity and tradition, secularism and religion, as well as between men and women and women themselves (Gôle, 1999: 1).

As Reşat Kasaba points out, “Islamists find the goals of Kemalist modernization intrinsically antithetical to the essential qualities of Muslim culture, of which they see the people of Turkey as an integral part. They argue that under Atatürk, Muslims in Turkey were cut off from their religious tradition by force” (Kasaba, 1997:17). Nilüfer Gôle puts it this way:

> The contemporary Islamist movement recreates the Muslim identity, erased in the collective memory by modernism, in a collective vein and turns it into a social actor. This process, which has accelerated since the 1980s, in fact began, along with the formation of the civil society, in the 1950s. Behind the political rise of the Islamic movements lies the upward mobility of new social groups and their increasing social participation. (Gôle, 1996: 132-3)
Ali Bulanç, a leading figure among Muslim intellectuals in Turkey, an Islamist with his own definition\(^\text{13}\), views any kind of reconciliation between religion and modernism as impossible. He notes that “the incompatibilities between religion and modernism are based on totally different interpretations of the earth and the world which are manifest in all problems related to the human, the meaning of life, the rules of the world and of social relationships.” Moreover, Bulanç suggests that, while in the last three hundred years modernism gained power as opposed to religion, after the second half of the twentieth century religion regained its power as opposed to modernism and thus attracted attention of people who were aware of the crisis of modernity (Bulanç 1990: 255-56)\(^\text{14}\).

As in other Muslim countries, the Islamic movement in Turkey has different camps. However, the most important Islamic political wave works within one legal organization, namely the Virtue Party (previously the Welfare Party). Despite its anti-Western discourse, the Virtue Party uses “the most Western” techniques in its party organizations and campaigns, with materials such as widely distributed videos and colorful publications, and adoption of popular songs in their election campaigns. Moreover, most of the Virtue Party leaders do not appear different from Western politicians. In this regard, it would not be wrong to suggest that a synthesis of Islamic rhetoric and policies with Western political techniques is embedded within the Virtue Party. Virtue Party activists, both men and women, go door to door in slums and alleys across the country, offering help to the millions of Turks living in poverty. Tea parties

\(^{13}\) Ali Bulanç defines himself as Islamist in Ahmet Hakan Coşkun, Ali Bulanç ile İslamcılık Üzerine, (With Ali Bulanç on Islamism), (İstanbul: Eylül Yayınları, 2001), 16.

\(^{14}\) All Ali Bulanç references are in Turkish. Translations are mine.
among female volunteers and supporters of the Party have probably provided the initial step into politics for many Islamist activist women in the last two decades.

“Örtümüz ümüz özgürlüğüümüzdür” (Our veil is our freedom)

Islamist women have created a model to integrate the basics of modernity such as higher education and human rights discourse with their Islamic faith. Carrying the banners that say “Örtümüz özgürlüğümüzdür,” “Our veil is our freedom”, during the protests against the headscarf ban in the universities is one example of this combination model. In this way, the headscarf issue has been presented as a Western-type human rights issue in well-known urban centers like İstanbul and Ankara.

The headscarf crisis reached its peak point when a woman with her headscarf was elected as a representative and refused to take her scarf off in order to serve in the Parliament. In the 1999 general elections, twenty-four women were elected to Parliament from various political sides in Turkey. The pro-Islamic Virtue Party won 15% of the votes, going down six points from the 1995 elections, and became the third party. Although it had a lesser share in Parliament, the Virtue Party was still at the center of the debates due to the women members who had been elected. The Virtue Party had nominated seventeen women, eight of whom wore headscarves. One of them was Merve Kavakçı, a US educated computer engineer elected from Istanbul, (Akit, February 25, 1999). Even before the swearing-in ceremony, political tension was rising. Kavakçı declared: “If our nation wants to send me to the Parliament, this will be their decision... I will carry the voice of women and youth there” (Akit, March 10, 1999). Although there is no written rule banning women from covering their head in the Grand National
Assembly, the deputy Nesrin Ünal from the Nationalist Action Party (a party of the extreme right) took her scarf off, while Merve Kavakçı refused to do so.

Appearing in her scarf, Kavakçı was applauded by the members of her party during the swearing-in ceremony while the members of secular bloc shouted at her: “Out, out”. The leader of the secular bloc in the Turkish Parliament, Bülent Ecevit, cautioned: “This is not a place to challenge the secular Turkish state. Religion should not be mixed with politics” (Radikal, May 3, 1999). The next day, former President Demirel openly condemned the incident and called Merve Kavakçı an “agent provocateur,” verbalizing the secularist concerns of the military-dominated National Security Council.

The worst attacks on Kavakçı were directed at her American citizenship, gained through her American husband whom she later divorced. The center-left leaning Radikal published the original information about her American citizenship, writing: “She was Caught” as a headline (Radikal, May 13, 1999). The fact that Kavakçı took the American oath of allegiance without informing the Turkish authorities became a major issue in all the Turkish media.

Kemalists vs. Islamists

The whole story was defined as a “lynching” within the pro-Islamic media. One newspaper announced: “We love you Merve. Thousands of thanks to you...When they put Prophet Abraham into the great mountain of fire, he survived. Just like Abraham we are all being examined now: You and the ones who voted for you...” (Akit, May 10, 1999). The same day, she was chosen as “the mother of the year” by the Women’s Platform of the Capital City (an Islamist women’s organization). A group of women who themselves
wore the headscarf gave flowers to Kavakçı's mother with a note: “we support you in your democracy struggle.” However, after they left, Kemalist protests took place in Kavakçı’s neighborhood, stating, “we will not allow this kind of show-off in our neighborhood” (Akit and Radikal, May 10, 1999). After this period, Merve Kavakçı, who had not officially been sworn in, was stripped of her Turkish citizenship by a quick decision of the Turkish government in May 13, 1999 (Bizim Gazete, May 17, 1999).

Secularist women’s organizations joined the secularist bloc in condemning Merve Kavakçı for her act in the Parliament. According to one newspaper the president of the Association of Women Politicians (Kadın Siyasetçiler Derneğі / KASİDE), announced that “No one has ever entered the National Assembly with their head covered for 75 years. Will a woman violate a custom that has been in use for 75 years? Merve Kavakçı cannot repay Atatürk this way.” In another condemnation, the president of the Association of Women Lawyers of Turkey (Türkiye Hukukçu Kadınlar Derneği) stated, “One cannot swear in by an ideological symbol in a state of law. We condemn those who attempt to violate the principles of the Republic” (Bizim Gazete, May 6 1999).

Merve Kavakçı defines herself and her position as follows:

In my understanding, “politics” means being aware of what is going on around us and being active in social affairs. So I don’t take the word “politics” to mean only being involved in the political arena, or being active as either a member of the parliament or as a government official... I come from a very democratic, rational, and civilized background, and in my family people do not impose their ideas on one another. Our convictions are demonstrated through our actions and everyone is free to choose (Interview with Kavakçi in Muslims in American Public Square, 2000:99,102).

Kavakçı is, in a way, inviting all women into the sphere of politics, which does not fit into the space of traditional Muslim women. In İlyasoğlu’s words:
The new veiling is a demarcating symbol that serves to outline Islamist gender identity. It is Islamic, as prescribed in Koran, but it also marks the move from the “traditional woman image” to the “enlightened Muslim woman.” It reflects the emancipated character of enlightened Muslim women, because this enables them to participate in public life through a process of re-socialization. (Ilyasoğlu, 1999: 258).

The Puzzle of the State of Being Modern

From the Western feminist point of view, the Islamist women’s place may still seem steps behind men, regardless of their militarism or activism, as their roles are defined more or less strictly in both public and private spheres. However, the newly veiled women vary in their perceptions, too. While some are more conservative and traditional in their understanding of the world, religious and private and public spheres, some others are more liberal and even somewhat close to the ideas of feminism. While some would even be in favor of Sharia, some others would be completely against it, because to them such a system is “too fanatical, and fanatic people are unable to build a harmonious society.” (Özdalga, 1998: 76). While some accept the superiority of men more or less, some others would share similar ideas and feelings with feminists, and even define themselves as feminist, although this last assertion is rather rare. Although most of them do not define themselves as feminist, many do speak on behalf of women, and to the advantage of women. Heba Ra’uf Ezzat, a teaching assistant in the Political Science Department at Cairo University, asserts “I don’t believe that God wants to humiliate me as a woman”. In her religious attire (with her head and shoulders covered completely) she
defines herself an Islamist, but does not accept “the dominant discourse about women inside the Islamist movement.” She does not consider herself feminist, because she states:

Feminists are secularists who are fighting male domination. Many regard religion as an obstacle to women’s rights and they concentrate on women’s superior or special nature. Conflict is the main concept of their theory that they even want to turn into a paradigm. My effort is quite different and even opposes such ideas. I am not an Islamic feminist. I do believe in Islam as a worldview, and think that women’s liberation in our society should rely on Islam. This necessitates a revival of Islamic thought and a renewal within Islamic jurisprudence (El-Gawhary 2001:99-101).

As for the headscarf, there are those who would value it as part of their deep religious belief that in their eyes obligates them to veil, and would require punishment if not veiled. There are those who would veil just for the love of God, and the headcover itself. There are those who would take off the scarf for the sake of survival in their education or career and somewhat adjust this new situation into their belief. Although in all cases it is the religious belief that leads women to cover, their practice of veiling varies according to their perceptions of not only their religious belief but also how they view other worldly matters.15 The variety occurs in more than one dimension in the Turkish Islamist women’s case. While the women of the first wave Islamist movement changed in time, there emerged new groups of veiled women with different aspects. For instance, one particular group is worth mentioning here. The rise of Islam, and the new veiling of this Islamist movement, influenced many traditional women who did not have anything to do with either university education or politics. These women began to adopt tesettür, giving up their previous practice of yarım tesettür. At this point, revisiting Şerif

15 For a broad analysis of veiling terminology, history, and interviews with veiled women, see Elizabeth Özdalga, The Veiling Issue, Official Secularism and Popular Islam in Modern Turkey. (Surrey: Curzon Press. 1998).
Mardin’s notion of “social mobilization” and “the influence of the mass media” 16 seems helpful, as these two factors, along with others, have been at work in the changing of the Turkish society in various directions.

In Turkey, as elsewhere in the Middle East, both “Islamist” and “modern” women experience the impacts of the transition between private and public spheres. Modern women accept the modern conditions of the public sphere and comply with it, even though their private sphere is not totally transferred into modern conditions, as is the case for many modernized women. Many would still carry out most of the traditional female roles in the private sphere as a wife, mother, sister, and daughter. However, Islamist women reorganize the public sphere when they go into it in their Islamist dress, and in a way, create their own modernization there. By entering professional life or politics, they demand a share in the public sphere, which does not fit into the definition of the traditional woman, rather it fits the modern woman.

If the newly veiled women are also the products of modernity, one should ask, what is the problem then? Didn’t the Turkish modernization project want Turkish women to be modern? According to the above arguments, these veiled women seem to be modern, since they demand a share in the public sphere, and they are educated, visible, active, etc. What keeps them from being considered modern? The simplest answer to this question would be, it is the way they look, or, it is the headscarf that they wear. A more complicated answer would be, it is what the headscarf represents or does not represent which are not welcomed by the official ideology of the Turkish Republic and the

modernist, Westernist elite. It represents a threat to the secularist state; a fear that these kinds of religious tendencies would pull the country into its "Islamic past", thus isolating it from the modern West that has been taken as an example since the first modernization reforms. The headscarf does not represent the Western way, which is, according to the official ideology, the way Turkish women should look, at least in the public domain - because it is something Islamic, and backward in the eye of the Westerner. Therefore, once the Turkish woman (in the public sphere) looks like the Western woman, the Turkish Westernist/secularists can get over their fear to a great extent. Although there is a duality here, too. The modernist Turks would still not want the Turkish women to look too modern, or in other words, they would want to make sure that the Turkish women look culturally appropriate while they look modern enough.

The place that "modern Muslim women" take in the public domain provides them with power, and this creates the fear among the secularists. Although traditional Muslim women are viewed as backward and somewhat symbolize the Islamic aspect of the society in the secularist’s eye, they do not cause any fear, since they do not exist in the public domain. However, Islamist women do exist in each and every area of the public domain, and claim their rights in education, politics, and professional life without giving up their religious attire; this symbolizes Islam in the secularist’s eye.
CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to explore how the issues of modernity and religion intersected with orientalism both in the West and in the East through “the woman question.” It has sought to shed light on the understanding of these concepts and various approaches to them, related to Middle Eastern women’s issues, particularly to the Turkish issue of the headscarf.

Modernity did get into the Middle East and affected many women’s lives. However, there has not been a single modernity that has been in effect. While Middle Eastern cultures created their own modernities with different aspects, the emergence of the “modern Muslim” was inevitable, even though the concept of modern is still considered suspicious by many in Muslim societies. Similarly, although the term feminism, even Islamic feminism, does not seem to find a broad acceptance among Islamist women, it would not be too incautious to suggest that some kind of feminism or gender consciousness mobilization has existed among Islamist women alongside the Western feminism that has found some acceptance among secularist women of the region.

Modernity brought orientalism not only to the West but also to the East. The orientalist distinction of the West and the East first divided the world into these two imagined parts, then it divided people of the same cultures within the East. Looking at all
the debates of modernity, traditions, women’s rights, patriarchy, and the veil from an orientalist point of view has added problems to the study of the women of the Middle East and the societies of the Middle East in general. It also gave way to misunderstandings and prejudice that hindered a better, healthier connection between the Western and Eastern societies. Whatever the perspective is, looking from only one perspective does not seem to be the appropriate way in order to understand the dynamics in the Middle East in terms of women’s issues or anything else. It seems essential for a scholar to base his/her research on the fact that there is not one homogenous Middle East, nor one type of Middle Eastern woman. Thus, a multidimensional analysis for the Westernist seems to be crucial both to understand the Middle East and to connect with it. This has become even more important in our times, as the world has become a “global village” and people have become more and more world residents in the last few decades. Thus, cultures are not pure entities anywhere, any more, if indeed they ever were. They influence one another continuously, and things change—-including people, societies, thoughts and beliefs—due to economic, social and cultural mobilization of our time. By the same token, meanings that are ascribed to a particular identity or community change over time.

Local feminisms, whatever they are called at the local level, seem to work better for many women around the world. It is obvious that every culture has its own aspects, in spite of the fact that cultures influence each other in countless ways, and when it comes to cultures with different religions, these aspects become even more complicated and emphatic, since religion is a very important part of culture. Many Muslim women have been expressing their gender consciousness demands within an Islamic framework, which
encompasses possibilities to bring improvement to Muslim women’s lives in the Middle East. However, this does not mean that their gender-conscious struggle in an Islamic framework is the only way of mobilization that all women in the region have embraced, or should embrace. In other words, there are also countless women who would not identify themselves within an Islamic framework, rather with a Western or hybrid feminism that has already been there and even became local. Also, there are women of other religions in the Middle East who would embrace a framework within their religions. The ideal seems to be for all women to express themselves within the framework of their choices, and to challenge any unjust gender conditions of their societies in favor of women. The main question to ask is, how would any culture or state accommodate different choices? In this regard, democracy seems to be the key, since it is the only regime that would provide such a condition.

The headscarf issue in Turkey has been a test for the Turkish Republic, Turkish democracy, and many secularist men and women of Turkey, and Turkey has not yet passed that test. Modernity and Islam intersect in Turkey as elsewhere in the Middle East, and Islamist women of the last two decades have become the agents of this intersection while their headscarf has become the symbol of it. Islamist women have been paying a price for this, as one always does in any social movement against authority, and their struggle is changing them in many ways, and even empowering them. This struggle should not only be seen as the struggle to wear the headscarf or claim one’s religious identity, but also for women’s empowerment in the public sphere. This is not only an issue of religious vs. secular, but also of women’s claim in the male-dominated public sphere, especially in politics, whether it is among the secularists or the Islamists. As
Islamist women gain power in the public domain, the issue of power distribution among genders becomes part of the agenda among Islamists, too, which makes Islamist women more aware of gender inequality and thus impels their energy to that direction. Similar to modernist men who want Turkish women look modern enough but not “too modern”, perhaps the majority of Islamists men would not like Islamist women to be “too powerful” in the public sphere. I believe this would strengthen the gender consciousness within the Islamist movement, as it has always been the case within the modernist one. Removing Islamist women from the public sphere would help Islamist men to maintain their agenda in the public realm, thus hindering the gender consciousness of this realm.

“New Muslim women” throughout the Middle East might bear the potential to represent a third way, in the intersection of Modernity and Islam, apart from Orientalism and the dangers of Islamic fundamentalism. The need for the Westernist view, either in the West or in the East, to adjust itself to this new situation and find its third way apart from the discourses of Western modernity, Western feminism, and Orientalism and within the possibilities of democracy awaits fulfillment.
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