Secular and Islamic Feminism in Turkey: Polarized by current politics or two sides of the same coin?

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research topic

On March 20th 2021, Turkish president Recep Tayyıp Erdoğan withdrew from the Istanbul Convention, an international accord to protect women from domestic violence, which was signed by Erdoğan himself ten years before. Erdoğan apparently agreed with conservative Turkish politicians and religious groups, who contended that this convention violates national values, undermines the unity of the family, and normalizes LGBTIQ's (persons who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and/or Queer).[1] In 2020, Turkish human's rights lawyer and feminist Canan Arın stated: *"*We used to struggle to further expand our rights whereas now, we are trying to protect those that are already granted to us*".*[2] The event of March 20th proves that Canan Arın was right; and recent developments in Turkey have emphasized the ongoing need for this fight.

In previous years incidents of violence against women and femicide have increased.[3] Ruling president Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; hereinafter AKP) contribute to a strong anti-feminist discourse and at the same time promote traditional gender roles.[4] The AKP has been in power since 2002 and although in the beginning it presented itself as neoliberal and modernist, throughout the years their course became more and more religiously conservative and authoritarian.[5] Despite – or maybe even because of – this politically repressive discourse, many feminists and feminist organizations are active in Turkey. These developments were for me reason to look deeper into the subject of feminism in Turkey.

At current, in the public fight for women's rights in Turkey two forms of feminism, *i.e.* secular feminism and Islamic feminism, dominate the debate.[6] A parallel can be made here with the Muslim world in general. So, although the primary focus of this thesis will be on feminism in Turkey, to understand its local context it is imperative to examine the origins of these two forms of feminism in Islamic societies in general. Therefore, we first need to zoom out and look at the Muslim world; and then, specifically, to the Middle East, because Turkey is part of this

[1] Beemsterboer, "'Wij zullen niet gehoorzamen'."; Tuysuz & Sariyuce, "Turkey withdraws from Istanbul convention."
[2] Yılmaz, "Feminist Lawyer Canan Arın."
[3] Gaioli, "Here is what you need to know about the increasing Femicide cases in Turkey."; Mutluer, "The intersectionality of gender, sexuality, and religion," 112.
[4] Unal, "Vulnerable identities," 12.
[5] Mutluer, "The intersectionality of gender, sexuality, and religion," 104.
[6] Arat, "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey," 125-127; İbrahimhakkıoğlu, "Beyond the Modern/Religious Dichotomy," 150.

region. Turkey has been, and still is, not only geographically but also historically, part of and influenced by the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire, Turkey's predecessor, ruled large areas of the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, and parts of Europe. Nowadays, Turkey still shows social and cultural resemblance with the Middle East. Most relevant is the fact that the Republic of Turkey also had, and has, a predominant Muslim population. In sharp contrast, however, in the Republic of Turkey secularism is the official state ideology since its establishment in 1923, while in all Middle Eastern countries Islam was and still is applied as the official state religion.[7] This makes the situation of Turkey unique and possibly even more complex compared to other Middle Eastern countries.

1.2 Historical context of feminism in the Middle East and Turkey

Research into the Middle East shows that two major feminist paradigms can be identified, namely secular feminism and Islamic feminism.[8] The shaping of secular feminism in the Middle East can be traced back to the late nineteenth century when many countries in the Middle East were fighting for autonomy and independence from Ottoman or colonial rule. It was a period of modernisation and nation building. In this political and social climate also a women's movement emerged to redefine women's place in these new nations.[9] Much later, at the end of the twentieth century yet another form of feminism arose, that became known as Islamic feminism; a movement led by Islamic women scholars reading and reinterpreting the Qur'an.[10]

Most Middle Eastern countries that became independent in the twentieth century, have secular constitutions by now. However, Islam was and still is the state religion in these countries.[11] In Turkey, however, the situation has always been fundamentally different. After the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923) and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed on the 24th of July 1923, and the Republic of Turkey became officially a sovereign state.[12] The proclamation of the Republic of Turkey meant a dramatic break with the Ottoman past. Founder and first president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, implemented reforms based on an ideology now known as "Kemalism". The military became the protector of the

[7] Ahmed-Ghosh, "Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminists and Feminisms," 101; Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 10.
[8] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 6.
[9] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in* Islam, 144-145; Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 6.
[10] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 8.
[11] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 10; Edayat, "Islamic Feminism," 359-360.
[12] Zürcher, *Turkije een moderne geschiedenis,* 190.

Kemalist values and was even authorized to intervene whenever these values were compromised.[13]

The main principle of Kemalism is laicism.[14] Laicism differs from secularism, even though the literature about Turkey often speaks about secularism.[15] Secularism implies merely the separation of church and state, whereas laicism implied that religion was subordinate to the state. Religion was not just removed from the political and the state, but rather interpreted, overseen, and administered by the state. In this regard, the Kemalists favoured a Sunni interpretation of Islam and this was strictly carried out by the in 1924 established Diyanet (the Directorate of Religious Affairs).[16] Controlling religion was a way to achieve modernization and westernization, and make sure that religion would not become an obstacle in obtaining these goals. As a result, laicism became equal to progress and religion became equal with backwardness.[17] Following main stream literature, however, in this thesis I will use the term "secularism" when referring to the institutional arrangements in Turkey.

So, in Turkey, secular feminism was part of the westernization, modernization and secularisation reforms. Emancipation of women was high on the Kemalist agenda and a "new modern Turkish woman" was created.[18] The Swiss Family Code replaced the Islamic family law as codified by the *Mecelle* in 1926, which meant equality between men and women on issues of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Also, in 1934, women got suffrage and non-veiled women could be elected to parliament.[19]

Islamic feminism in Turkey is directly connected to the rise of Islamism in Turkey in the 1980s. Islamism was not unique in Turkey; within multiple countries in the Middle East Islamist movement emerged and gained electoral advances.[20] Islamists movements have different interests and discourses. They are shaped and transformed by the cultural factors, economic structures and political institutions in which they operate.[21] Islamism as an ideology or political discourse draws back on a specific reading of Islam. Islamism can be understood as the "conscious epistemological and ontological reference to 'Islam' for shaping or directing a

[13] İbrahimhakkıoğlu, "Beyond the Modern/Religious Dichotomy," 144.
[14] Çağatay, "Women's Coalitions beyond the Laicism–Islamism Divide in Turkey," 49; Yavuz & Öztürk, "Turkish secularism and Islam under the reign of Erdoğan," 3-4.
[15] Houston, "Thwarted agency and the strange afterlife of Islamism in militant laicism in Turkey," 335-336.
[16] Çağatay, ""Women's Coalitions beyond the Laicism–Islamism Divide in Turkey," 49; Çınar & Duran, "The specific evolution of contemporary Political Islam in Turkey and its 'difference'," 22.
[17] Kadıoğlu, "The pathologies of Turkish republican laicism," 492-497.
[18] van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 465; İbrahimhakkıoğlu, "Beyond the Modern/Religious Dichotomy," 143.
[19] Arat, "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey," 129.
[20] Cleveland & Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East,* 487.
[21] Çınar & Duran, "The specific evolution of contemporary Political Islam in Turkey and its 'difference'," 17-18.

state, a society, and an individual, directly or indirectly".[22] In Turkey, the conservative Islamist movement started a new discussion about the role of religion in the secular nation.[23] The Welfare Party (Refah Partisi; hereinafter RP), founded in 1983, can be considered the most important institutional representative of Islamism.[24] The RP grew in popularity in the 1990s, also electorally, and this was alarming the secular establishment in Turkey. Eventually the RP was closed down by the Constitutional Court in 1998, on the accusation of violating the secular principles of the Turkish state.[25]

Religious women in Turkey became part of the Islamist movement and became more visible in society. Turkish scholars Yesim Arat, Feride Acar and Nilüfer Göle saw a new feminist paradigm emerging in Turkey which they labelled "Islamic feminism".[26] Islamic feminists criticized the Turkish secular state for oppressing religion and the secular feminists for not representing the interests of religious women. Facing these claims, secular feminists stood up to defend the Kemalist principles and this instigated a new debate between secular and Islamic feminists.[27] This debate centred for a long time around the issue of the headscarf. In the 1980s a formal headscarf ban was implemented in public places and buildings, like courtrooms and universities. Even though in 2013 the AKP repealed the headscarf ban, from the 1990s up until the present day it has been a much discussed topic in the public debate and serves as a symbol of the secular-Islamist paradigm.[28]

1.3 Research question

Given the fact that two strands of feminism co-exist, one may wonder whether they pursue similar goals through different discourses, or whether they have completely different programs. In fact, some Turkish secular feminists still consider Islam to be by definition repressive towards women, and an emerging danger to secularism. In response, many Islamic women and Islamic feminists distance themselves from the extreme orthodox secular stand of these secular feminists.[29] The debate, in short, appears to be very polarized and based on an apparent strong dichotomy between secular feminism and Islamic feminism. At the same time, however, these two movements also pursue similar goals, for instance, they both fight against violence against

[22] Ibid., 18.
[23] Diner & Toktas, "Waves of feminism in Turkey," 50-51.
[24] Gülalp, "Globalization and Political Islam," 433.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, 243-244.
[27] Diner & Toktas, "Waves of feminism in Turkey," 47; van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 470.
[28] Arat, "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey," 126.
[29] Unal, "Vulnerable identities," 14.

women. I will discuss the current relationship between secular feminism and Islamic feminism in Turkey, compare the standpoints of the two movements; and in doing so, I will analyse how these two movements react to the problems and difficulties faced by women in Turkey today and to what extent they are able to find common grounds in their struggle. This thesis seeks to provide an answer to the following research question: '*How do secular and Islamic feminism in Turkey currently relate to each other?*'

1.4 Materials and methods

To address the research question we first need to look into the history of feminism in modern Turkey and study how the two strands of feminism evolved to what they are today. In doing so, the situation in Turkey must be considered within a regional context and the global paradigm of secular and Islamic feminism within the Muslim world. I use secondary literature to give an historical overview of feminism and discuss the secular-Islamic paradigm in both the Middle East and Turkey.

From this historical background we will arrive at the main part of this thesis, *i.e.* the current situation of secular and Islamic feminism in Turkey, and, in particular, the interaction between the secular and Islamic feminist movement. To get a perspective on this debate, I chose to use the work of four prominent Turkish feminists, two "secular" and two "Islamic" feminists. Their work as used in this thesis contains different sources, such as websites, interviews, blogs, columns and (newspaper) articles. From these primary sources I will deduct not only their personal views on different topics and theme's concerning women and feminism in Turkey, but also their view on each other; *i.e.* where they see unsurmountable differences and where common ground. In this way, the relationship between secular feminists and Islamic feminists will be uncovered.

Research sources

Historian Margot Badran mentions that the main language used for Islamic feminist discourse is English, however, simultaneously it is also expressed locally in a large number of different languages.[30] Therefore, although most of the secondary literature I will use is in English, I will also study both primary and secondary sources written in Turkish. Most primary sources I use are in Turkish, because the public debate is conducted within a national context, and thus mostly in Turkish. However, since my knowledge of Turkish is mediocre there are unfortunately some

[30] Badran, *Feminism in Islam, 245.*

limitations to the Turkish sources I am able to use, especially the secondary academic literature. Fortunately many prominent Turkish scholars and academics also express themselves in English.

For the selection of primary sources to analyse the public debate, I searched the internet and studied the literature. I searched for women who actively participate in the public debate by examining Turkish media outlets and social media. During this research, I also came across many feminist organizations. Many of these organizations originated from women's rights movements and still fight for women's rights in courts and parliament. Interestingly, I found that many feminists, feminist activists and women's rights advocates who participate in the public debate are also linked to the women's organizations, either as co-founder, member or spokesperson. Therefore, in my opinion, the four feminists cannot be seen completely separate from these organizations and what these organizations stand for. Nevertheless, my main focus will be on the individual feminists because they actively participate in the public debate.

For this thesis, I selected secular feminists Gülsüm Kav and Tuba Torun, and Islamic feminists Rümeysa Çamdereli and Berrin Sönmez. Gülsüm Kav is a doctor, activist, columnist, and one of the founders and representatives of Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu (We Will Stop Femicide). Kav uses a secular discourse and calls herself a socialist feminist.[31] Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu raises awareness on gender-based violence against women in Turkey. Kav writes columns for the daily paper Yarın. Tuba Torun works as a freelance lawyer under the Istanbul Bar Association. She is, among other things, a lawyer for the We Will Stop Femicide Platform and the Women's Councils. She is also a board member of the Association to Support Women Candidates. Torun is politically active and writes articles for duvaR.[32]

Rümeysa Çamdereli calls herself a Muslim feminist, is a musician, and co-founder of the Kadın Derneği Havle (Havle Women's Association), which is the first Muslim feminist women's association in Turkey. The association aims to increase Muslim women's participation in the feminist movement, empower women, and combat discriminatory interpretations of Islam against women.[33] Çamdereli is writer and also co-founder of the Reçel blog. Berrin Sönmez also identifies herself as Islamic feminist.[34] She writes articles and essays for several media outlets, including duvaR.[35] Sönmez is member of the Başkent Kadın Platform

[31] Interview with Gülsüm Kav by Fariba Nawa, https://sistersofeurope.com/women-arent-recognised-as-individuals-but-as-extensions-of-men/
[32] "Tuba Torun Kimdir?" https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazar/tuba-torun
[33] Meryem, "Türkiye'de İlk Müslüman Feminist Kadın Derneği: Havle."
[34] Taştekin, "Müslüman feministler': Ne istiyorlar, neden eleştiriliyorlar?"
[35] "Berrin Sönmez Kimdir?" https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazar/berrin-sonmez

(Capital Women's Platform), a women's organisations led by pious women and active since 1995. Through education, employment and political activism they strive to increase women's public participation.[36]

The primary sources used to study the current feminist debate are published between January 2019 and April 2021. In this way I am able to discuss the most recent feminist debate. In my opinion, this is a considerable period for the scope of this thesis. Using sources from a period of over two years will give me a good overview of recurring topics and discussions. When analysing the primary sources to determine differences and similarities, key questions are: what do they strive for; how do they want to achieve their goals; how do they define feminism; and what kind of arguments do they use? This will be retrieved by focussing on the gender related topics they write/talk about, which will be discussed more in chapter four.

1.5 Structure

In order to answer the research question, I will first focus on Turkey's regional context and the broader secular-Islamic feminist paradigm. Chapter two will discuss important literature on feminism in the Middle East and Muslim world, and discuss the concept of "feminism". Subsequently, the emergence of both secular and Islamic feminism will be discussed, and, last, I will address the most important discussions between both movements. Chapter three will focus on feminism in Turkey; first by discussing the history of feminism and then by focussing on the two prevailing movements, *i.e.* secular feminism and Islamic feminism. Chapter four discusses the current feminist debate in Turkey. In chapter five I will draw and discuss my conclusions. It will give the answer to the research question: "How do secular and Islamic feminism in Turkey currently relate to each other?" also, I will place Turkey in its regional context of the Middle East and draw a parallel between Turkey and Turkish communities elsewhere.

[36] Tunali, "Defending Human Rights in Turkey: Berrin Sönmez."

2. Secular and Islamic feminism in the Middle East

2.1 Literature overview

Before discussing the literature about feminism in the Middle East, it is important to mention orientalism. We must realize that the "West", *i.e.* Europe, and the "East", *i.e.* the Middle East, are manmade classifications that, over the years, became constructs of their own. Edward Said describes this extensively in *Orientalism* (1978). On the one hand, from an orientalist discourse, Europe stands for modernity, secularism, and freedom. However, from an occidentalist point of view it is linked to colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Moreover, from a western perspective, the Middle East, and its main religion Islam, are often linked to repressive regimes, backwardness and war.[37]

Within feminist discourses in the Middle East and Turkey, orientalism is a recurring theme. Lila Abu-Lughod analyses in her article 'Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others' how the mechanism of orientalism works in relation to gender. She describes the common Western idea that oppressed Muslim women need to be saved by the West from oppressing Muslim men.[38] A similar argument can be found in the work of Shadi Hamid 'Between Orientalism and Postmodernism: the changing nature of Western feminist thought towards the Middle East', in which he describes how for a long time Western feminists reduced Muslim women as "the other"; being powerless and oppressed, women who needed to be saved. Even today, though their view has changed, Western feminists, how well their intentions may be, still express pervasive biases.[39]

When we shift our scope to the discussion about feminism within the Muslim world, we see that the concept of feminism is relatively new, but that discussing the position of women within the Muslim world is not. Leila Ahmed argues that the discussion about the position of women in Islam and in Islamic societies and/or communities can be led back already to the early days of Islam in the seventh century. However, in her view, the first "real" feminists and feminist movements of the Middle East emerged in Egypt around the twentieth century. It was influenced by western colonial powers and western feminist ideas.[40] There is consensus under scholars that feminism in the Muslim world as we know it today indeed emerged in the late 19th century.[41] According to Ahmed, the beginning of the twentieth century was a period of social

[37] Said, *Orientalism,* 2003.
[38] Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?"
[39] Hamid, "Between Orientalism and Postmodernism," 76-82.
[40] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 128.
[41] Hesová, "Secular, Islamic or Muslim feminism?" 26; Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 6.

and political change and for the first time since the establishment of Islam, the treatment of women in Islamic customs and law was openly discussed in many Middle Eastern societies.[42]

Literature on the secular feminist movement focusses mainly on the Middle East as a region, and specifically the Arab world. Within the Arab countries, occupied with nation building, a secular feminist discourse was imbedded in other prevalent discourses, such as an Islamic modernist discourse and a new nationalist discourse.[43] There is a focus in the literature on Egypt, which becomes clear in the work of Nadje Al-Ali 'The Women's Movement in Egypt, with Selected References to Turkey' and that of Leila Ahmed 'Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East, a Preliminary Exploration: Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen'.[44] Moreover, Nawar Al-Hassan Golley states that Egypt was the centre of modern Arabic cultural life until the mid-20th century.[45] Which also explains the focus on Egypt in literature about the secular feminist movement.

Literature about Islamic feminism is often about particular countries or a comparison of a number of countries, partly because feminists struggles have been first and foremost internal battles.[46] Studies about Egypt, Turkey and Iran represent the majority of the literature.[47] Abu-Lughod in *Writing Women's World: Bedouin stories* and Saba Mahmood in *Politics of Piety* focus on Egypt. Also, in *Remaking Women: feminism and modernity in the Middle East* edited by Abu-Lughod the majority of the articles written is about Egypt and the fewer other articles focus on Iran and Turkey. Then, the work of Deniz Durmuş 'Middle Eastern Feminisms: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Turkish and the Iranian Experience' compares Turkey and Iran. She analyses secular and Islamic feminisms in Turkey and in Iran, one being an secular regime and the other an Islamic regime. In addition, she points to the shortcomings and patriarchal elements in both movements.[48]

Islamic feminism is not only found in the Middle East but also in other regions. For instance the work of Shirin Zubair and Maria Zubair focusses on Pakistan. In 'Situating Islamic feminism(s): Lived religion, negotiation of identity and assertion of third space by Muslim

[42] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 128.
[43] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 8.
[44] Al-Ali, Nadje S. "The Women's Movement in Egypt, with Selected References to Turkey." *Civil Society and Social Movements Programme Paper* Number 5 (2002): 1-37; Ahmed, Leila. "Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East, a Preliminary Exploration: Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen." *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 5, no. 2 (1982): 153-168.
[45] Al-Hassan Golley, "Is feminism relevant to Arab women?" 530.
[46] Badran, "From Islamic Feminism to a Muslim Holistic Feminism," 83; Weir, "Islamic Feminisms and Freedom," 100.
[47]Ahmadi, Fereshteh. "Islamic Feminism in Iran: Feminism in a New Islamic Context." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 33-53; Moghadam, Valentine M. "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate." *Signs* 27, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 1135-1171.
[48] Durmuş, Deniz. "Middle Eastern Feminisms: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Turkish and the Iranian Experience." *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 10, no. 3, (2018): 221-237.

women in Pakistan', they discuss Muslim women's identity and agency in Pakistan.[49] Azza Basarudin in *Humanizing the Sacred: Sisters in Islam and the Struggle for Gender Justice in Malaysia* writes about the nongovernmental organization Sisters in Islam and how they use reinterpretations of the Qur'an for gender justice and activism in Malaysia.[50] However, in this thesis I will focus on the Middle East, *i.e.* the geographical and cultural region Turkey is part of.

Within the literature, Turkey in a historical context is often mentioned as being different from other Middle Eastern countries. Since 1923, Turkey has been an autonomous republic and had a strict separation between church and state.[51] Prominent scholars on gender and feminism in Turkey are among others Yeşim Arat, Nilüfer Göle and Deniz Kandiyoti. Yeşim Arat wrote among other things *Rethinking Islam and liberal democracy Islamist women in Turkish politics*.[52] Nilüfer Göle's *Modern Mahrem* (*The Forbidden Modern)* was one of the pioneering works on religious women and feminism.[53] In her book she focussed on women in Turkey wearing the headscarf who were part of the Islamist movement. Deniz Kandiyoti wrote 'Bargaining with Patriarchy' and *Women, Islam and the State*.[54] Arat, Göle and Kandiyoti focussed on feminism and Islam, and argued that secularism does not always serve the best interests of women.[55]

An important topic in the literature is the question "Is Islamic feminism an oxymoron?". Dawn Llewellyn and Marta Trzebiatowska in 'Secular and Religious Feminisms: A Future of Disconnection?' and Saba Mahmood in *Politics of* Piety argue that most religions are more or less repressive towards women, and therefore the relationship between feminist theory and religion is difficult, this may be most present in the discussion when the religion is Islam.[56] Mahmood also argues that in the eyes of secular feminists, one cannot be both religious and a feminist. For them, Islam is by definition conservative and rejects liberal values, which matches the orientalist view on Islam. Secular feminists from different cultural and religious backgrounds in the Middle East, cannot comprehend women's support for Islamist movements.

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[49] Zubair, Shirin & Zubair, Maria. "Situating Islamic feminism(s): Lived religion, negotiation of identity and assertion of third space by Muslim women in Pakistan." *Women's Studies International Forum* 63 (2017): 17–26.
[50] Basarudin, Azza. *Humanizing the Sacred: Sisters in Islam and the Struggle for Gender Justice in Malaysia*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016.
[51] Ahmed, "Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East," 154-156; Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminisms," 10.
[52] Arat, Yeşim. *Rethinking Islam and liberal democracy Islamist women in Turkish politics.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005.
[53] Göle, Nilüfer. *Modern Mahrem*. İstanbul: Metis Books, 1991; Göle, Nilüfer. *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
[54] Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Bargaining with Patriarchy." *Gender and Society* 2, no. 3 (1988): 274-290; Kandiyoti, Deniz. *Women, Islam and the State.* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991.
[55] Özcan, "Turkish Women in Islamism," 183.
[56] Llewellyn & Trzebiatowksa, "Secular and Religious Feminisms," 245-247; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* 1.

For them, the common assumption is that these Islamic women are part of an oppressive patriarchal system; and, once freed from this system they will naturally reject the traditional Islamic morals. To the secular feminists, this assumption makes feminism and Islam mutually exclusive.[57]

Another argument that Islamic feminism is an oxymoron is that Islam and feminism represent two ideologies with irreconcilably conflicting interests. Moreover, some scholars argue that feminism is not compatible and in conflict with almost all current dominant ideologies, both Western and Islamic.[58] However, when it comes to Islam and feminism it seems as if they represent two extremes and that there are insurmountable differences. This can be explained by the fact that women in Western societies are more free to express their critic and discontent about their cultures and prevalent ideologies, because they are not held accountable for betraying one's culture and national identity. The complex relationship between Islam and feminism is connected to the history of Western countries in the Middle East. The Islamic world is holding on to and reaffirming its old values. The Islamic world does this more determent and dogmatically, because it is protecting itself and both its authenticity and identity from this old enemy, *i.e.* the West. As a result, Middle Eastern women feel forced to stay loyal to either their Muslim identity.[59]

2.2 The meaning of feminism

The term "feminism" was coined in France by Hubertine Auclert in the late 1880s as a way to criticize male predominance and domination, and to demand women's rights and emancipation. "Feminism" and "emancipation of women" are often used interchangeably. Feminism can be explained as a social movement and political program aimed at improving women's position in society. Feminist theory seeks to understand the nature of gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality.[60] The European Institute for Gender Equality describes emancipation of women as a process, strategy and myriad efforts by women in order to liberate themselves from the authority and control of men and traditional power structures. At the same time it is aimed at securing equal rights for women, removing gender discrimination from laws, institutions and behavioural patterns, and

[57] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 2012,
[58] Ahmed, "Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East," 162.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Chandrika, "Feminism and Emancipation," 303.

setting legal standards that shall promote women's full equality with men.[61] So, feminism is more a means through which emancipation of women is realized. Even though the term "feminism" is of Western origin, it is absolutely insufficient to say that feminism itself is Western. Every form of feminism and every feminist movement develops in its particular time and place, influenced by local circumstances and in local terms.[62]

Identifying and naming discourses can help us frame and articulate, but they can also limit, mislead and obscure.[63] The relationship between the West and the East has been problematic considering former western imperialism and colonialism. Therefore, "feminism" has certain, for some negative, implications and associations, and, that is why some Muslim women thinkers resist using the Western term "feminist" or "feminism". One reason for this is that Muslim thinkers and theologians want to avoid Western appropriation of their work. Using the Western term "feminism" would imply that liberation is primarily of Western origin and liberation could only come from a Western concept.[64] A second reason not to use the term feminism is because it might weaken the position and legitimacy of women in their own Muslim society, because of the linkage between western concepts and colonial projects. The perception that women's emancipation would lead to moral depravations and a loss of social identity is a common fear among nationalists and fundamentalists.[65] A third reason to reject the term is that feminism implies for some that it is only about women's emancipation, and thus improvements for women, instead of social improvements for all members of society. Also, Muslim women renounce from using the term because of its secularist connotations, *i.e.* non religiousness.[66]

Especially Islamic feminist have trouble with the term. Islamic women activists, thinkers and theologians might advocate feminist ideals and values, many of them resist and refuse to use the term.[67] It is important to note that those who are labelled Islamic feminist, such as Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas and Amina Wadud, do not identify themselves as "Islamic feminist". Mernissi for instance considers herself to be a secular feminist. Wadud states that she never refers to herself as "feminist", because that term in general is used in a reductionist manner.[68] Others position themselves as "scholar of Islam" or use other terms like "womanist",[69] "Believing women" or "Muslim women scholar-activists".[70] Nevertheless,

[61] European Institute for Gender Equality https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1098
[62] Badran, *Feminism in Islam,* 243.
[63] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 12.
[64] Barlas, "Secular and Feminist Critiques of the Qur'an," 112; Hesová, "Secular, Islamic or Muslim feminism?" 28.
[65] Hesová, "Secular, Islamic or Muslim feminism?" 28.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Weir, "Islamic Feminisms and Freedom," 101.
[68] Wadud, *Qur'an and Women,* xviii.
[69] Badran, "From Islamic Feminism to a Muslim Holistic Feminism," 81; Weir, "Islamic Feminisms and Freedom," 101.
[70] Bahi, "Islamic and Secular Feminisms," 144.

despite critical notes and even rejection, the term "Islamic feminism" is a "catch-all, umbrella term" that covers different actors with different political agendas and remains widespread compared to for instance "Muslim feminism", "Qur'anic feminism" or "feminist hermeneutics".[71]

Another critique on "Islamic feminism" is that it reduces Middle Eastern women to their common Islamic identity, and with that disregards regional, ethnical, religious, cultural, and class differences. Seeing Middle Eastern women in such a limited way is precisely what orientalism does.[72] However, Tohidi states that using the label "Islamic feminist" can be harmless, but only if it does not "imply a deliberate or unwitting "otherizing" or essentializing of Muslim women".[73] She adds that it would be harmful to ignore, exclude or silence women of non-Muslim religious minorities or women who have a secular and laic orientation. This would limit the diverse spectrum of women's movements in Muslim societies.[74] Hence, being aware of the critics and limitations of the term "Islamic feminism/t", I follow the main stream literature and use these terms.

2.3 History of feminism in the Middle East

Secular feminism

The second half of the nineteenth century was a tumultuous period in the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire was still in power in most of the Arab-speaking Middle East, but European countries began to contest its rule. At the same time, many Middle Eastern countries were confronted with Western imperialism and colonialism. The Ottoman Empire and colonial powers tried to hold on to their control over the region, yet the call for independence and the creation of independent nation states became louder and louder. Reformists imagined secular nation states, of which the identity was not primarily based on religion, but on a shared history by space and local culture.[75] In that period, "secular" referred to a certain degree of separation between state institutions and religious institutions. In most Middle Eastern countries education and law, with the exception of family law, would be removed from the jurisdiction of the

[71] Hesová, "Secular, Islamic or Muslim feminism?" 29; Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Critiques,"* 22.
[72] Alak, Islamic Feminism(s)," 33.
[73] Tohidi, "Islamic Feminism," 141.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 7.

religious authorities to that of the secular state. However, Islam was still used as a source for law making and anchored as state religion in their secular constitutions.[76]

Male intellectuals in Egypt and Turkey were the first to write about the subject of women. The status and treatment of women were intertwined with other issues that in the eyes of these intellectuals were important for national reforms.[77] In Egypt, intellectuals such as Muhammad Abdu, Ali Mubarak and Rifa'ah Rafi al-Tahtawi shared their ideas on women, education and reform. Abdu was the most influential thinker and argued for modernisation, widespread education, reforms in intellectual and social fields, and for the elevation of the status of women and changes in marriage practices.[78] In 1899, the work of Qassim Amin *Tahrir al-Mar'a* (the liberation of women) was published and caused an immense debate. Amin urged for the abolition of the veil, and fundamental changes in culture and society.[79] In the midst of these developments, also women in the Middle East started redefining their place within society and their movement became known as the secular feminist movement.[80] These women called themselves "secular feminists" or just "feminist".[81] Their name reflects the fact that they operated within different discourses, namely secular nationalist, Islamic modernist, humanitarian/human rights, and democratic. Secular feminists were jointly responsible for creating and democratizing new institutions of state and civil society.[82] For instance, the Society for the Advancement of Women (1908) and the Intellectual Association of Egyptian Women (1914), which included among its founders Huda Sha'rawi, who is considered the preeminent feminist leader of the 1920s and 1930s.[83]

This new vibrant era influenced middle and upper class women in different places in the Middle East. These women developed a feminist discourse, in which they criticized the fact they did not enjoy the same benefits of modernity as men, just because they were female. The start of this movement coincided with the arrival and spread of the printing press and the spread of literacy among women.[84] The feminist struggle for emancipation met with both religious reforms, as well as with the nation building process. For Middle Eastern feminists the start of the twentieth century was a time of dual liberation of both the nation and the woman.[85] While

[76] Ibid., 10.
[77] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam,* 128.
[78] Ibid., 138-139.
[79] Ibid., 144-145.
[80] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 128; Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 7; Hesová, "Secular, Islamic or Muslim Feminism," 29-30.
[81] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 15.
[82] Ibid., 6-8.
[83] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam, 172.*
[84] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 7.
[85] Ibid., 8.

their countries moved further away from foreign rule and its remains, the role of women in these new nations was also redefined. Feminist women acted independently and as leaders of their own social movements.[86] The main focus of secular feminists was the public sphere and the rights they could gain there.

In contrast, however, the private sphere was left mostly untouched and that's why unequal rules and religiously defined gender identities persisted within religious institutions and family relations.[87] The reason that secular feminists in that period focussed on the public sphere and did not criticize the private sphere was related to the complex relation between the East and the West .[88] New nation states were created following a secularist, modernist agenda in a period of anticolonialism and nationalism.[89] As Ziba Mir-Hosseini states: "For anticolonialists and most nationalists, feminism—that is, advocacy of women's rights—was a colonialist project that had to be resisted."[90] This meant that women were put in a position where they had to choose between staying loyal to their Muslim identity or follow the path inspired by the Western feminist discourse for gender equality; choosing one meant betraying the other. Women thus became symbols of the cultural authenticity of their nation, and a cultural and religious identity.[91] In more recent times, secular feminists still base their discourse on a human rights discourse and see a secular democracy as the precondition to ensure those individual rights.[92]

Islamic feminism

Islamic feminism emerged in the 1980s, in a "secular era", a period in which the idea of a secular state and society already had taken hold.[93] Islamic feminists had to fight a double battle; one against secular feminism and one against Islamists. On the one hand, Islamic feminists opposed the secular feminist movement, because they did not feel represented by it. Muslim women who embraced their religion viewed feminism as Western norms that were imposed on them.[94] At the same time, towards the end of the twentieth century, secular feminism seemed to have reached an impasse; it could not provide a new ideology or tools that

[86] Ibid., 8.
[87] Hesová, "Secular, Islamic or Muslim feminism?" 30-32.
[88] Ahmed, "Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East" 162.
[89] Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality," 639.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ahmed, "Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East" 162-163; Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality," 639
[92] Ahmed-Ghosh, "Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminists and Feminisms," 106.
[93] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 10.
[94] Hermansen, "Introduction," 16.

feminism needed at that time . So, Islamic feminists also filled this void and were able to provide a new kind of thinking in which they used a progressive religious discourse.[95]

On the other hand, Islamic feminism is closely related to the emergence of Islamism in the 1970s and 1980s, which entailed returning to Islam as a guide for daily life instead of living up to secularism proposed by the state.[96] During this rising tide of Islamic revivalism, Islamists voiced a critique on both state and society in a climate where people in different Middle Eastern countries became discontent over the lack of both democracy and broad economic prosperity. They reached with this different groups and classes who experienced "the pushes and pulls" of modernity. Islamists revaluated the comforts and certainties of a more traditional culture and created a new conservative gender discourse in which religion was reappropriated.[97] This new Islamist discourse promoted a lifestyle for women that was supposed to be more "pure" and "authentic"; removed from the public scene.[98] Both secular and religious women grew concerned with this discourse which was based on conservative readings of the Islam. To offer counterarguments, the participation of women theologians in the debate grew.[99]

In the last decade of the twentieth century it became clear that women and their reformist, non-traditional readings of the Qur'an had created a new feminism, which was then referred to by *observers,* mostly scholars, in different countries as Islamic feminism.[100] The term Islamic feminism is used to describe "both political activists and academics in various contexts, but all are pursuing equality and justice for women within Islam".[101] The term grew in visibility and popularity after it had been used by some Iranian, Turkish and Saudi feminists in their work.[102] Islamic feminism is based on a new form of Muslim theology, undertaken by female interpreters and being explicitly feminist or womanist.[103] Mir-Hosseini defined Islamic feminism as "a new gender discourse that argues for equality in a Islamic framework*"*.[104] According to Badran, Islamic feminism is "a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm. Islamic feminism, which derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence".[105]

[95] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 13; Weir, "Islamic Feminisms and Freedom," 99.
[96] Eyadat, "Islamic Feminism," 359.
[97] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 8.
[98] Ibid., 9.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 8; Badran, *Feminism in Islam,* 243-244.
[101] Weir, "Islamic Feminisms and Freedom," 99.
[102] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 9-15; Alak, "Islamic Feminism(s)," 32.
[103] Hermansen, "Introduction", 11.
[104] Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality," 629-630.
[105] Badran, *Feminism in Islam,* 242; Tohidi, "Islamic Feminism," 135.

These women focus on the field of Qur'anic interpretation and exegesis, called *tafsir* in Arabic, and aim to uncover the Qur'an's egalitarian message.[106] The work of Moroccan sociologist and academic Fatima Mernissi *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Inquiry* (1991), the work of North American scholar Amina Wadud *Qur'an and Woman: Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective (*1999), and that of Pakistani-American scholar Asma Barlas '*Believing Women' in Islam: Un-reading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (2002) are considered to be the first and leading works of the Islamic feminist movement.[107] Muhammad Abdu argued, based on a Quranic verse of equal rewards for labour, that there is no superiority between the sexes and that Islam recognizes the "full and equal humanity of women". Islamic feminists still make this argument today and are thus convinced that men and women are equals in the eyes of God. So, when they interpret other verses they do this based on the principle of equality.[108]

Where in the secular movement women felt they had to choose between their religion and feminism, it seemed this dilemma had disappeared because of the space the Islamists had unintentionally created.[109] With their discourse based on religion, Islamic feminists reached religious institutions and family relations, and by this they were able to influence the private sphere, where secular feminists so far had influenced mainly the public sphere.[110] Islamic feminists were able to reform Muslim personal status codes and family laws, and made short work of the hierarchical gender roles still prevalent in the family by affirming the unqualified equality of all human beings grounded in their reading of the Qur'an.[111] The growing participation of Muslim women in Islamist or socially conservative pietistic movements meant also that the field of religious discussion and activism widened.[112]

2.4 Important discussions between secular and Islamic feminists

Where secular feminism can be considered as a social movement drawing on and constituted by multiple discourses, Islamic feminism might be seen as a religiously framed discourse on gender equality.[113] Some scholars argue that the gap between secular and Islamic feminists is getting smaller and smaller, and that they are increasingly able to combine forces in common

[106] Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality," 642.
[107] Hesová, "Secular, Islamic or Muslim feminism?" 31.
[108] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam,* 139-140.
[109] Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality," 639.
[110] Hesová, "Secular, Islamic or Muslim feminism?" 32.
[111] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 13-14.
[112] Hermansen, Introduction, 11.
[113] Badran, "From Islamic Feminism to a Muslim Holistic Feminism," 81.

causes.[114] Other scholars, however, state that the dichotomy between secular modernist and Muslim reformist discourse is insurmountable as it creates tensions, controversies and disagreements. Oppositional binaries, such as theology versus social issues, Islam versus democracy and Qur'an versus universal standards, polarize the discourse on women in Islam. With this in mind, the section below will discuss the most important topics in the debate between secular and Islamic feminists.

What is the foundation of gender equality?

Secular and Islamic feminists use a different frame of reference, methodology and outcome. Secular feminists derive their discourse from universal standards and Islamic feminists derive their discourse from the Qur'an.[115] So, secular feminists base their arguments on democracy, human rights and universal standards, while Islamic feminist believe that women's equal rights are anchored within the Qur'an. However, some secular feminists are not convinced that the uncritical stance towards Islamic feminism as liberatory project will help forward the position of women, because discussions about the oppressive gender practices are being avoided and a critical analysis of the Sharia-based reforms, central to the Islamic feminist agenda, seem to be disapproved.[116] In addition, Iranian scholar Hammed Shahidian argues that in view of the strength of the conservative, orthodox, traditional, and fundamentalist interpretations, laws and institutions the efforts of Islamic feminist are pointless.[117]

Besides that Islamic feminists base their arguments on their interpretation of the Qur'an, they, as Muslim women, identify in the first place as Muslim, not with universal categories such as "woman" or "human".[118] Islam is thus their first source of identity, not their nationality or gender. That is why some Muslim women scholars and activists argue that is not possible to sufficiently understand the struggles of Islamic women in terms of struggles for individual or human rights, because such an approach assumes a secular nonreligious individual subject. That is why in the eyes of Muslim women a human's right approach is insufficient. The human's rights approach does not acknowledge the injustice done to them as *Muslim* women. In the eyes of critics, the human's rights approach is not independent and unbiased in evaluating the rights of Muslim women, because it privileges secular identities.[119]

[114] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 22-23.
[115] Bahi, "Islamic and Secular Feminisms," 147-148.
[116] Moghissi, "Islamic Feminism Revisited," 77.
[117] Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents," 1150.
[118] Weir, "Islamic Feminisms and Freedom," 101-102; Tobin, "On Their Own Ground," 157-158.
[119] Tobin, "On Their Own Ground," 156.

Is Islam oppressing women?

Many secular feminists, are convinced that feminism and Islam are incompatible. In their eyes Islam still is the key factor in the subordination and oppression of women. Secular feminists will keep resisting religious traditions based on gender hierarchy.[120] However, "Islam" is ambiguous, because it has several dimensions, namely social, political or spiritual.[121] When we talk about Islam it is important to realise Islam is not ahistorical or monolithic, and it is crucial to distinguish between religion and religious interpretation. Islam is not a fixed religion but a series of interpretations of Islam.[122] Because Islam is subject to interpretation we cannot separate it from its historical context, which was an 7th century tribal Arab patriarchy.[123] Making argument based on this historical context is exactly what Islamic feminist do in their work.[124] In the same way, a distinction can be made between faith, based on values and principles, and organized religion, which constitutes institutions, laws and practices; or between on the one side the sharia (revealed law) and on the other side *fiqh* (the science of jurisprudence). The sharia is believed to be sacred, universal and eternal, while *fiqh* is subject to change just like any other system of jurisprudence.[125] Islamic feminists argue that secular feminists equate Islam with a patriarchal reading of it and by doing so, secular feminists ignore important debates and activism within Islam which contribute to feminist goals.[126] By not acknowledging the alternative or progressive readings of Islamic feminists, secular feminist do in fact the same as Islamic fundamentalists, namely not seeing Islam in its historical context and subject to historical, cultural and gendered attempts to comprehend the holy texts. As a result the most rigid and dogmatic narrations prevail.[127]

Secular feminists also argue that the real problems of Muslim women will not be resolved by using theology, instead Islamic feminists should focus on socioeconomic and political questions.[128] Tohidi argues that the limits and potentials of Islamic feminism for women's empowerment "have to be accounted for in its deeds and practices more so than in its theological or theoretical strengths or inconsistencies".[129] Because of their focus on the private

[120] Bahi, "Islamic and Secular Feminisms," 142.
[121] Adújar, "Feminist Readings of the Qur'an," 60.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Barlas, "Uncrossed Bridges," 421.
[124] Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality," 32; Moghissi, "Islamic Feminism Revisited," 83; Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist Critiques in the Work of Fatima Mernissi* 209.
[125] Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality," 632.
[126] Bahi, "Islamic and Secular Feminisms," 148.
[127] Zine, "Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism," 16.
[128] Bahi, "Islamic and Secular Feminisms," 142.
[129] Tohidi, "Islamic Feminism," 140.

sphere, *i.e*. family law, the position of Islamic feminists about political and economic issues remains unclear and undeveloped, secular feminists argue. As long as Islamic feminists do not also focus on socioeconomic and political questions, but only on theological arguments, and their point of reference is the Qur'an instead of universal standards, their impact will remain limited. Even worse, solely focussing on theology could "reinforce the legitimacy of the Islamic system, help to reproduce it, and undermine secular alternatives".[130]

Social gender roles

Islamic feminists with their interpretations of the Qur'an seek to make changes and improve equality, women's rights and women's position in society. They argue that discrimination and inequality rather have a social basis than a divine one.[131] They state that any inequality emanates from patriarchal interpretations and stress the equality of men and women in the Qur'an with their own interpretations and arguments.[132] Amina Wadud writes in the preface of *Qur'an and Women* that the equality of men and women in Islam is irrefutable and that in her study of the Qur'an she found overwhelming conformation of this equality.[133] Wadud concludes that every exegete of the Qur'an is subject to personal and individual perspective. No one is totally objective. She also states that if one has assumptions about the inferiority of women, then this person will interpret the Qur'an in accordance with these assumptions, but if one keeps the key principles (justice, equity, harmony, moral responsibility, spiritual awareness, and development) in mind then it would be inevitable not to interpret the Qur'an in accordance with gender equality.[134]

Islamic feminists thus state that those who base gender inequality on the Qur'an use a conservative patriarchal readings of it. Barlas states that patriarchism is the main instrument for women's oppression in Muslim societies. She refuses to engender and sexualize God and breaks down the patriarchal imaginary of God as father figure, because a God who is above sex and gender would not show favouritism towards men by privileging them over women or by advocating the oppression of women. Furthermore, Barlas finds in her reading of the Qur'an affirmation "that women and men originated in the same self, have the same capacity for moral choice and personality and, as God's vice-regents on earth, have a mutual duty to enjoin the

[130] Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents," 1158.
[131] Ibid., 1144.
[132] Ibid., 1159.
[133] Wadud, *Qur'an and Women,* ix-xix.
[134] Ibid., 94-96.

right and forbid the wrong."[135] Barlas adds that even though there are some verses in the Qur'an that differentiate between men and women concerning certain social issues, and that these verses are interpreted as evidence of God's favouritism towards men, that difference should not be mistaken for inequality for that this difference has nothing to do with sex or gender.[136]

However, for secular feminists these different social roles of men and women are confirmation of unequal treatment. The Qur'an affirms the equal moral worth and spiritual equality between the sexes and for Islamic feminists this confirms full gender equality in the public and the private sphere. However, the idea of complementary but different social gender roles does not convince many secular feminists, because they precisely criticize these fixed and heteronormative gender identities and roles.[137]

Mutual acceptance and cooperation

Barlas is critical of the project of secular feminists and denounces pitting secularism against Islam or Islamism. This false binary is in her view pointless and presents Muslims with false choices which narrow the political arena. She argues not to secularize Islam but search for rights and equality within a Qur'anic framework.[138] Though there are secular feminists who do not see the benefits of Islamic feminism because they hold rigid views on Islam and Islamic feminism, there are also moderate secular feminists who acknowledge the contribution of Islamic feminist to women's equality. Tohidi stresses the importance of dialogue and coalition building among women activists. She adds that Islamic feminists should always respect the freedom of choice and should never impose their version of feminism on other strands of feminists. In general, it is dangerous for one ideological brand of feminism to present itself in such a way that they silence all other voices and ideas, whether this is secular or Islamic feminism.[139] In the same way Moghissi argues that secular feminists should be critical on Islamic feminism, because only then they are taken serious.[140] We can conclude by saying that both secular and Islamic feminists hold critical views over each other, however, there are also voices who stress the importance of mutual acceptance and cooperation.

To summarize, this chapter discussed the history of feminism in the Muslim world. I discussed the concept of feminism in the context of Islam. Two feminist paradigm were

[135] Barlas, "Uncrossed Bridges," 421.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Weir, "Islamic Feminisms and Freedom," 100.
[138] Barlas, "Uncrossed Bridges," 418-422.
[139] Tohidi, "Islamic Feminism," 143.
[140] Moghissi, "Islamic Feminism Revisited," 84.

identified, *i.e.* secular and Islamic feminism. Then this chapter focussed on the most important topics in the discussions between secular and Islamic feminists. It showed that secular and Islamic feminists still have disagreements on how they see gender relations and that they base their arguments on different sources. However, there is also rapprochement and the will to cooperate. Based on the discussion of the context of the Middle East, I will now shift the focus to Turkey.

3. Secular and Islamic feminism in Turkey

3.1 History of secular and Islamic feminism

Literature on feminism in Turkey identifies four successive feminist waves: Kemalist (or state) feminism, Turkish feminism, Kurdish feminism and Islamic feminism.[141] These waves all have their own identity and groups of women they represent. These women come from different backgrounds (social, geographical, ethnic) and have different ideas about a woman's place in society and the role of religion. This chapter will first give a historical overview of feminism in Turkey and discuss the four feminist waves. Subsequently, the secular-Islamic paradigm in Turkish politics and society will be discussed and how this influences feminism in Turkey. From there we arrive at the feminist debate in the AKP era and the most important discussions about women and gender issues will be discussed.

The first wave: Kemalist feminism

Women and women's movements in the Ottoman Empire already had voiced their demands for more gender equality and even though all women's organisations founded in the Ottoman Empire had fallen apart, the feminist movement that emerged in the republic cannot be seen separate from the women's movement in the late Ottoman Empire. However, it would be men who instigated the first feminist reforms.[142] The first feminist movement was subject to state control and overshadowed by the Kemalist project of modernization. Part of this project was the creation of "the modern Turkish woman" who could propagate the new Turkish identity. The new identity was based on the idea of a homogenous Turkish people, whereas in the Ottoman Empire cosmopolitanism, founded on the Islamic principle of tolerance, prevailed. This common Turkish identity was supposed to unite the new nation, but in reality it meant that ethnic and religious minorities had to deal with expulsion, assimilation and abandonment.[143].

The creation of this new Turkish woman did not mean radical changes in male-female relations. The patriarchal order was still accepted as norm by both men and women, because

[141] Diner & Toktas, "Waves of feminism in Turkey," 41.
[142] Ahmed, "Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East," 159. van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 465-466.
[143] İbrahimhakkıoğlu, "Beyond the Modern/Religious Dichotomy," 144.

men and women were still seen as fundamentally different and complementary.[144] Within this patriarchal order, women did voice their demands. Most of these demands were related to equal access to the public sphere.[145] Some of these demands were met. For instance, in the early years of the republic, the Swiss Civil Code was implemented, education for girls and women increased and women were given the right to vote for local elections in 1930 and for national elections in 1934. However, motherhood, *i.e.* raising the next generation Turkish citizens, remained the most important duty for a Turkish woman, which becomes clear from Atatürk's speech that he held in 1923:

"In this total division of responsibilities the women, in parallel with their inherent duties should be engaged in total work needed for the welfare and good fortune of society. The domestic duties of a woman are the easiest and most unimportant ones. The greatest duty of the woman is motherhood... Our nation is determined to become a strong nation."[146]

In short, an educated mother was able to actively contribute to the economy and to the development of society and the new nation.[147] The leading motive of this top down process of giving women more rights, therefore, was not *their* wellbeing perse, but the idea that educating women and raising their status was necessary in the process of rehabilitating and reforming society for the sake of progress of the nation. The nation was dominated by men, so this progress would be primarily in the interest of men.[148]

Because women's emancipation was carried out by the state, it left little room for women to independently create women's movements or organizations. The events around the *Türk Kadın Birliği* (Union of Turkish Women) are exemplary for this. The *Türk Kadın Birliği* was actually founded in 1923 under the name *Kadınlar Halk Fırkası* (Women's People's Party).[149] However, the union had to change its name because Atatürk wanted to use "People's Party" in the name of his own party, *i.e.* the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People's Party; from now on CHP). The *Türk Kadın Birliği* was not able to achieve both their political and social goals, because in 1928 an enforced change of its board and statues made sure they were further depoliticized. In 1935 the *Türk Kadın Birliği* was closed down by the government because the government had stated that the union had reached its goals. Afterwards women

[144] van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 460; İbrahimhakkıoğlu, "Beyond the Modern/Religious Dichotomy," 143.
[145] Diner & Toktas, "Waves of feminism in Turkey," 44.
[146] This quote is mentioned in Safarian, "On the History of Turkish Feminism," 150.
[147] van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 465.
[148] Ahmed, "Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East," 158.
[149] van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 465.

were placed within state organizations and institutions, so that the government could keep control over them. Women who stayed active had to deal with state control. It would take a considerable amount of time for the second feminist wave to emerge.[150]

The second wave: Turkish feminism

The second feminist wave, which followed developments in Europe, was secular in nature. In the 1960s, women's activities to achieve gender equality in Europe and the United States grew considerably and this was labelled the second feminist wave. This wave was way more radical than the first feminist wave and women started to put their own development above society's development. They demanded fundamental changes in male-female relations.[151] By the 1980s this movement had also reached Turkey. This second wave in Turkey, known as "Turkish feminism", originated in the years after the coup d'état of 1980, especially within leftist women group; and, it consisted of mostly urban, middle-class, well-educated, professional women.[152] The first few years after the coup d'état, however, political movements were forbidden. Because women's organizations had often been extensions of political parties and movements, formally they weren't allowed either. Nevertheless, influenced by developments in the rest of the world, Turkish women started to come together, first informally later formally, to discuss the still unequal position of men and women in Turkish society.[153] By the late 1980s, a "grassroots civil feminists activism" had emerged from the Turkish socialist women's movement and included liberal, Kemalist and secularist feminists.[154]

These diverse women's organizations, because of their different political affiliations, often had also different viewpoints on their goals and how to achieve them. However, on some major topics they did found common ground, *i.e.* their fight against violence against women, for which they held joined protests, and their demand for changes in the Civil Code of 1926 to ensure more equality for women in marriage.[155] For a long time, criticizing the Civil Code was taboo. The Civil Code had a revolutionary status, because of all the rights women had received in 1926. However, this changed when second wave feminists looked deeper into the law and

[150] van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 466-468; Diner & Toktas, "Waves of feminism in Turkey," 44.
[151] van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 460.
[152] Diner & Toktas, "Waves of feminism in Turkey," 45; Mutluer, "The intersectionality of gender, sexuality, and religion," 103.
[153] van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 469-470.
[154] Dorroll, Philip, "Post-Gezi Islamic Theology," 159.
[155] van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 469.

drew attention to its instrumental nature in the Kemalist modernisation project.[156] Other topics that were important in the second wave movement were oppression of women within the family spheres, the misrepresentation of women in the media and the fight against virginity tests. The motto 'personal is political' became the motto of the second wave.[157] Contrary to the first feminist wave, this time, Turkish feminists themselves were able to institutionalize the movement within society. A women's library opened in Istanbul, which collects scholarly and literary works on women and by women. Furthermore, several periodicals focussing on women's issues were published, universities decided to open research centres on women's issues and departments of women's studies, and consultancy centres and women shelters were established.[158] Over all, the second feminist movement in Turkey put women's rights and women's issues back on the agenda.

The third wave: Kurdish

By the 1990s the leftist, more radical women's groups from the second wave had lost their momentum. Influential were the decrease in political activism in general and the changes that took place in traditional male-female relations in Turkey. In 1989, Turgut Özal became president of Turkey and sailed a more liberal economic and political course. In that period, Kurdish women as well as Islamists women started to get organised.[159] Connected to other political developments, the 1990s saw the rise of the Kurdish feminist movement and the Islamist feminist movement. Interestingly, both forms of feminism showed yet again similarities to developments in Western feminism. In the West, black and lesbian feminists challenged second wave feminists for only focussing on white and heterosexual women. In Turkey, Kurdish and Islamic women challenged second wave feminists for being ethno-centric and not being inclusive to other identities by only focusing on the secular, ethnic Turkish woman.[160] Besides being ethnically limited, Kurdish feminists stressed that Turkish feminists did not acknowledge the different struggles Kurdish women faced by living in conflict zones and often coming from rural areas and low socio-economic backgrounds.[161] However, the discussion about Kurdish feminism is beyond the scope of this thesis.

[156] Arat, "Women's Rights and Islam in Turkish Politics," 238.
[157] Diner & Toktas, "Waves of feminism in Turkey," 41.
[158] Diner & Toktas, "Waves of feminism in Turkey," 46.
[159] van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 470.
[160] Diner & Toktas, "Waves of feminism in Turkey," 47.
[161] Ibid., 42-47.

The fourth wave: Islamic feminism

Even though Islamic feminism truly emerged in the 1990s, it origins can be traced back to rise of the Islamist movement in the late the 1980s. Islamism in Turkey was not an entirely new phenomenon. However, it had never lived long because since the 1960s, Islamists parties or parties with Islamists tendencies had been closed down by the army when it thought that the Kemalist principles were at stake. In the liberal climate from the 1990s, however, new Islamist intellectuals were allowed to speak out and the Islamist movement was able to rise. Islamism, embodied by the RP, gained foothold in Turkish politics.[162]

Religious women, just like their male counterparts, became more integrated into the political system. In this period, some scholars argue that it is more accurate to identify the movement as "Islamist feminism", because religious women were active for and/or within the Islamist movement. Just like Islamist men at that time, religious women questioned the secular state and strived for a political role for Islam.[163] Within the Islamist movement, women participated in activities, such as campaigning for religious conservative parties.[164] Muslim women demanded their place within society as *Muslim,* not per se as woman. Up until then religious women wearing the headscarf had to deal with prejudices and stereotypes. They were seen as inferior, un-modern and backward compared to Turkish secular women.[165] In that period, religious women also started to organize themselves and voiced their opinions. They published a number of periodicals writing about themes important to them. In these periodicals, they voiced their opinion that men and women are quintessential different, but complementary. They argued that the most important duties of a women were those she carried out in her home.[166]

Nevertheless, women in the Islamist movement became discontent over their position. They wanted to participate more in social life but they encountered resistance from the Islamist men. Religious women became invested in questioning their individual rights and liberties, and became more critical of their male counterparts in the Islamist movement. In this period, religious women started to develop an Islamic feminist discourse.[167] Pioneering was the work of Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal *Kadın Karşıtı Söylemin İslam Geleneğindeki İzdüşümleri* (2001).[168]

[162] Diner & Toktas, "Waves of feminism in Turkey," 50-51.
[163] Aydındağ, "The Evolution and Intersection of Academic and Popular Islamic Feminism in Turkey," 141.
[164] Diner & Toktas, "Waves of feminism in Turkey," 50-51.
[165] Aydındağ, "The Evolution and Intersection of Academic and Popular Islamic Feminism in Turkey," 141.
[166] van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 470.
[167] Aydındağ, "The Evolution and Intersection of Academic and Popular Islamic Feminism in Turkey," 141; Özcan, "Turkish Women in Islamism," 185-186.
[168] Tuksal, Hidayet Şefkatli. *Kadın Karşıtı Söylemin İslam Geleneğindeki İzdüşümleri.* Ankara: Kitâbiyât.

It was the first "systematic Islamic feminists theological work" written in modern Turkish.[169] Tuksal unites feminist theoretical discourses with Islamic theological and ethical discourses. She represents a movement of women who started a conversation on the relationship between religion (*din)* and tradition (*gelenek*) based on their own experiences and reflections.[170] In her work, Tuksal tackles patriarchal and misogynistic discourses with what is in her view the "essence" of Qur'anic teaching, *i.e.* fundamental human equality. She argues that in essence the Qur'an opposes oppression and injustice, including the oppression and injustice by patriarchy.[171]

Within the Islamic feminist movement a distinction can be made between religious (veiled) women's participation within society and politics, and, an Islamic feminist discourse based on reinterpretations of the Qur'an and Islamic law. In the 1990s, Kurdish and especially Islamists women with their critiques, not just on Turkish secular feminism but also on the Kemalist principles in general, created eventually polarization and fragmentation within Turkish feminism, because secular women's organizations that wanted to defend the Turkish secular nation-state, *i.e.* the heritage of Atatürk, increased.[172] This resulted in a strong secular-Islamist paradigm between feminists in Turkey.

3.2 The secular-Islamist paradigm

The Kemalist reforms did not just create a division between state and religion, but in fact instituted state control over religion. Religion became something that was confined to the private spheres. However, these reforms did also influence people's private lives significantly. The Kemalist idea of secularism, *i.e.* laicism, led to institutional reforms, but also created an Orientalist value system in which anything associated with Islam or Islamic traditions was denied or looked down upon. In this context, all things "western" were seen as "modern" and, in contrast, everything associated with Islam was seen as "traditional". This created a strong modern-religious dichotomy, or in other words introduced "a secular-Islamist paradigm".[173] This happened in a country where, even today, the vast majority of the people identifies as Muslim and about 70 percent of women cover their head.[174]

[169] Dorroll, "Post-Gezi Islamic Theology," 163.
[170] Ibid., 161-163.
[171] Ibid., 163.
[172] Diner & Toktas, "Waves of feminism in Turkey," 47; van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," 470.
[173] İbrahimhakkıoğlu, "Beyond the Modern/Religious Dichotomy," 145.
[174] Arat, "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey," 126.

As mentioned, the RP represented Islamism in Turkish politics. In 1997, the relations between the government (the RP was in the coalition) and the army got worse because of inflammatory statements by some RP parliamentarians and mayors, and, on February 28, the military intervened with a memorandum. The military memorandum demanded change in order to limit the influence of the Islamists. As the demands were not met, the army intervened and in 1998 the RP was officially closed down by the Constitutional Court.[175] However, the Islamists reorganised and established the *Fazilet Partisi* (Virtue Party; hereinafter FP), which was also closed down by the Constitutional Court in 2001. This development led to disagreements in the FP between conservatives, who wanted to pursue a strict Islamic course, and the modernists, who wanted to transform the party into a wide centrum-right movement without the Islamic rhetoric. Eventually, the modernist led by Abdullah Gül and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan split of and established the then centrum-right and neoliberal AKP.[176]

For a long time, the Kemalists controlled politics in Turkey. However, this changed when the AKP won the national elections in 2002 and has won them ever since. The AKP started as a neoliberal, centrum right party, but over the years, the AKP has become more and more authoritarian and has pushed conservative religious politics into almost every area of life.[177] This fuelled the secular-Islamist paradigm. The Kemalist CHP has remained the biggest opposition party of the AKP since 2002 and grew out to be a centrum left party. Throughout the years polarization emerged between the left oriented, secular CHP opposition and the right oriented, conservative AKP government. The Kemalist tried via different ways to limit the AKP's power, but did not succeed; both the military and the Constitutional Court were not able to intervene. Instead, the AKP, with controversial criminal investigations, was able to limit the power of the military and silence secular opposition. In 2013, section 35 of a specific law that formed the basis for the military to intervene whenever the Kemalist principles were compromised, was changed. From then on, the military became formally an instrument of the government.[178]

3.3 The "headscarf debate"

What women wear and do with their bodies is a topic of debate between secularist and Islamists. Women's bodies are used as instrument for secular and Islamist politics and this places gender

[175] Zürcher, *Turkije, een moderne geschiedenis*, 375-377.
[176] Ibid., 377-380.
[177] Aydındağ, "The Evolution and Intersection of Academic and Popular Islamic Feminism in Turkey," 186-187.
[178] Zürcher, *Turkije, een moderne geschiedenis*, 389-398.

in the middle of the current secular-Islamist paradigm. The "modern" (unveiled) woman became the personification for the Kemalist ideology and the "traditional" (veiled) woman became the personification for the Islamist ideology. In this context, the discussion around the headscarf has been most prominent, because the headscarf had become the "antithesis of modernity".[179] In the early years of the republic, wearing traditional Islamic clothing was discouraged. In the years that followed, women wearing a headscarf were marginalized, mostly in urban areas. In 1978, the government introduced a dress code for its employees and for the first time women wearing the headscarf had to deal with an official constraint. After the 1980 coup d'état, the Council of Higher Education officially issued a general ban on the headscarf.[180] In 1989, the Council of Higher Education removed the dress code from the Student Discipline Code, after which women were able to go to university wearing a headscarf.[181]

After the 1997 military intervention, however, the Kemalist ideology was again promoted and the army enforced the eradication of public signs of Islam. The National Security Council made eighteen decisions. One of those was about the way of dressing. A modern way of dressing was promoted and wearing a headscarf was considered anti-modern and anti-secularist. Based on this, the controversial headscarf ban was re-enforced.[182] In 2008, the AKP tried to lift the ban but the Constitutional Court blocked the lifting of the headscarf ban. However, in 2010, the Council of Higher Education took the initiative to lift the ban in universities. In the three years that followed, Turkish parliament, the AKP government, and both the Council of State and lower courts lifted parts of the headscarf ban for parliamentarians, lawyers, teachers, other public employees, and students.[183] So, since 2013, Turkey no longer carried out a headscarf ban for women.

The headscarf debate is not just a conflict between religious and non-religious women who hold different world views. It is also connected to factors like class, status, migration, urbanization, and economic development. In addition, women's bodies and clothing are used in the discussions between secular and Islamist men.[184] Throughout the years, a heated debate took place between proponents and opponents of the headscarf ban. Secular feminists are convinced that religious women are forced by their families to wear a headscarf. Moreover, secular feminists think that religious women seek to enforce a conservative agenda and

[179] İbrahimhakkıoğlu, "Beyond the Modern/Religious Dichotomy," 143-152.
[180] Akbulut, "Veiling as self-disciplining," 433.
[181] Uğur, "Unveiled," 192-193.
[182] Akbulut, "Veiling as self-disciplining," 433; Uğur, "Unveiled," 193.
[183] Akbulut, "Veiling as self-disciplining," 433-434.
[184] Onar & Müftüler-Baç, "The adultery and headscarf debates in Turkey," 379.

disempower nonreligious women and men.[185] In general, secularist (including Kemalists, liberals and nationalists) believe that women who wear a headscarf and at the same time participate actively in society are a threat to the secular nation and to modernity.[186]

In contrast, religious women state that wearing a headscarf gives them the freedom to practice their faith and simultaneously participate in the public sphere. They claimed their Constitutional right on religious freedom.[187] In their eyes it is possible to be a pious Muslim and strive for the emancipation of women.[188] Women who defend their right to wear the headscarf state that it is a symbol of their submission and commitment to God only.[189] For these religious women wearing the headscarf is a practice that teaches them self-discipline. They wear the headscarf not to protect them from the male gaze, but from their own self: it reminds them on a daily basis why they are committed to their faith.[190] Other, non-religious, opponents of the headscarf ban make arguments based on a human's rights approach and are critical of the Constitutional Court for privileging the interests of the state over woman's rights. Opponents of the headscarf ban states that such a ban takes away the right to education, because religious women had to resort to measures such as wearing a head or a wig to follow education or even quit their study. Women who did wear a headscarf were sometimes dragged out of the university and their headscarf was pulled off.[191]

Though the AKP succeeded in the end, it took them more than a decade to lift the ban. Islamist women were frustrated by this and started a campaign in 2011, prior to the general elections. With the campaign "If no headscarved candidate, then no vote" they wanted to pressure the AKP in lifting the ban and draw attention to the unequal victimization of Islamist men and women. Interestingly, Islamist women used both an Islamic feminist discourse by arguing that Islam eradicates inequalities, discrimination and oppression, and a secular feminist discourse by criticizing concepts such as the patriarchy, obedience, discrimination and oppression.[192] But, even though the ban is lifted, the headscarf did not disappear completely in the public debate. As we will see, the activism of Islamic feminists goes beyond the topic of the headscarf. The secular women's movement and its feminist values shaped the concerns of Islamic feminists, though there might be differences in approach and priorities.[193]

[185] Ibid., 381.
[186] Ibid., 386.
[187] Arat, "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey," 135.
[188] Onar & Müftüler-Baç, "The adultery and headscarf debates in Turkey," 381.
[189] Akbulut, "Veiling as self-disciplining," 443-444.
[190] Ibid., 439-443.
[191] Onar & Müftüler-Baç, "The adultery and headscarf debates in Turkey," 386.
[192] Arat, "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey," 135.
[193] Ibid., 127-130.

3.4 Feminism during the AKP era

When the AKP came into power in 2002, the party positioned itself as pro-European and worked actively to meet EU criteria in the EU accession process. For instance, in order to meet these criteria, the AKP committed to the implementation of all CEDAW (the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) requirements. In this period the women's movement in Turkey achieved major victories.[194]

Penal Code reforms: the adultery debate

The AKP made it a top priority to reform the 1926 Penal Code.[195] Feminists in Turkey seized this opportunity to voice their demands about the Penal Code reforms and a coalition of secular women's groups started a campaign. The Penal Code stated that adultery was punishable by law. Since the 1980s, secular feminists voiced strong critiques against it and in 1996 this clause was dropped based on unequal penalization of men and women. However, in 2004, the AKP tried to implement an article into the Penal Code criminalizing adultery again, arguing that it would protect women in the end. Secular feminists feared control over and punishment of women's sexuality. Secular feminists and Islamist women, most of them aligned to the AKP, clashed. In the end, pressured by secular women's groups, but mostly by European officials, Erdogan withdrew the proposal.[196]

Eventually in September 2004, the new Penal Code was accepted and it included more than thirty amendments that were recommended by the coalition of secular women's groups. Since then, crimes committed against women are labelled as "crimes against the individual" instead of "crimes against family or social order" and women received equal status in marriage. These were major victories for women and the women's movement. In addition, the AKP signed the CEDAW's Optional Protocol and the government amended Articles 10 and 90 in the constitution to guarantee that CEDAW prevails in case of a conflict with national law. These developments mark a milestone, not just in Turkey but also in the Muslim world.[197]

[194] Negrón-Gonzales, "The feminist movement during the AKP era in Turkey," 201.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Negrón-Gonzales, "The feminist movement during the AKP era in Turkey," 201-202; Onar & Müftüler-Baç, "The Adultery and Headscarf Debates in Turkey," 384-385.
[197] Negrón-Gonzales, "The feminist movement during the AKP era in Turkey," 202-203.

Gender quotas

Another topic of discussion concerns gender quotas. It was mostly secular feminists who wanted to implement such quotas to increase women's participation in politics and the work force.[198] Women's employment had not been a primary concern for Islamist and their traditional supporters, but in the public discussion, Islamist women supported and advocated for women's employment. Islamists women voiced their critique on the conservative community for keeping women from working, but stayed away from criticizing the AKP government. They used different arguments, some of them based on feminists interpretations of Islam. However, it became clear that Islamist women often accepted and supported traditional gender roles.[199]

Violence against women

Since the 1980s, feminists demanded attention for violence against women. On this topic, secular and Islamic feminists found each other, both condemning this violence. In 2011, when Erdoğan signed the Istanbul Convention, many Islamist women praised the AKP for their commitment to the women cause.[200] In the discussion about violence against women, Islamist women stand in solidarity with secular women and use both secular and Islamic arguments. They condemn gender-based violence within their own Islamic communities but also violence towards secular women who dress and behave not according to conservative Islamic prescriptions and for that reason become victims of assault. Also, Islamist women defended women shelters for victims of gender-based violence, which were still controversial in conservative communities.[201]

The abortion debate

Since 1983, abortion had been legal in Turkey and women were allowed to terminate their pregnancy up until the tenth week. In 2012, Erdoğan stated that abortion was akin to murder. Subsequently, the minister of health announced that the government wanted to restrict or ban abortions. Here upon, several secular feminist organizations gathered again to protest the criminalization of abortion in Turkey. Later that year, the government pulled back the bill,

[198] Ibid., 204-205.
[199] Arat, "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey," 133-138.
[200] Ibid., 132.
[201] Arat, "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey," 138-141.

mainly due to criticism from the European Union.[202] Though not implemented, the idea about changing the abortion law had started a heated debate, in which secular and Islamist women sided together. What is interesting about this debate is that Islamist women personally oppose abortion but they also oppose a ban on abortion in support of women who chose to have one. Islamist women agreed with secular arguments, such as focussing on birth control instead of criminalizing abortion, being against imposition of values, supporting the right of privacy, and stated that women who choose to have an abortion do not think lightly of such a decision, which supports women's authority over their body.[203] However, Islamist women also fuelled this discussion using arguments based on progressive interpretations of the Qur'an and Islamic law. For instance, they referred to interpretations of Islamic law that permit abortion up until four months of the pregnancy. Where in previous discussions Islamist women had supported the AKP government, now for the first time they publicly opposed the government by opposing the criminalization of abortion and prioritizing legal rights of women.[204]

Headscarf ban lifted and Gezi Park protests

In 2013, new developments took place within the feminist movement in Turkey, influenced by two major events. First, up until 2013 Islamist women had been mainly focused on their right to wear the headscarf in all public places. They never really mobilized or been active around other feminist issues. Since 2013, due to the lifting of the headscarf ban and increased education and occupational opportunities, a new generation of religious women is engaging with feminism, some of them within a religious framework.[205] Also important is the fact that by that time the public opinion in Turkey about the headscarf had turned around in favour of religious women.[206]

Second, 2013 was the year of the Gezi Park protests in Turkey. The protests initially started with environmentalists who protested against the building plans of the AKP government in the Gezipark in Istanbul. The protesters faced police brutality and soon the protests developed into a nationwide movement against the authoritarian AKP government. The AKP's neoliberal economic policies, patriarchal rhetoric, social policies, marginalization of ethnic and religious minorities, and marginalization of the LGBTIQ community were important themes in the

[202] Negrón-Gonzales, "The feminist movement during the AKP era in Turkey," 205-206.
[203] Arat, "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey," 141-143.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Arat, "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey," 127-130; Okuyan & Curtin, ""You don't belong anywhere, you're 'in-between'"," 490-491.
[206] Dorroll, "Post-Gezi Islamic Theology," 165.

protests.[207] The Gezi Park protests are known for its wide range of participants and the visibility of women. The protesters had different genders, sexualities, ethnic and religious backgrounds, and consisted of people with various political, social and cultural affiliations. The Gezi Park protests were the embodiment of pluralism in Turkish society, but at the same time the start of deeper polarisation between proponents and opponents of the AKP.[208]

The Gezi Park protests were also a major turning point in the history of feminism and LGBTIQ activism in Turkey.[209] Secular women and religious women again stood together and used joined chants in the demonstrations. Protesters with different backgrounds and intersectional identities brought about discussions about the nature of Turkish identity, nature of the state, and the human rights of women and members of the LQBTIQ community. During that period, secular and Islamic feminists came together and moved towards a new form of intersectional feminist discourse.[210]

To summarize, the secular feminist movement and the Islamic feminist movement had in common that they both challenged the state's control over women's bodies. Whereas secular feminists in Turkey use a human rights approach based on secular arguments, the strength of Islamic feminists is that they use secular as well as Islamic arguments to defend women's rights. In this way, Islamic feminists may act as a bridge between their conservative community and secular feminists.[211] Though initially the two movements opposed each other, throughout the years they proved to be able to combine forces and establish change.[212] The next chapter will discuss the current debate and relationship between secular and Islamic feminists.

[207] Ibid.
[208] Mutluer, "The intersectionality of gender, sexuality, and religion," 110.
[209] Dorroll, "Post-Gezi Islamic Theology," 166.
[210] Ibid., 167.
[211] Arat, "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey," 127.
[212] İbrahimhakkıoğlu, "Beyonce the Modern/Religious Dichotomy," 148.

4. The current feminist debate in Turkey

From the previous chapter we know that feminism in Turkey, here represented by Gülsüm Kav and Tuba Torun, has been for a long time primarily secular in nature. However, over the years, Muslim feminism has become more visible in Turkey. Representing a bigger movement of Muslim women activists, Rümeysa Çamdereli and Berrin Sönmez openly call themselves "Muslim/Islamic feminist" and speak out against inequality.[213] When we look at the countless secular women's organizations that exist now, we could say that the secular feminist movement has been institutionalized. We cannot say the same thing yet about the Islamic feminist movement, but, that is changing; the Havle Kadın Derneği (Havle Women's Association), established in 2018, is the first Muslim feminist women's association in Turkey. In this chapter, the work of these four Turkish feminists will be discussed to find out what the current feminist debate in Turkey is about. After examining primary sources, it appeared that these four feminists focus on a number of specific topics, *i.e.* gender equality, social norms and social gender roles, women's participation in politics and the labour market, alimony rights, amnesty for child abusers, and violence against women, femicide and the Istanbul Convention.

Gender equality

For Gülsüm Kav gender equality cannot be seen separate from economic equality and she stated that "we have to fight against capitalism, which is the biggest inequality system that will reproduce gender inequality."[214] In the Turkish debate, conservative voices focus on justice instead of equality. Justice is based upon fundamental differences between men and women, and sees gender roles as different but complementary.[215] Tuba Torun is critical on this topic. She specifically mentions the women's organizations KADEM (Kadın ve demokrasi derneği; the Women and Democracy Association) whose vice-chair is President Erdoğan's daughter Sümeyye Erdoğan Bayraktar.[216] Torun regards KADEM largely as a component of the political establishment and believes that their deployment in the feminist movement has been harmful to the struggle. She explains:

[213] Taştekin, "Müslüman feministler': Ne istiyorlar, neden eleştiriliyorlar?"; Sivrikaya, "Hem Müslüman Hem Feminist: Ailenin değil rabbimizin kuluyuz."
[214] Kav, "Kadınların hayatı, kadınlarındır." "cinsiyet eşitsizliğini yeniden üretecek en büyük eşitsizlik sistem kapitalizm ile sistem karşıtı mücadele vermek zorundayız."
[215] Bron
[216] Torun, "The reasons behind pro-gov't NGO rejecting a feminist campaign."

"Conservative circles, including KADEM, regard the concept of equality as narrow and inadequate. In other words, according to them, the history of the world's women's rights movement has been rotating around a narrow and inadequate concept. Other statements from KADEM state that women cannot exist without the family. Ultimately, they emphasize that women cannot be equal to men."[217]

Instead KADEM strives for "gender justice", in accordance with the AKP's standpoint. However for Torun "justice does not mean much without equality and freedom. That's why the conservatives demonize feminism, as it advocates equality."[218] Rümeysa Çamdereli also explicitly criticises those who call for "justice, not equality".[219] For Sönmez, gender equality is the solution for gender violence and she strives for equality within all areas of life, including the mosque. [220]

Social norms and social gender roles

Torun states that social gender norms are learned, we are not born with it. Men are taught they ought to be masculine and now while the feminist struggle is liberating women, their masculinity is threatened. According to Torun we can speak of a "masculinity crisis", although there are also men who walk side by side with feminist and strive for equality. The masculinity crisis is also one of the reasons for the increase in violence against women. Once men feel like they lose their power over women, they resort to violence. In the end, Torun states, men themselves are suffering the most from the weight of their masculinity and the fear to lose it.[221] Kav criticizes that president Erdoğan urges women to get married and have at least three children, and that women are seen as extensions of men and aren't recognised as individuals. She states that marriage perpetuates the patriarchy.[222]

Çamdereli in the first place identifies herself as Muslim an added "feminist" to her Muslim identity. As a woman wearing the headscarf and calling herself a feminist she received criticism from both secular and Islamic sides. Islamic circles feel uncomfortable with the Muslim feminist critique on patriarchal interpretations of religion and secular feminists believe

[217] Torun, "The reasons behind pro-gov't NGO rejecting a feminist campaign."
[218] Ibid.
[219] Çamdereli, "Aileyin Korumanın Bedeli ve 8 Mart."
[220] Sönmez, Kadının payına düşen: Mecliste yok sayılma camide şiddete uğratılma."
[221] Torun, "'Erkeklik krizi'"
[222] Interview with Gülsüm Kav by Fariba Nawa, https://sistersofeurope.com/women-arent-recognised-as-individuals-but-as-extensions-of-men/

that a "headscarf will never bring freedom".[223] Çamdereli, who is also a musician, experiences critiques from conservative circles about the fact that she performs on stage. Conservative men feel threatened by her musicianship, because women are expected to act within certain limits and they are not supposed to be visible. Conservative women make harsh comments like "you cannot do this" or "take of your headscarf and go".[224] From the secular side, she often gets praised. People say how amazing it is that she is a musician and wears a headscarf. At first, she was very happy hearing this, thinking "I am marginal". Later she realized that what she was doing was perfectly normal.[225]

The idea of Muslim feminists provokes strong reactions, because it does not fit the view people have of religious women. Women participating in the 2019 Women's March were accused of wanting to silence and disrespecting the *ezan* (call to prayer) by whistling during the march. Sönmez states that this "slander" is a tool of anti-feminists and misogynists, and, in her opinion, this was related to the upcoming local elections. She stated: "The phenomenon what really scares misogynists and makes them reckless to use religion as a tool is the presence of Muslim feminists".[226] Çamdereli attended the 2019 Women's March and carried a banner with the slogan "Are you God? Let your family go down!". She referred to people's judgement and the patriarchal idea of the family. The photo of Çamdereli and the banner went viral and she received enormous backlash and insults.[227]

Many religious people consider gender equality against nature and see it as a concept contrary to religion. They use biological difference between men and women as a justification for their opposition to equality. They say it is against the Islamic concept "*fitrat*" (nature). Sönmez interprets this concept differently. In the broadest sense of the concept, *fitrat* is everything that separates humans from animals. Sönmez, specifically focussing on her religious "brothers and sisters", discusses the concept of *fitrat* through its three layers; biological characteristics, social skills and the purpose of the creation of man. The purpose of human beings is turning to the good, and avoid and forbid what is evil. In doing this, there is no hierarchy between the sexes, she argues:

[223] Taştekin, "Müslüman feministler': Ne istiyorlar, neden eleştiriliyorlar?"; Kav, "İşsizlik oranları kadınlara ne anlatıyor?"
[224] Çetin, "Müslüman Feminist Rümeysa Çamdereli."
[225] Ibid.
[226] "Kadın düşmanlarını asıl korkutan ve dini araç olarak kullanmak yönünde pervasızlaştıran olgu, Müslüman feministlerin varlığı." from Sönmez, "Islık, ezan ve İslamî feminizme saldırı."
[227] Çamdereli, "Aileyin Korumanın Bedeli ve 8 Mart."

"They should see that it is against the purpose of creation to establish a hierarchy between the sexes of a person who is directed to the same perfection despite his bodily existence, the needs and pleasures of the body, the difference between the sexes and other gender characteristics created by this difference. Hucurat/13 clearly states the equality of people regardless of their gender in social life with its first sentence. It is clear in this verse that there will be no hierarchy between the sexes, in other words, there will be gender equality."[228]

She concludes by saying that those who will stop reading it through the glasses of patriarchy, will easily see equality.[229] Sönmez does not believe that social gender roles for men and women are prescribed by religion. She is also not convinced that women should obey their man according to the Qur'an. She states that "both men and women are commanded to fulfil their family obligations. There is nothing that designates women to the house and defines the woman only by motherhood. A woman is an individual directly responsible to God." [230]

Women's participation in politics and the labour market

Women's participation in politics and the labour market is disproportionally low in Turkey. Kav states that on 2% of local politicians is woman.[231] Sönmez states that "it is clear that there are only 119 women mayors among 31 thousand elected mayors throughout the history of the Republic, which cannot be explained by coincidence … In other words, the number 119 shows that there is a mountain of difference between the words and actions of political parties. These numbers are proof that, contrary to their claims, the parties do not support women politicians."[232] Sönmez thinks that political participation of women in politics is an important threshold in the struggle for gender equality.[233]

Kav often connects the women struggle to economic factors. She states that the economic crisis affects women disproportionally and growing unemployment rates effect

[228] "Bedensel varlığı, bedenin ihtiyaç ve hazlarını, cinsler arası farklılığı ve bu farkın yarattığı başka başka cinsiyet özelliklerine rağmen aynı kemale yöneltilen insanın cinsleri arasında hiyerarşi kurmanın yaratılış gayesine aykırı hareket etmek olduğunu görmeleri gerekir. Toplum hayatında cinsiyeti ne olursa olsun insanların eşitliğini Hucurat/13 ilk cümlesiyle açıkça belirtir. Cinsler arasında hiyerarşi olmayacağı yani cinsiyet eşitliği bu ayette açıktır." from Sönmez, "Fıtrat nedir? Eşitlik fıtrata aykırı mı?"
[229] Sönmez, "Fıtrat nedir? Eşitlik fıtrata aykırı mı?"
[230] "Hem kadın hem erkeğe aile yükümlülüklerini yerine getirmesi emrediliyor. Kadına evi işaret eden ve kadını sadece annelikle tanımlayan hiçbir şey yok. Kadın, Allah'a karşı doğrudan sorumlu bir bireydir."
[231] Kav, "Seçimler ve Rabia Naz adaleti."
[232] Sönmez, "Erken evlilik değil o çocuk istismarı!" "Cumhuriyet tarihi boyunca seçilmiş 31 bin belediye başkanı içinde sadece 119 kadın belediye başkanı olmasının tesadüfle izah edilmeyeceği açık… Yani 119 sayısı siyasi partilerin, söylemleri ile eylemleri arasında dağlar kadar fark olduğunu gösterir. İddialarının aksine partilerin kadın politikacıları desteklemediklerinin kanıtı bu sayılar."
[233] Sönmez, "CHP, KADEM ve kadınların siyaseti."

young people and women the most. At the same time, violence against women is increasing, which is no coincidence.[234] Besides, women's participation in the workforce makes them economically independent and less vulnerable to oppression and violence.[235] According to statistics of 2020, the labour market consists for 30.9% of women; 26.3% of women is employed; and 15% is unemployed.[236] Kav argues that the definition of unemployment needs to be widened. Official statistic do not include women who want to work but are not able to or not allowed. Right now, 11 million women are labelled as "housewife" and are not included in unemployment rates. Therefore the numbers are not accurate and, in addition, a form of sexism, according to Kav.[237] She also cites another research which categorizes why people are not part of the workforce. Categories include "student", "retired" or "busy with the household". The majority of women (55%) fall within the category "busy with the household". In contrast, 0% of men fall in this category. For Kav this shows the inequality between men and women. However, the Turkish government is not taking any steps to close this gap, Kav states.[238]

Alimony rights

Recently, there has been critique on alimony rights and some members of the AKP see it as an punishment for men and argue that alimony rights should be abolished. Rather it is demanded that women find a job and work, or that alimony is paid by the state. For Kav this debate is connected to the sexist labour division. The work women do in the household is not valued and the importance of women's financial independence is not acknowledged. She states that working women also face violence, however, to empower women it is important they are able to stand on their own feet.[239] For Torun it is clear that the AKP government only has one goal with its attacks on alimony rights, the Istanbul Convention, Law No. 6284 and early marriage proposal; and, that is putting marriage and the family above anything else, despite violence, abuse and murder.[240]

Çamdereli argues that the employment rate of women is only 29%. Women had unequal opportunities in education and employment; they are mainly expected to be mothers and housewives. Once divorced how are these women supposed to take care of their selves and their

[234] Kav, "İşsizlik oranları kadınlara ne anlatıyor?"
[235] Kav, "İşsizlik oranları kadınlara ne anlatıyor?"
[236] Turkstat, "Labour Force Statistics, 2020" https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Labour-Force-Statistics-2020-37484
[237] Kav, "İşsizlik oranları kadınlara ne anlatıyor?"
[238] Kav, "Bu anneler gününde de eşitlik istiyoruz."
[239] Interview with Gülsüm Kav "Gülsüm Kav ile söyleştik." https://www.yolculukhaber.net/soylesi-gulsum-kav-ile-soylestik-kadina-yonelik-siddet-6284-kadin-issizligi-ve-evlilik
[240] Torun, "'Her şeye rağmen' evlilik."

children, she questions. Another argument she makes is that 75% of divorced women face physical or sexual violence and 80% emotional violence, so revoking alimony rights for women will not empower women but only put them at more risk. Çamdereli compares alimony to *mehir* (the Islamic concept of *mahr*). *Mehir* is the money intended to meet the post-marriage needs of women. There is no upper limit for *mehir* in the Qur'an, she argues.[241]

Amnesty to child abusers

In 2016, the AKP government introduced a draft law that would give amnesty to child abusers if they marry their victim. After major protests from women's organizations, the government withdrew the bill. However, in 2019, the AKP attempted for a second time to introduce the same draft law.[242] The draft law states that a man who has been charged, tried, and convicted of child abuse will be released if he marries the victim.[243] This caused huge criticism from the feminists. For Torun, marrying a fifteen year old is by definition child abuse and such a crime cannot be covered up by labelling it a "marriage".[244] A law proposal such as the early marriage proposal is exactly the reason violence against women and children is increasing in Turkey. Besides for instance ineffective law enforcement and the language of the media, Torun argues that the government's encouragement to commit crimes is the reason for the increase in violence. Those in power do not take a stand against violence but instead support and defend the "disgusting creatures" who commit these crimes, she states. [245] Kav also strongly opposes the early marriage proposal and stresses that there is no clear data about child marriages. In her opinion, a clergyman should not be able to perform wedding ceremonies at all, because this endangers the separation between church and state, and harms the principles of secularism.[246]

Sönmez speaks out against this draft law and the so called "early marriages" by stating that "the arrangements being made are not marriage amnesty, but rapist amnesty."[247] For Sönmez, the proposed law is without a doubt a form of child abuse. She states that indeed there are people who consider it normal for girls to be married off at an early age for religious and

[241] Çamdereli, "Nafaka Sorgusuz ve Sualsiz Bir Haktır!"
[242] McKernan, "Turkish activists oppose amnesties for child rapists." https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/23/turkish-activists-oppose-amnesties-for-child-rapists
[243] Women's Platform against Amnesty for Child Sexual Abusers https://tck103kadinplatformu.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/tcp103_20200706_press_release.pdf
[244] Torun, "'Her şeye rağmen' evlilik."
[245] Torun, "What's with their obsession with young girls in Turkey?"
[246] Interview with Gülsüm Kav "Gülsüm Kav ile söyleştik." https://www.yolculukhaber.net/soylesi-gulsum-kav-ile-soylestik-kadina-yonelik-siddet-6284-kadin-issizligi-ve-evlilik
[247] "Yapılmaya çalışılan düzenleme de evlilik affı değil tecavüzcü affı." from Sönmez, "Erken evlilik değil o çocuk istismarı!"

cultural reasons. However, she calls out the hypocrisy of those who defend early marriages because it is "Turkish culture" and "Islamic tradition", but do not want their own daughters to be married before the age of 18, preferably later.[248] At the same time, Sönmez makes an appeal to Islamic intellectuals to speak out and to anyone who regards himself/herself to be religious to openly condemn and reject this proposed law. From a religious point of view, she argues that traditional interpretations of Islam are closely related to medieval Arab culture and that in the Qur'an marriage and the methods of marriage are left to the customs of society. She bases her arguments on her interpretations of the Qur'an and points out the hypocritical and patriarchal approach within *fiqh.*

Çamdereli argues that, contrary to general assumptions, the AKP voters don't support with everything that the government decrees. For example when it comes to the early marriage proposal. The Havle Women's Association conducted critical research on early marriage in several cities with 2838 public surveys and fifty four in-depth interviews.[249] Çamdereli states that the majority of the respondents think women should not be married before the age of eighteen, and that the ideal age for women to marry and be responsible for a household is twenty four. She uses another argument to disapprove of the early marriage proposal. Çamdereli condemns people who defend the proposal and argue that the Prophet married nine year old Aisha, and see this young age as an exemplary criteria for marriage. She mentions arguments from the Islamic feminist organisation Musawah about early marriage in Islam.[250] Musawah has found evidence that Aisha was not nine but more likely nineteen years old when she married the Prophet, and, even if she did marry at age nine, the marriage was not consummated until later. Additionally, Musawah questions why the marriage of the Prophet to Aisha is selected as exemplary, while he also married Khadija who was a widow and fifteen years older than him.[251]

Violence against women, femicide and the Istanbul Convention

For many decades violence against women poses a major problem in Turkey and since the 1980s feminists voiced their concerns about it. Violence against women even increased over the years. The brutal rape, murder, and mutilation of 19 year old student Özgecan Aslan in 2015 was a turning point for the movement and created nationwide outrage, with protests on social

[248] Sönmez, "Erken evlilik lobisine dinden bakış,"
[249] Çamdereli, "Nerden Çıktı Bu Müslüman Feministler?"; Yılmaz, "Havle Kadın Derneği: AKP tabanı iktidarla aynı fikirde değil."
[250] Yılmaz, "Havle Kadın Derneği: AKP tabanı iktidarla aynı fikirde değil."
[251] Musawah, "Child Marriage for OHCHR," 4-5.

media and rallies in several cities. The hashtag #sendeanlat (#tellyourstory) became trending on twitter. Özgecan Aslan became a symbol of femicide in Turkey.[252] Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu, established already in 2010, has been fighting for the official recognition of femicides. In 2018, the government finally officially acknowledged femicide and for the first time the Ministry of Interior released data on cases of femicide.[253]

Femicides often take place in the family sphere; jealous boyfriends or husband, angry ex-husband, or even a brother. Men who feel like they are losing control over a woman or her body turn violent. Kav argues that it is important that the murders are identified as "femicides", instead of being called "honour killings" or "crimes of passion". These denominations serve to normalize violence and cover the political problem. She explains that it is stereotypical to see violence as part of tradition, because it reinforces structures of existing patriarchy.[254] Torun notices raising awareness in sexual violence within the marriage. Since the 2005 changes in the Penal Code, sexual violence within the marriage is considered a crime. As she mentions, a women's should not have to "fulfil her duty" in a marriage.[255] For Sönmez, violence against women is also an important topic. She states that gender based violence is connected to inequality and should be a priority of the government, instead women are being ignored and face violence even within the mosque.[256]

After the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2012, Turkey's Family Protection Law was also revoked and replaced with the Law to Protect Family and Prevent Violence against Women (Law No. 6284). Law No. 6284 aims to prevent female violence, uses the definition of female violence promoted by the Istanbul Convention, and provides for both prevention and protection measures to assist victims. Law No. 6284. suggests that women should be protected from violence because they are women, not because are a spouse or mother. In addition, Law No. 6284 does not underscore the traditional view of family in which women hold the honour of the family and where violence against women is a private matter.[257]

Both Gülsüm Kav and Berrin Sönmez are very clear in why they think femicides and violence against women is increasing. They repeatedly argue that the Turkish state lacks in the protection of women. The state is not able or not willing to implement the Istanbul Convention

[252] Lepeska, "Will #OzgecanAslan change Turkey?"; Davidson, "Rape and murder of young woman sparks mass Twitter protest in Turkey."
[253] Kav, Gülsüm. "Kadın cinayetlerinde yeni bir evre mi?"
[254] Kav, Gülsüm. "Kadın cinayeti kavramını genişletmek şart."
[255] Torun, "Evlilik içi cinsel şiddet."
[256] Sönmez, "Kadının payına düşen: Mecliste yok sayılma camide şiddete uğratılma,"; Sönmez, "Özel gündeme ret oyları sistematik şiddeti açıklıyor."
[257] Güneş, "Legal Implications of Turkey's Accessions to the Istanbul Convention by Enacting and Refining Its Laws on Violence Against Women," 211.

and Law No. 6284, while these are the most practical solution in hands to combat violence against women.[258] They argue that the Istanbul Convention is not taken serious, has not been implemented well and, even worse, is being attacked. The state is absolutely lacking in their eyes.[259] Torun expresses the fear that withdrawing from the convention will generate the perception of impunity, and, it could also mean Law No. 6284 is next in line.[260] Çamdereli shed her light on the, back then, possible withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention. She also strongly endorses the Istanbul Convention and Law No. 6284 and thinks that the arguments around immorality are based on fear for change.[261] Older generations fear the loosening of boundaries of identity. The discussion about the LGBTQI community is also related to this fear. However, she states, LGBTQI rights are human rights and thus indisputable.[262]

To summarize, these four women have different focal points, though, in general, they focus on the same topics. They also share the opinion that women and men deserve equal treatment. Gülsüm Kav and Tuba Torun arguments are based on a human rights framework. Rümeysa Çamdereli and Berrn Sönmez also use human rights arguments, but also base their argumentation on an Islamic discourse. In general, they all strive for gender equality, though their argumentation may differ. However, they all get organised through different organisations. These organizations sometimes specifically target a certain public, but in the end they strive for empowerment of and equality for all women in society.

[258] Kav,. "Pazar parası."; Kav, "Dört maddede İstanbul Sözleşmesi."; Sönmez, "Eşcinsellere şiddeti reva gören dindarlık."
[259] Kav, "Tüm örtülenler açığa çıkacak."; Sönmez, "Özel gündeme ret oyları sistematik şiddeti açıklıyor."
[260] Özçelik, "CHP Discipline Committee Member and Lawyer Tuba Torun."
[261] Çamdereli, "Aileyin Korumanın Bedeli ve 8 Mart."
[262] Yılmaz, "Havle Kadın Derneği: AKP tabanı iktidarla aynı fikirde değil."

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This thesis researched feminism in Turkey and aimed to answer the question "How do secular and Islamic feminism in Turkey currently relate to each other?". In order to do this and to fully understand the current secular-Islamic feminist paradigm in Turkey, in this thesis feminism in Turkey was studied in its regional and historical context. Therefore, I first discussed secular and Islamic feminism in the Middle East and the Muslim world in general. By doing this, I deliberately disregarded the many local differences and struggles. I focussed on the major issues and gave a general overview, which is sufficient to place Turkey in its regional context. Next, I focussed on the history of feminism in Turkey, since the establishment of the republic up to and including the AKP era. Subsequently, the current feminist debate was discussed based on the views of four Turkish feminists; Gülsüm Kav, Tuba Torun, Rümeysa Çamdereli and Berrin Sönmez. Here, the main findings will be presented.

The secular feminist movement in the Middle East emerged in the late 19th century when Arab countries became independent nation states. In this tumultuous period, women in the Middle East redefined their place within society. They demanded more equal rights in the public sphere. However, within the private sphere unequal rules and religiously defined gender identities remained unchanged. In the slip stream of Islamism, Islamic feminism emerged in the 1980s and raised awareness in the 1990s. Islamic feminists opposed both secular feminists and Islamists. They did neither feel themselves represented by secular feminists nor by the conservative ideas of the Islamists movement. Islamic feminists created a new discourse with their progressive readings and interpretations of the Qur'an. Islamic feminists also focus on and try to influence gender roles in the private sphere.

In Turkey, four feminist waves were identified, in chronological order Kemalist (state) secular feminism, Turkish feminism, Kurdish feminism and Islamic feminism. All feminist movements were influenced by Turkey's political context. The Kemalist principles, guarded by the military, left little to no room for religion in Turkish society. Attempts by Islamists to change this were crushed down. For a long time, feminism in Turkey was merely secular in nature. This changed when in the 1990s religious women joined the Islamist movement and demanded their place in society as Muslim women.

When placing Turkey in its regional context we notice some interesting similarities and dissimilarities. The beginning of the twentieth century was a turbulent time and in this period male intellectuals in Turkey, just like in Egypt, instigated the discussion about the position of

women in society in the light of national reforms. Turkish intellectuals discussed the liberation and emancipation of women through education and more equal public rights and this also happened in the Middle East. When in 1923 the Kemalists established the Republic of Turkey, women became an instrument in the Kemalist project of modernization, westernization and secularisation. The "new modern Turkish woman" was created and women's emancipation was appropriated by the state. However, not all women in Turkey benefited from this first feminist movement. The Kemalists focussed mostly on urban, ethnic Turkish, middle and upper class women. In contrast to Turkey, women in the Middle East had to fight personally for their rights. Hence, women in the Middle East became agents of their own feminist movements.

In Turkey, the Kemalists implemented secularism as the official state ideology. Religion was under strict state control and removed from the public sphere, so that it would not become an obstacle for modernization. This was unique for a country where the majority of the people was, and still is, Muslim and unprecedented compared to other Middle Eastern countries. Middle Eastern countries had secular constitutions and even though the role of religion was questioned and debated, Islam was still the official state religion and inherently part of society. The fact that Turkey had such a strict separation between church and state also influenced the position of women. Veiled women were per definition seen as backwards, uneducated and not part of public life. This exclusion, felt by many pious women, would eventually lead to a new feminist movement.

In Turkey, the Islamic feminist movement emerged in the 1990s and was connected to the rise of the Turkish Islamist movement. When the Islamist movement grew in the more liberal political climate of the 1990s, religious women joined the Islamist movement and became more prominent in politics and public life. In the Middle East, Islamic feminism emerged already in the 1980s, also influenced by the rise of local Islamist movements. If we place Turkey in its regional context then it may seem that the Islamic feminist movement flew over from the Middle East to Turkey. However, the movements were fundamentally different.

First, because Turkish Islamic feminists initially joined their male counterparts in the Islamist movement. Later they distanced themselves because of the rigid and conservative gender roles promoted by the Islamists, while Islamic feminists in the Middle East were concerned right away by the conservative views of Islamists.

Second, in the discussion between secular and Islamic feminists in Turkey, western colonialism and imperialism did not play a role. In Turkey, the West was not the common "enemy" and feminism was not per se controversial. In the Middle East, religious women in former colonies felt on the one hand as if through secular feminism Western norms were again

opposed on them. However, on the other hand, they also felt the need to oppose the conservative gender standpoints of the Islamists movement. While Middle Eastern feminists felt the weight of betraying their identity by criticizing Islam or the Islamist movement, religious women in Turkey had their own internal struggle. Turkish Islamic feminists did not feel represented by secular feminists because they did not feel represented by the Kemalist society at all.

The secular feminist movement in Turkey focussed on more public rights for women. The Islamic feminists also focussed on public rights, but at the same time focussed on equal gender roles in the family sphere. This correspondents with what is happening in the Middle East, even though every country may have their own internal focal points. One big difference, however, is the issue of the headscarf ban in Turkey. In no other Middle Eastern country the headscarf is such a controversial topic. The fact that in Turkey religion and the headscarf had no place in society while the vast majority of the people identify as Muslim and also a majority of women cover their head, is unprecedented. The headscarf debate in Turkey has been exemplary for the strong secular-Islamic feminist paradigm. This paradigm we can also see in the Middle East. However, the foundation for the secular-Islamic paradigm in Turkey is essentially different than in the Middle East, because in Turkey secularism is the official state ideology.

When we look at more recent feminism in Turkey, we can conclude that the role of the European Union has been very influential for the feminist movement. The possible EU membership of Turkey is exceptional, no other Middle Eastern country ever qualified for EU membership. We have to see the AKP's commitment to changing its Penal Code in accordance with the wishes of secular women's groups and the implementation of CEDAW in the light of possible EU membership. However, in recent years, the AKP has become more conservative and authoritarian. The government is distancing itself from Europe and trying to restrict women's rights. This puts feminists under pressure. The AKP is responsible for growing polarization in Turkish society. Where religious people were oppressed and marginalized by the Kemalist ideology, the AKP government is doing exactly the same in current times with their ideology. It is striking that during the first feminist movement, the Kemalists were convinced that they were liberating women in Turkey, and, although they did liberate of a part of the women, they also excluded another part. The same way, the AKP strived to give religious women more freedoms, but by doing this they are oppressing secular women. Both the Kemalists and the AKP wanted to shape the role of women in society according to their own ideas and ideology, and by doing this controlled women and their bodies. The big difference between the first feminist movement and current feminist movement is that right now both

secular feminists and Islamic feminists realize what is going on and more and more appear to stand up for each other.

Finally, in chapter four, with the above in mind, I aimed to answer the research question: "How do secular and Islamic feminism in Turkey currently relate to each other?". I discussed several actual topics, namely gender equality, social norms and social gender roles, women's participation in politics and the labour market, alimony rights, amnesty for child abusers, and violence against women, femicide and the Istanbul Convention. It turned out that both secular and Islamic feminists, represented by the four women chosen, although they sometimes use different arguments in these public discussions, reach for the same goals; and, even more, represent the same viewpoints. Moreover, although the four women have different backgrounds, they not only defend their own rights, but also each other's rights even when they do not agree with the standpoints chosen. Both secular and Islamic feminists use a human rights approach and, additionally, Islamic feminists use arguments based on Islamic sources and their own interpretation of the Qur'an. This way Islamic feminists are able to reach their own Islamic communities, and bring about change a different way secular feminists are able to.

I can conclude that these four women are not polarized and that there is a growing willingness to listen to each other and join forces, especially in the light of the current threat posed by the conservative government, who is restricting women's rights. Strikingly, the AKP alienated a part of its supporters and even though the AKP uses an anti-feminist discourse, Muslim feminism in Turkey has grown and become more visible. The feminist movement seems stronger than ever and cooperation between secular and Islamic feminists increases. The topic that seems to unite them the most and where they publicly criticize the politics of the AKP government, is violence against women and femicides. For the four feminists gender equality in all areas of life is the main solution to violence. To fight for this, they stood next to each other in the Women's March and condemned Erdoğan's wish to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. They all agree that implementing the Istanbul Convention is imperative to combat violence against women. Unfortunately for them, the unthinkable did actually happen, *i.e.* Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention, and I can only imagine how this might make them fight even harder.

Even though I strived to be as complete as possible, this thesis has its limitations. I studied four feminists and based my choice on women who actively participate in the public feminist debate and who identify themselves as feminist. I do realize that the debate is broader, meaning that also other voices exist. In addition, the focus of this thesis was on urban, educated women. Unfortunately, less educated women and women living in rural areas most of the time

do not express themselves publicly and thereby remain unheard. Last, the feminist struggle that takes place in Turkey is not just limited to its national borders. Women in Turkish communities elsewhere may face the same problems and restrictions as women in Turkey. In the Netherlands, Lale Gül, daughter of Turkish migrants, described in her autobiographical bestselling debut novel how she as a young women suffers from the oppression of her conservative family and community, and blames Islam for gender inequalities. For future research, it would be interesting to take a deeper look into this phenomenon and see whether the secular-Islamic feminist paradigm also exists in Turkish or other migrant Muslim communities in the West.

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