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Bridging the Divide: A comparative analysis of the feminist movement in Turkey and the United States

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Bridging the Divide: A comparative analysis of the feminist movement in Turkey and the United States

This is still a working paper of my senior honors thesis and is the most updated version. However, all research for this project has been completed, only minor edits remain. The final draft will come out on March 15th, but I cannot in good conscious call this a final draft until my committee deems the project completed.

Women's diverse experiences in the context of globalization has been a recurring theme throughout my academic career. How do women in their daily lives, reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable? My interest in this subject took me to Turkey for a year to study the unique process of democratization and its effects on women's rights. At some point, I had a realization that led me to write his paper. While there, I found myself accepting the perspectives of Islamic women as feminist, regardless of the extent to which I agreed with those perspectives. I had never had that experience with Christian women in the United States. In fact, I found it difficult to wrap my head around the idea of Christian feminism at all. This is likely due to my own social position as a secular liberal feminist in the United States. Christian women's perspectives are often presented in the United States as being in opposition to liberal secular feminism. My personal response to Islamic feminism was different because I saw Islamic women creating new forms of feminism that challenged Western notions in general.

My reaction to Christian feminists helped me understand how secular Turkish women orient themselves towards Islamic feminism. Ideological divisions that exist in Turkey I argue are similar to those in the US. The most significant similarity is the particular political debate over women's rights. As a result, both nations have similar contemporary problems in building solidarity exist, despite the clear differences in the organization of civil society. Both the U.S. and Turkish feminist movements post-1980 have experienced a rise in conservative religious

right while political debates have become polarized. In both countries the discourse around contemporary issues, such as those surrounding abortion and headscarf debates, developed in such a way that women's rights are trumped by an ideological battle between religion and secularism.

The objectives of this paper are threefold: First, to demonstrate how pro-religious women's perspectives in both Turkey and the United States have been effectively marginalized from the women's movement; second, to pinpoint the two polarizing debates of abortion and the headscarf, showing how they have divided women along ideological lines; and thirdly, to argue that women must move away from these polarizing debates as they no longer present a clear means for the progression of women's rights. To do so, women must begin to find commonality while acknowledging that their personal ideological position is not the 'end all be all' of women's rights. Often, "factions with the most power inevitably try to create the illusion that theirs is the only possible interpretation of reality" (Ingersoll 2003, p.8). My argument attempts to move beyond these particular debates and provide a means for secular and pro-religious women to build solidarity and progress the cause of women's rights.

Women's bodies and identities become a battleground for these contested ideologies and thus marginalize certain groups of women whose "thick," particularistic positions are attached to these issues.¹ Pro-religious women of both countries, "who call themselves feminists are not readily accepted by the larger feminist movement as ideological kin" (Ingersoll 2003, p.34). Many pro-religious women do not explicitly identify as feminist, yet incorporate feminist values into their lives. These perspectives, whether explicitly feminist or not, are equally valuable in the

¹ 'Thick' v. 'Thin' identities will be discussed more thoroughly later on. 'Thick' identity however is referring to the non-primary identity of the other.

pursuit for gender equality. The resulting arguments and political positioning within these two debates creates particularistic ‘thick’ labels of women, often having little to no basis in the reality of women’s attitudes and practices. Religion as an ideology is not the sole oppressor of women, while secularist policy been proven to guarantee women’s rights in full.

The debates as they stand today provide limited means for the progression of women’s rights through generating any action toward their resolution no matter which ideological side one falls. Currently, women in both countries are fighting a battle that is not their own. Women’s rights are now secondary to an ideological struggle, they can no longer deliver a satisfactory means for the development of women’s rights. Moving away from the political sphere and these particular debates will allow women to build solidarity across ‘opposing’ identities. Negotiating around contested debates, building solidarity as women will provide an avenue to achieve common goals of women’s rights. If successful, the ability for individual to find agency and take control of political debates.

This paper will at times reveal my personal leanings toward secular feminism; however, that should not detract from my primary argument that women must place equal value on the diverse perspectives of women. I recognize that mine is the dominant perspective of both countries and, I contend, that the secular perspective has not been adequately challenged by pro-religious women. I am a feminist with strong opinions, but I, “may admit the possibility that [my] opinion may be false, [s/]he ought to be moved by the consideration that, however true it may be, if it is not fully, frequently, and fearlessly discussed, it will be held as a dead dogma, not as a living truth” (Mill, line 21). Therefore, my argument focuses on finding a means of debate for women through which building solidarity is possible.

In both countries, literature exists that shows how debates over abortion and headscarves have been severely polarized along ideological and political lines, further indicating that these ideological divisions do not, in reality, exist for the average citizen. In the United States it has been shown that, liberal secular and conservative religious are inadequate labels for expressing the political beliefs of a multidimensional electorate (Treier & Hillygus 2009, p. 683). In Turkey, the current Justice and Development Party (AKP) is considered by some as, populist social constructionists' who create a national narrative that best suits their ideological position, not the perspectives of the citizenry (Sözen 2008).² Others have pointed out that the headscarf debates are based on the ideological positions of political parties through which women begin to take sides (Fisher-Onar & Paker 2012). These two political debates regarding women's rights have become what I consider, 'stalemate debates.' Defined as political debates in which the subject matter of women's rights merely becomes a symbol for distinct and opposing sides to argue their position. Because of this, actual progress on the issue cannot be realized and it halts compromise by obscuring commonality. Most importantly, while the political polarized sides may have a base in the electorate, they certainly do not represent the multidimensional opinions of the vast majority.

The reality that a polarized political perspective cannot represent the majority is even clearer when analyzing women's complex identities. As Manning (1999) and Jelen (2011) state, many conservative religious women integrate feminist values into their public or professional

² The same is true for the founding Kemalist elites who constructed a particular national narrative in which women's rights had a starring role - as the bearers of democracy.

lives, without necessarily labeling it ‘feminism.’³ For example in the United States, pro-religious women tend to strongly support workplace equality legislation whereas secular women may tend to focus on reproductive justice. In Turkey, many pro-religious women work on issues of domestic violence, education, empowerment and access to higher education. The reality in both countries is that women have comparable experiences and often share common goals that transcend current political categorization. Knowing that many women have common interests and share feminist values, why have political conversations so thoroughly divided women in each country? Comparing the organizational differences of civil society and similarities in “single-issue” polarized debates will shed light on how women can move beyond one issue to find solidarity. Once women find common ground they can decide for themselves the issues relevant to women’s rights and progress can be made.

To frame my argument, I contend that socially constructed group differences (even if they form oppressive structures) does not exclude the possibility of individuals being able to negotiate to change this very same structure. Perhaps even using those very structures to negotiate alliances and gain access to needed resources. “Philosophers Taylor (1989), Young (1990), and Kymlicka (1995) illustrate that admitting the socially constructed nature of group differences does not preclude organizing around the identities that mark those groups” (Bernstein, p. 50). The first reason being that abolishing base group identities is difficult and will not happen in a time span that would allow individuals to resolve contemporary issues. In addition, focusing on a far end goal of creating change outside identity groups may lead individuals to ignore current

³ This broad definition is used to make a clear cross-cultural comparison between pro-religious/secular feminist in the United States and Turkey. Since Turkey’s feminist movement is much smaller and has experienced a different political history than the United States, I am using many of their feminist movements concepts and finding correlating groups within the United States.

issues and inequalities between identity groups. Individuals will then be better able to work within identity groups and around oppression.

Some theorists argue against the continued use of identity politics. One author, Wendy Brown, described by Bernstein, contends that the base culture of identity groups are formed through marginalization, creating oppressive structures. Therefore, “She contends that advocating for rights based on marginalized cultural identities will only lead to the increased social regulation of those groups by dominant groups that control the state”(Bernstein 2005, p. 50). Essentially, Brown is arguing that because identity groups are formed through marginalization and are tools of coercive powers, they cannot be instrumental in being a catalyst for social change.⁴ Bernstein continues by arguing that base identities are created and maintained to oppress various groups and that working within those boundaries can only reinforce that oppression.

This paper, however, finds it hard to imagine action based upon these objections. These base identities persist throughout contemporary life, politics and our understanding of the ‘other.’ Structures influencing or assigning identity have not become less oppressive as groups have chosen to ignore them; rallying around them can only cause more women to be aware of those oppressive forces. “Some social movements of the oppressed have challenged the ideal of liberation as transcending group difference and have asserted instead the positivity of group based experience”(Young 1987, p. 639). Affirming rather than oppressing social group difference is essential to negotiating around normative structures which oppress various groups. “By asserting [these] politics, groups redefine the meaning of difference so that it no longer means

⁴ I’m aware that these debates exist within the feminist movement. However, to make my point clear that women need to move beyond stalemate debates, I am taking the side that identity can serve as a means for organization.

exclusive opposition and deviation” (Young 1987, p. 638). By this acknowledgement women can find agency within their constructed identities. Co-opting the meaning and power behind those identities to create a community and foster a more effective social movement. One in which women see it’s affects in their lived experiences.⁵

Fisher-Onar and Paker (2012) provide a framework for understanding tensions between “thick” particularistic identities and “thin” principles. They investigate how individuals can live together despite particularistic differences. This paper will be using “thick” or particularistic to identify secular and pro-religious identity while “thin” will be used to identify ‘woman’ as an identity.⁶ In a time when the process of globalization is weakening the influence of borders among societies, they question whether a cosmopolitan framework can produce a platform which would allow women to unite around a common identity through mutual recognition of difference (Fisher-Onar & Paker 2012, p. 2). The practical realities is that too often cosmopolitanism glosses over the serious tensions and contestation between “thick” particularistic positions and “thin” principles. However, the often comparable experiences of women under various patriarchal structures is a strong ‘thin’ principle, one that is a force for unity.

As I will show in this paper, when analyzing the abortion and headscarf debates in the political sphere “thick” identities are not quite as polarized in the general populous. In stalemated debates, “ideological constructions often seem clear-cut and simple, the demands of the modern

⁵ However, this is not emphasizing innate ‘feminine’ characteristics that are different from innate ‘masculine’ characteristics in which a balancing of the two equally would be ideal. Rather emphasizing the historical social (and sometimes oppressive) construction of femininity and womanhood, which can be used as a point of commonality between biological women to form the basis for a group based social movement; allowing women to find commonalities while negotiating particularistic identities within the social movement.

⁶ These labels are derived from Seyla Benhabib (1992), *The generalized and the concrete other*. In this she describes the two perspectives of viewing the other, each have flaws. In the Generalized, we view the other as an individual (or citizen) that is entitled to the same rights as our self. Yet, this understanding hides the particularistic aspects of the self. With the Concrete, we view the other as just the opposite. The other is different, separate from the self, this hides the (generalized) commonality the self and other may share.

world require a level of fluidity,” that a thick v. thin analysis can provide (Ingersoll 2003, p.16). Tensions between “thick” identities exist on some level this tension may be generally exaggerated. Negotiating around particularistic identities may be possible if individuals take seriously the tensions between particularistic identities, “Cosmopolitan citizenship can transcend the commonly posed dichotomy of particularistic identity claims versus universalistic citizenship rights” (Fisher-Onar & Paker 2012, p. 3). Meaning that, women’s diverse and particularistic identities can be used as a starting point for discussion and deliberation, women may be able to see beyond the generalized other and find true commonality. An analysis using “thick” v. “thin” will allow us to think beyond dichotomous identities and understand how “thin” identities interact with “thick” experiences which create overlapping and divergent communities of women.

David Held and Aihwa Ong have both argued, though differently, that new global structures have created new challenges for current nation-state governance and concepts of sovereignty. “contemporary processes of globalization and regionalization create overlapping networks of power and interaction” (Held 2003, p. 466). Nations and social movements need to begin working with the understanding that, “overlapping communities” and identities exist in the modern world. As Fisher-Onar & Paker (2012) have noted, global forces that are changing individuals understandings of citizenship are particularly salient for women. It is because of women’s diverse, ‘thick’ identities and ‘thin’ experiences as women creates most experience and therefore have a foundation for mediating ‘overlapping communities.’

Ong has argued that the, “Penetration of global forces has affected the relations between state and society, also changing people’s understanding of their investments in state power and

the different possibilities of citizenship depending on one's relations to market forces" (Ong 2000, p.57). Ong states that depending on an individual's location in a zone of graduated sovereignty, citizens are treated differently. Despite criticism of global solidarity, she recognizes that within these zones, the disadvantaged find opportunity in the fissures of sovereignty. Thus, even in the most critical perspectives of global solidarity there exists 'fissures' which women can build solidarity cross - identity.

Case Studies: Abortion and Head Scarves as Divisive Symbols

Processes of globalization demand that we study groups of women within their particularistic national and regional identities to build mutual recognition and understanding. It is possible that by studying women's cultures and historical backgrounds we may find comparable interests as women and begin to build bonds of solidarity. The case studies of the United States and Turkey that I will now present show the comparable experiences of women cross-identity as well as cross-border. While we may not think to compare these two countries due to their very different histories, there is a surprising similarity in the recent history of their feminist movements. Both countries saw the early development of the women's movement create tangible legal change, yet this change remained accessible only for an elite group of women (Gordon 2002; Arat 1997). In the American context this presented itself as a socio-economic divide, in Turkey it was reinforced through a national myth of the 'citizen woman,' laïcité policy, and suppression of the women's movement after 1930.

Post - 1980s both movements saw a change in the political geography of their respective countries, as the far right organized religious conservatives and moved into mainstream politics. The United States movement had two decades to organize itself, gaining some political clout. In

contrast, feminists in Turkey expanded into the public sphere at a time of political upheaval and in the wake of a military coup. With the entry of a religious right into the political spotlight, ethical debates over women's rights coalesced into ideological debates of secularism, religion, democracy and modernization. The abortion debates in the United States and headscarf debates in Turkey have revealed how women have become divided along ideological lines that have no bearing on the complex realities of women's attitudes and practices.

Each of these debates in their respective countries have guaranteed that women are now fighting a lose-lose battle. The debates have become ideological fight between religion and secularism. Regardless of who 'wins,' neither can guarantee the development of women's rights. On the one hand, Religion can be viewed as an ideology and one that can be used or manipulated to oppress women. It is true that to focus on this variety of religious freedom could reverse basic women's rights by denying them access to abortion or determining that they must present themselves in a particular manner. But these restrictions do not constitute the complexity of oppression. A perspective such as this does not distinguish between religion as a faith and religion as a political ideology. On the other, secularist policy does not always provide the full development of women's rights. To create effective change in the majority of women's daily lives, we need to step back from these debates and fully understand the complexity of women's experience. This might be our only option for building solidarity and common interest among women.

Historical Differences and Similarities

The development of both feminist movements (in the U.S. and Turkey) can be viewed in comparable 'waves,' or time periods in which the movement was especially active. Generally what is considered the first wave of both movements consisted of women who strove for the

right to vote and access to education. In Turkey, some people include late Ottoman era women circa 1860 into the first wave of feminist women. However, generally the first wave of women are considered Kemalist, starting at the founding of the republic in 1923 up to 1940. This time period is what Yildiz Ecevit call the, “Formative years of the Republic” (2000). In the United States many consider the first wave as starting with the Seneca Falls convention of 1848 as the right for women to vote was ratified in the Declaration of Sentiments. Women gained the right to vote in 1920 and the first wave is considered to have extended up to 1930. In what Ecevit calls a “stagnation period,” both movements diminished in strength between 1935 and 1960. In Turkey, this was due to the tight control the Kemalist state had over civil society. Once women’s rights in Turkey had been granted to an extent that was consistent with democratic principles, the movement as an autonomous entity was suppressed. The reason for the diminished movement in the US was due to a series of factors. Partially the organization of civil society that allowed women’s organizations to diffuse along single issues and partially due to the economic downturn of the great depression.

The First Wave of Feminism in Turkey

Turkey took on a modernization project which speaks to the powerful influence of western liberal thought. After succeeding from the Ottoman Empire in 1923 they abolished the Caliphate, created the Turkish language to replace Arabic and implemented strict laïcité secularism, suppressing ethnic and religious minorities in the name of ‘modernity’ (Ecevit 2007). Founder, leader and creator of the powerful and still existing Republican Peoples Party (CHP), Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is often portrayed as a hero and social constructionist of the nation.⁷ It was the

⁷ CHP, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, Republican people’s party that was exclusively in power until 1950 (Coşar & Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2008). To this day it remains a dominant political party and has extensive support from the military.

Kemalist ideology of secularism, nationalism and modernization that pushed Turkey to adopt Western characteristics within a Turkish cultural context. Women's representation in the public sphere was held as a beacon of progress in modernizing Turkey (Arat 1997; White 2003). Their equality and status in society was used as a tool to prove the legitimate democratization of the new nation. 1925 was the year that women got the right to vote in Turkey. Just a year later the secular Swiss Civil code was adopted which created a legal framework abolishing polygamy and giving women rights to initiate divorce, seek education and professional career.

Yet, these rights were given to women by a state that valued its image of a 'secular Turkish democracy' over women's rights. As Atatürk himself said, "Republic means democracy, and recognition of women's rights is a dictate of democracy; Hence women's rights will be recognized" (Arat, 1997). Women, who had begun to organize at the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, who had furiously campaigned for suffrage were *Given* a certain amount of rights by an authoritarian government (White 2003). The catch for women was that exercising their rights was a duty to the modernization project of the State. Hence, any women's rights organization or identity outside the purview of the state was condemned.

Under the national narrative of the New Turkish Woman the identity of 'citizen woman' was created. This new 'citizen woman' was an urban, educated and socially progressive woman who never dressed in traditional Ottoman clothes (White 2003, p. 146). The conceptualization of 'citizen woman' had a twist. While elite women were given access to education and the public sphere, the other side was that once married women's duty was to provide a modern household (White 2003; Arat 1997). The majority of women who internalized this duty were urban, well educated Turkish Kemalist women, an elite upper class of women who had started the founding

era movement (White 2003; Arat 1997). Non-urban, often religious or minority women failed to see the modernization project have any real affect in their daily lives. The republican feminism that grew out of the founding era only improved the lives of a small elite group of women, in terms of education and participation in the public sphere (Fisher-Onar & Paker 2012, p. 7). Early on one can see the exclusionary attitude of the state influencing who was given access to the legal rights of 'citizen woman.'

Suppression of Feminism in Turkey

After the push for suffrage, the women's movement in Turkey experiences a 'stagnant period.' The Women's movement in Turkey post 1940 was effectively suppressed as the Kemalist propagated the myth that women's rights had been granted. exemplified in 1923 when women appealed for the foundation of the Republican Woman's Party, they were almost immediately denied (Coşar & Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2008; Arat 1997). Later in 1935 the Turkish Woman's Federation was shut down because all women's rights had been granted and there was no need to organize. Best conceptualized by Kandiyoti, "men gave social birth to the new woman of the republic" (1997, p. 123). This placed serious limits on the ability for the feminist movement to expand and diversify in a collaborative way both in the public and private realm.

The feminist movement of Turkey entered into its stagnant years. Political women's groups were explicitly banned, yet the 40s saw some women's philanthropic groups expand. It was not until the mid 60s that the women's movement began to enter the public sphere. In what Ecevit calls the 'Restless Years,' it was a gradual movement that pretty much exclusively represented profession women. Building associations such as, the Association of Turkish Jurist Women. A small group of women during this time argued from a distinctly feminist perspective, stating that

debates about 'women's issues' should put women at the center (Ecevit 2007, p. 193). The 70s saw the proliferation of left-wing organizations that promoted women's rights. The most widely organized women's group in Turkey, The Association of Progressive Women (APW) was established in 1975. The APW adopted a Marxist - feminist perspective and was "an active supporter of women's struggle for their everyday economic demands and their struggle for equality, democracy, progress and peace" (Ecevit 2007, p. 194).⁸ Despite relative success of the APW it was banned after the 1980 coup due to its socialist ideals. However the coup's suppression of far left (and far right) groups allowed for the proliferation for an autonomous center left women's movement that gained national attention.

The United States First Wave of Feminism

In the United States, the first wave was recognized as the suffragist movement, gaining the right to vote for all women along with other legislative changes. Early on in the movement, amongst the turbulence of reconstruction and abolition, women attempted to argue for their right to vote based on liberal principles of democracy. Unlike Turkey however, the suffrage movement in the United States was greatly influenced by pro-religious women, most notably the Quaker Lucretia Mott. Pro-religious women along with Mott, "justified claims for women's rights with references to the Scripture and natural rights doctrines" (Marilley 1997, p. 11). In stark contrast to these women, famous early feminists, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, argued that organized Christianity relegated women to inferior and 'unacceptable' positions (Marilley 1997). Although often working together and pursuing the same goal of suffrage, their ideological rational differed greatly. At the time, two national women's suffrage organizations existed, the National Woman

⁸ Despite being fairly radical, these far left-women still propagated the Kemalist notion of a secular polity. They viewed traditionalism and conservatism as the main oppressor of women.

Suffrage Association (NWSA) Led by Stanton and the more conservative American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA).⁹ Ultimately, these two organizations joined forces to push for women's right to vote.

Similar to Turkey's early movement, the core of the women's movement consisted of elite, upper class, (often) secular and highly educated women. However in Turkey, elite verse rural women became correlated with secular verse pro-religious. The major divisions amongst women of this time were race and class and historically these social divides had remained the most visible and exclusionary within the movement (Marilley 1997). Many secular and pro-religious women disagreed on arguments for women's rights, even if they agreed on the end goal. The diversity of voices within the US movement itself was still limited (Gordon 2002; Simon & Danziger 1991). Pro-religious women of the time were outspoken and often collaborated with secular women, their religious based arguments supported feminist notions of equality. Despite pursuing liberal goals, women of this movement were, "native-born, middle-class, white women" (Marilley 1997, p. 2). Because of this specific group of women, the push for women's right to vote was made under the arguments: no taxation without representation and democratic participation will make women better mothers and wives.

The framing of this argument for women's suffrage indicates that many of the women in the early feminist movement were housewives of the upper class or rich women who had inherited land. In the United States, "They were usually the children of important men in their hometown, often college educated ... Their well-to-do backgrounds gave them both the freedom to

⁹ In politics as well as feminist academia, particular women's organizations are often used to describe the entirety of the movement. Feminist organizations have a distinct ideological and political positioning needed to operate in American politics. Describing the entirety of the women's movement through specific organizations further overshadows the diversity of women's opinions

experiment and the safety net to retreat into as they aged” (Gordon 2002, p. 134). Laws are still limited in changing women’s daily lives is exemplified by the fact that only 20% of women in the United States voted in the first elections after the passing of the 19th amendment (Simon & Danziger 1991; Gordon 2002). The women of the early feminist movement gave legal rights to all women, but often due to their privilege, were the only ones who were fully capable of experiencing those rights.

Women gained the right to vote in 1920 by the 19th amendment, often called the ‘Susan B. Anthony Amendment.’ Coalitions of liberal and conservative women worked together post-1920 on a variety of women’s issues, from child labor protections to universal disarmament (Rosen 2000). Momentum of the movement soon slowed. Once women had gained legal rights, many scholars painted a picture of, The “New Woman.” This woman that had gained the right to vote and now stood socially and economically equal to men (Freedman 1974). They praised the notion that women had been a positive force in history, ending their analysis at the end of the suffragist movement. Implicitly many thought legal rights were the key to equality, and discussion ended when those rights were achieved. Effectively the women’s movement entered a dormant period, at least on the national stage. Some have argued that the women’s movement didn’t die after suffrage and become reborn in the 1960s (Verta 1989). The “stagnant period” was merely a pause or suspension in the movement, still containing some women’s activism. Most recognize however that the question of women’s realized equality did not begin to get asked until late 1950s.

Entry of Second Wave Feminism in the United States

In 1963 many women began to recognize their own discontent. The year Betty Friedan published the *Feminine Mystique*, although criticized for excluding black, poor and working women, her book revealed the previous decades inaction through middle class women's dissatisfaction with their roles as housewives (Rosen 2000). Unlike Turkey, this second wave of the movement gained significant political clout, their arguments for women's rights gained attention on the national stage. It was there feminist activists who recognized liberal political culture was inadequate to address the issues of women's daily lives (Rosen 2000). While there were tensions between factions of women in the leading organization (NOW), secular and pro-religious women cooperated (Rosen 2000). By the 1970s, the new women's movement was in full swing and began to construct its own identity separate from the civil rights movement, becoming autonomous.

The 1980s: Political Upheaval, Polarization and the Beginning of Ideological Divisions

In the wake of the 1980 coup in Turkey, many formal channels for political participation were closed as the coup attempted to calm the radicalization of both sides of the political spectrum (Arat 2000, p. 112). This gave way for the rebirth of a women's social movement to expand into the newly created political void. The feminist movement did expand and diversify, yet remained within particular boundaries predetermined by the Kemalist fathers. These feminist had grown to understand secularism as a pillar of democracy and modernization. They had seen earlier generations resist an authoritarian state, yet also saw secularist policy win the battle for public domain. Surprisingly, many secular feminists did not view the growing religious right as a threat, at least at first (Arat 1997). At this point in time there were certainly secular feminists

who sought mutual recognition with Islamic feminist, yet there was also a distinct faction of Kemalist women who viewed any religious perspective as the Islamization of society.

The movement expanded, allowing room for more diversity while still internalizing many authoritarian secular ideas inherited from Kemalism. Prominent feminists of the time seemed fearful to leave the safety of a singular secular identity. “The parameters of this radical feminist activism were defined by Kemalism, the left, and the worldwide revival of feminism” (Arat 1997, p. 107). These were the second wave feminists of Turkey, criticizing Kemalist state co-option of their mothers movement, while still incorporating a secular left perspective (Fisher-Onar & Paker 2012, p. 7). “Throughout the 1980s feminists had a negative attitude towards the state. This was mainly because they perceived the state as the main guardian of the patriarchal system” (Coşar & Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2008, p. 330). Distrust of the government was compounded during this decade as center-right, moderate Muslim political groups began to dominate the political geography. Secular feminists’ feared their movement would once again become co-opted by a religious center right government.

The legacy of Kemalism the persisted in the feminist movement, admitting diversity within the boundaries of secular Turkish identities. Born out of political upheaval was the “Dress and Appearance Regulation,” which prohibited certain dress in public agencies, offices and institutions (Olson 1985, p. 295). For men this meant no mustaches, beards, long hair and for women this meant no mini-skirts, low-necked dresses, and headscarves (Olson 1985; Kandiyoti 1997). The year 1984 was when debates over the headscarf first entered the public and political sphere. Most famous of the cases that hit the newspapers that summer was Dr. Koru, an assistant professor of chemical engineering at Aegean University in Izmir (Olson 1985, p. 291).

Controversially she stated that her headscarf was part of her life philosophy, that she would rather be fired than take it off, that her constitutional rights were violated as the third article of the constitution in which freedom of religion is protected (Olson 1985). Further she insisted that the Dress Code was not being enforced for mini-skirts and revealing clothes, only for the headscarf.¹⁰

This case became particularly well known in Turkey, as Dr. Koru not only challenged her institution and the newly created Dress Code She challenged the national narrative of *laïcité* secularism. In reaction to this event, a local politician said that there was a “relationship between this matter and women’s rights and religious attitudes [but] there can be no concessions that violate existing laws or Atatürk’s principles” (Olson 1985, p. 293). A professor and former political party leader was noted as saying that personal philosophies are a threat to “social order” (Olson 1985).¹¹ Many factions in Turkey at this time stressed that this was not really about women’s rights or religious freedom, rather merely following the law because the law was created for societies development. Inherently this implied the headscarf and pro-religious women as a direct threat to the secular narrative of society. What ensued was a national ideological debate: Turkish nationalism v. muslim identity and secularism v. islamic society.

As the ideological debate in politics flourished, women began taking sides on either side of the ideological divide. Secular and Kemalist feminists, embedded with the national narrative, viewed the headscarf as a political symbol of patriarchal religious oppression against women.

¹⁰ There are distinct differences between the types of headscarves in Turkey. Most common is just a loose scarf wrapped around the head and tied under the chin, this is especially common for women in the east. The Hijab is a particular covering directly related to faith, specifically covering the hair but not necessarily anything else. In Turkey the ‘Turban’ for women is sometimes referred to, which is a variation of hijab that encircles the face and covers the neck.

¹¹ Both politicians were associated with a center-right nationalist secular group. The first was specifically part of ANAP, Motherland Party at that time but since has merged with the Democrat Party (DP).

Pro-religious women on the other hand view their ability to wear the headscarf as a personal freedom, essentially feminist values in that they seek equality, agency and the capacity to exercise their legal rights. There are two main divisions within the secular camp that began to develop was between Kemalist and Radical feminists (Arat 2000). While Radical feminists to this day take a more sympathetic stance towards Islamic women yet still ultimately disagreeing with their overall ideology; Kemalist feminists openly protest the development of an Islamic women's perspective. Many Kemalist women dominated the conversation within the feminist movement, transforming their identity fully into feminists and re-inscribing Kemalist authoritarian stances.

“For some time now, we have been confronted by a serious and surreptitious reactionary movement that hides behind the curtain of ‘freedom of woman to dress as she wishes’ but in reality struggles to return our society to the darkness of the Middle Ages” (Arat 1997, p. 108; Aysel Eksi first president of The Association to Promote Contemporary Life).

Women who called themselves Kemalist feminists understood the rising power of Islam as a serious threat to their established rights. By this time the feminist movement as a whole had separated themselves from the nationalist rhetoric, thus any argument in favor of secularism was seen as protecting exclusively women's rights (Arat 1997; Coşar & Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2008).

Because there was a sense of a linear modernization model, emerging religious views would send the country ‘backward.’ Secular feminists view their liberties as directly dependent on the restrictions placed upon pro-religious women. In a fundamental way, reproduces the hierarchal status quo of the political spheres in Turkey as well as the singular authoritarian nature of the modernization project. How can one conceive of a liberty that is dependent on the restrictions placed upon another group of women? Perhaps this liberty is only a “privileged liberty,” which

will only reproduce patriarchal hierarchies and ultimately lead to greater gender discrimination within the society.

The secular feminist position “tends to be maximalist when it comes to formal positions,” which distinctly resembles the authoritarian stance of the republican era government (Fisher-Onar & Paker 2012 p. 14). The influence of the Kemalist political environment and direct government influence have significantly shaped the discourses within the feminist movement throughout the decades. Most recently, a distinct cleavage within the movement between secular and pro-religious women has developed, especially over the headscarf issue. Ultimately particular groups of pro-religious woman are marginalized due to the hierarchal secular strain of ideology dominant in the feminist movement; labeling pro-religious women as too distinctly different, as ‘the other.’

Similar to the reactions of secular and Kemalist women in Turkey, secular feminists in the United States viewed religious women as part of the religious right that was developing. A general attitude of stereotyping conservative religious women by lumping them under the category of the “New Religious Right.” During the 1980s the political sphere saw the rise of far right groups, motivated by religion. Liberal secular feminist viewed this as a direct attack on their rights (Petchesky 1981; Solinger 2005). The lack of any conservative religious women’s perspectives in the mainstream movement inherently placed them with the ‘New Religious Right’ (May 2010). As the ‘new religious right’ began to organize based on social issues and integrated themselves into the fiscally conservative republicans, women’s issues became a dividing line between who was with them and who was against them.

1980 was the year that for the first time, the Republican Party declared its opposition to the ERA and moral condemnation of abortion (Rosen 2000). It was with the, “Reagan presidency, [that] campaign activists in both parties developed distinct and divergent positions on abortion” (Carmin and Wood 2002, p. 370). Right-wing politicians have used the issue of reproductive rights and abortion as a main issue that symbolizes their ideological positioning. It was, “Abortion [and reproductive rights that] - became a primary vehicle through which right-wing politicians achieved their ascent to state power in the late 1970s and the 1980 elections” (Petchesky 1981, p. 207). Women’s rights, especially reproductive rights were used by the ‘New Right’ as the liberal secular ‘other’ with which they defined themselves in opposition with (Petchesky 1981; Solinger 2005). It is clear within many political debates in the United States that women’s rights, especially abortion and reproductive rights, have become markers or symbols of larger ideological positions.

Liberal secular feminists negatively reacted to the rise of conservatism in the United States, rightly so fearing the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*. However, pro-religious women somehow became agents of the radical right. In many quarters, among both conservatives and liberals, “individuals’ views regarding women’s roles are used as a litmus test to determine whether the person is ‘one of us’ or ‘on of them’” (Ingersoll 2003, p. 15). Now women have been pitted against each other in an ideological battle that is no longer about women’s rights. Fundamentalist groups in the United States have always existed as they have in Turkey. However, those fundamentalist groups in both countries have existed on the fringes of politics and society. The difference in the United States is that there was an accepted group of progressive religious women before the 1980s backlash. Unlike previous groups, the ‘second wave’ fundamentalists of

the 1980s were and, “are sophisticated players in contemporary media culture and have become adept at promoting a culturally current public image” (Brasher 1998, p. 23). Essentially it was in this era that radical conservatives became politically savvy and reproductive rights got caught in the middle of it all. As reproductive rights became a litmus test for the emerging ideological debates, women began to take sides based on their ‘thick identities of secular or pro-religious.

Petchesky’s (1981) article is charged with highly political, one sided language that does not recognize the diversity of religious women. Her language provides an example of how many women took a maximalist stance and viewed contested issues such as abortion (and reproductive rights) solely through the lens of their particularistic identities. Others in the United States have used the term ‘absolutist,’ to describe the ideological positioning of elite groups on both the right and the left (Strickler and Danigelis 2002; Tribe 1992; Luker 1984) However true it may be that, “a key element in the Right's strategy was to use the churches and particularly the "right-to-life" movement as an organizational model and base” (Petchesky 1981, p. 212). By not explaining or recognizing pro-religious women’s diverse perspectives, she implicitly lumps them under her category of ‘new religious right,’ reinforcing maximalist rhetoric about abortion.¹² The absence of any pro-religious women’s perspectives conflates their identity with radical leaders and continues the dichotomous line of secular liberal and conservative religious into the feminist movement. It has become all too clear that American society and the state are plunging day by day more deeply into right-wing reactionism”(1981, p. 206). While there has been a distinct

¹² Somewhere within her rhetoric lies the liberal secular assumption that no woman would have ethical issues with reproductive rights, as argued by conservative religious leaders. This assumption alienates pro-religious women, as they may agree with these leaders on a few topics, but generally have a more ambivalent position between the two poles.

development of a political religious right wing since the 1980s, it is reactionary in itself to describe this movement as engulfing the entirety of the nation.

The advancing influence of religion in politics is certainly worrying in a secular democracy, liberal feminist have viewed the rise of the New Right as a direct backlash to their liberation. The New Right may not have been a direct backlash, rather this was a politically opportune moment for the far right to organize religiously motivated leaders, gaining a voter base and political legitimacy (Manning 1999). Reproductive rights became the moment, “for the traditionalists - politically organized as the New Right - to define and organize their ‘crusade’”(Solinger 2005, p. 205). What the New Right saw was a general degradation of society and loss of religious values. What they wanted was a return to traditionalist views. Liberal feminist articles then developed an understanding of religious women as a group being the ‘foot soldiers’ of this movement (Solinger 2005; Petchesky 1981). Pro-religious women are often depicted as furthering the goals of fundamentalist men, thus positioned as the enemy (Brasher 1998). It was assumed that pro-religious women directly supported or were co-opted by the use of religious networks in the rise of the ‘New Right.’ In the United States feminist never fully left liberal political culture behind, creating further divisions. Turkish feminists meanwhile, never fully left behind the national narrative of Kemalism, reinforcing divisions that had always existed.

Contemporary Debates: The Headscarf and Abortion

The headscarf issue became prominent throughout the 1980s, ideological lines were drawn. During the 80s and 90s, a growing political movement was emerging. A conservative Islamist faction had solidified and came to a head with the Virtue Party, which had significant support (Atacan 2005). While the headscarf issue simmered through the decade and was widely

discussed, creating divisions, it was not until 1999 when the issue made its way onto the national political stage. A woman from the Virtue Party had been elected to parliament, surprising since women's representation in government has hovered around 9% (Jelen 2011). Merve Kavakci was highly educated and a prominent leader within the party, she also happened to wear a headscarf. Ultimately, she was forbidden to swear into office wearing the headscarf, the Virtue Party was later ruled as unconstitutional and Kavakci's citizenship was revoked (Jelen 2011). As women's organizations had begun to align themselves on either side of an ideological divide, This development posed a serious democratic conundrum for the contemporary women of Turkey. At the same time many women perceived the spread of conservative values, women were very active in those conservative organizations. A clear conflict for women's rights then is how to reconcile what has been posited as irreconcilable, women's rights and religion.

Yet many Kemalist and secular women view the issue strictly through their particularistic lens. They would make the argument that if secularism was a necessary foundation of democracy and women rights, then the election of any pro-religious individual would be contrary to the progression of women's rights. While the headscarf had gradually become a symbol of fundamentalism over the decades, "It wasn't until the AKP introduced the headscarf issue did women's rights organizations begin to define themselves along Islamists vs. Laicists" (Coşar & Gençoğlu-Onbaşı. 2008, p. 326). The divisions had always existed, growing stronger throughout the 80s and 90s, but here in the contemporary debates we see those ideological lines crystalize in all spheres of the polity. The headscarf issue was now distinctly a symbol through which, "different Turkish visions intensely clashed [and] ... again polarized the country along the same ideological lines"(Sözen 2008, p. 82). Now the headscarf ban was enforced in many public

places and politics had once again become polarized, the eye of the storm converging over the headscarf issue. Women's organizations explicitly defined themselves along these ideological lines and women take a stance of secular or pro-religious on many issues.

While women's organizations themselves still come together, bringing women from diverse backgrounds to work on the most salient issues for women (domestic violence, education, empowerment), there are clear dividing lines due to the headscarf debate that make working together difficult. The Islamic movement and dividing line between pro-religious and secular women demonstrate main cleavages within the movement, "inhibiting participation in common platforms and interaction among WROs" (Fisher-Onar & Paker 2012, p. 13).¹³ Essentially this is secular women's skepticism for pro-religious women's concerns and opinions. While there are platforms that include a wide range of women, there are also those that exclude pro-religious women, such as the Equality Watch Platform (Fisher-Onar & Paker 2012). Secular women continue to display hierarchal and hegemonic attitudes, assuming all women who cover do so because of male pressure rather than of their own volition (Fisher-Onar & Paker 2012). This has the affect of excluding pro-religious women who generally support a wide range of women's rights and yet view wearing the headscarf as an issue of religious freedom.

Issues with exclusion of pro-religious women may in part stem from the fact that very few stable WRO's for pro-religious women exist. Out of 6 WROs analyzed in a case study, only one thought that veiling was not a major violation of women's rights (Coşar & Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2008). There is a lack of pro-religious representation in the women's movement due to the ideological divide that permeated Turkish politics and society. Despite the few WROs who

¹³ Women's Rights Organizations are often abbreviated into WRO and 'Platforms' are initiative's that multiple WRO's work on, writing reports or holding conferences. For example the "women's coalition for elections initiative" which brought together a wide range of WRO's to push political parties to nominate female candidates.

acknowledge wearing the headscarf as freedom of religion, figures vary but it is estimated that currently (2007) about 69% of women cover, or identify as covered women (Jelen 2011). All these factors have the affect of explicitly or implicitly marginalizing pro-religious women from participating in the larger feminist movement. The cause stems from the dividing lines that have been present but increasingly prevalent in Turkish politics and social life since it's founding. Marginalization of pro-religious women and the 'single-issue' cleavage in the movement has stunted the progress of women's rights as a whole.

The reality of these debates is that they have exacerbated the tangible discrimination for Turkish pro-religious women who cover. Pro-religious women face discrimination in all public spheres, finding it difficult to pursue higher education (only ~14 universities tolerate the headscarf), difficult to find jobs especially those with opportunities and are often paid less than their non-covered female counterparts (Jelen 2011). "In addition to consciously not hiring hijabi women, even when they are highly qualified for the position, many private companies will limit these women to certain positions where they are not in contact with the public and where they are *invisible*" (Jelen 2011, p. 313). Those women are seen as a liability because the headscarf within the ideological debates represents "backwards" conservative values. This proves a serious problem for women's equality and participation in the workforce as a slight majority of women are covered and increasingly more covered women graduate from university. The fact that covered women are excluded from 'male' spheres has only reinforced gender inequality and difference as discrimination against one group of women is discrimination against all. In Turkey, not only does the ideological divide segregate women, marginalizing and excluding pro-religious women, it does nothing for the enhancement of women's rights.

While in both countries it become obvious how political ideological battles divide women by their 'thick' particularistic identities. More difficult to pull out is that these debates are now almost exclusively a political ideological battle despite the assertion that abortion and headscarf debates are women's issues. Although these issues are associated with women's rights, the battle between secular left and religious right does nothing for the advancement of women's rights. Because neither ideology can guarantee women's rights, while religion is not the ultimate oppressor of women, neither is secularism the guardian of women's rights. The debates as they stand, in the long run are not productive for the enhancement of women's rights, women are fighting each other in a battle that is not their own. Through recognizing each other's differences along this divide, moving beyond it to define issues on their own terms, women have the capability to build feminist solidarity cross-identity.

The reality for women finding solidarity beyond 'thick' particularistic identities of secular and pro-religious seems a long way off, as the battle of polarized ideologies permeates life in the political and social. Important for building solidarity is understanding each other's particularistic identity and finding common experiences of women, issues all women can rally round. "Where abortion [reproductive rights] had ignited feminist hearts in many Western countries, domestic violence activated feminists of different persuasions in Turkey" (Arat 1998, p. 119). The differences remain clear, as in the US the issue that rallied women also began to divide them. In Turkey it is the opposite reality as the issue that rallies women is still the issue that maintains solidarity as women. The glimmer of hope for Turkish women to find solidarity grows stronger as Platforms can unite women, organizations on either side of the divide still work on the same issues through comparable methods. In the United States the commonality may be harder to see

and solidarity harder to build as the polarized debate not only divides women, it divides politics all of politics as a whole, thus much better as disguising women's common experiences. Before we can come to a definitive answer on the possibility of women finding solidarity in both countries, the particularistic identities of pro-religious women must be better understood.

In the United States during the 80s, abortion and reproductive rights became an ideological symbol for both sides of the argument. Secular feminists viewed it as a symbol of freedom and self determination. Pro-religious women on the other hand, had a worldview in which motherhood was the highest calling, thus abortion was a 'mothers issue' (Stavrianos 2008; Luker 1984). During the 80s, this particular world view has been used by organizations and politicians to rally a religiously conservative voter base. Since 2000 however, their tone has changed and pro-life, "proponents have made increasing use of rhetoric that focuses on the 'rights' of 'unborn children'" (Satvrianos 2008). As particular groups of conservatives have moved even farther to the right, a new campaign against abortion has been launched. One that targets restrictions on abortion at the state level and seems to be leaving behind the motherhood concerns of many pro-religious women.

As the symbol of the abortion in the United States has developed into an ideological debate between religious conservatives and secular liberal groups, women's rights have been sidelined. Right to life groups have argued for the sanctity of life while liberal groups view restricting abortion as restricting individual liberties. The ideological 'battle' is taking place at the state level while both sides hold maximalist positions on the debate. Organizations like the, National Right to Life Committee has supported and pursued state legislation that creates barriers for women. For example, Senator Tony Fulton is a sponsor of a legislative proposal in Nebraska that would require women to be shown an ultrasound image of the fetus prior to having an abortion

(Gold 2009). Wrapped in a cloak of 'sanctity' for life and religious rhetoric, pro-life politicians and leading organizations have tried to rally a conservative religious base to get behind their cause and restrict abortion on the state level.

The shift into state level restrictions on abortion started in 2000 with an increasing number of states implementing severe restrictions on abortion access. Oklahoma was one of the first to adopt legislation stating that a woman must have an ultrasound before an abortion and a, "physician must review the image with the woman; the legislation explicitly mandates that, if she chooses, the woman be permitted to 'avert her eyes'(Gold 2009). Political absolutist rhetoric on both sides increased over the decade as more states imposed restrictions. By 2011, a core group of states had passed 135 new 'reproductive health' provisions, the most of any year since Roe V. Wade passed (Gold and Nash 2012). These polarized debates have reached a stalemate within the last decade and are attempting to make inches of headway at the state level. While this battle rages on, one has to wonder if the perspectives that abound in politics actually represents the vast majority of women.

The 'culture war,' with abortion as it's leading symbol, is an elite political phenomenon, driven by groups of activists on the left and right who influence the electorate. As Fiorina (2010) and others have argued, the average citizen is moderate and generally ambivalent in their political beliefs (Treier and Hillygus 2009) This is especially true for women as the vast majority of individuals beliefs are never consistently pro-choice or pro-life (Strickler and Danigelis 2002). Analyzing self-identified democrats and republicans, it seems that there has been a shift to either side. However, this polarization is much more apparent in activists who participate in politics than the average citizen (Carmin and Wood 2002). Further, the majority still remain in the center, whether by choice or 'pushed' by competing factors (Treier and Hillygus 2009). The

absolutist rhetoric on both sides has divided 'elites,' symbolically dividing the nation and women. Abortion has merely become, "a salient party cleavage issue, perhaps the most prominent issue difference between the parties (Carmin and Wood 2002). Even among those analyzing the polarization of U.S. politics, abortion is a key variable used to expose true 'divisions' in society. Abortion attitudes have become deeply associated with party identification, becoming a permanent feature of politics in the U.S. No longer merely a woman's issue, it has become an identifier of political ideology.

As such, the progression of women's rights has been stalled. In current politics, reproductive rights have become a channel through which particular 'thick' worldview can be espoused. In the midst of these debates pro-religious women have fully entered into, "a double bind as the marginalized of the marginalized" (Brasher 1998, p. 89). These women are viewed as part of a 'backwards,' portion of society. Further understood as the unwilling and co-opted to perpetuate a particular ideology. These divisions, while existing earlier in the movement, never ultimately divided women. In previous decades, these ideological positions were secondary to the goal of gender equality and women's rights. The political change over the past three decades has created abortion as a symbol of 'thick' particularistic identity, causing divisions between women to become crystalized.

The Reality of Women's Experiences, Beyond Categorization and Building Solidarity

Contemporary women have incredibly diverse experiences, values and opinions, which move beyond the boundaries of current categorization. Often women's individual experiences are overlapping as women from secular and pro-religious camps have much more in common than they do different. The current debates and polarized political ideologies are not

representative of women's experiences, women need to move beyond these debates and define democracy, modernity and the important issues for women on their own terms. Building feminist solidarity between women starts with recognizing differences and thus eventually realizing the commonality. In both countries one can see how pro-religious women have begun to reinterpret religion, creating their own understanding of modernity and incorporating feminist values into their daily lives. Through an understanding of women's 'thick' particularistic identities, we may find a common avenue for change, building an inclusive movement around the issues all women find imperative for women's rights.

While pro-religious, covered women in Turkey are often seen as representing the resurgence of religious conservatism the reality is that these women have diverse experiences and usually have ambivalent attitudes towards the moderate Muslims in power. Currently holding office is the Justice and Development party (AKP), self described as moderate Muslims and founded in 2001 by many political leaders from the disbanded Virtue Party. The, "AKP elites are social engineers. In other words, unlike traditional conservatives the neo-conservative populists' claim to represent the contemporary values of the people..." (Sözen 2008, p. 80).

There are many pro-religious covered women who want to participate in politics, education and civil society and, "not necessarily to support the ideas that conservative men would like them to" (Jelen 2011, p. 313). The contemporary debates over the headscarf and the ideological battle played out by political parties do not necessarily represent the attitudes or beliefs of pro-religious women. Further, this divide is hiding the reality that many women's organization, regardless of ideological placement agree, and work on the same issues.

Increasingly the number of covered women graduating from higher education and entering the workforce has sparked academic interest in investigating their lives and beliefs. While the

national statistic for women who are considered covered as remained stable at around 65%, the number of women who specifically wear the hijab has risen from 3.5% in 2003 to 16.3% in 2007 (Jelen 2011). Overall the number of covered women who graduated from higher education was at 26.6% in 2007, for comparative only 5.4% of Turkish women graduated from higher education in 2000 (Jelen 2011). Despite the headscarf ban and the “dress and regulation code,” the number of covered pro-religious women who are seeking higher education and employment opportunities is increasing.

While some consider the headscarf a symbol of fundamentalism, the reality is that these women have incorporated feminist values into their daily lives. As a current university woman states, “As a woman it is specifically important to earn my own money, which in other words means to have strength. I believe it is not about being a Muslim or a non Muslim [...] I am a smart woman, I can make my own money, I do not want to be dependent on my family anymore, or on my future husband” (Jelen 2011, p. 311). Pro-religious women, especially when college educated have created new understandings of their identity, incorporating feminist values and beliefs into their life. Many pro-religious women have incorporated feminist values into their lives and by reinterpreting religious texts through a feminist lens, create new understandings of Islam.

Some women even justified their desire to work and educated themselves through a reinterpretation of Islamic texts and Islam as a whole. One student states that she, “believe[s] that everywoman has the right to stand on her own feet. It is hard to defy patriarchy today. As a Muslim hijabi woman, I think we need to break the taboo that Islam puts women in an inferior position, and I'll do my best to do so” (Jelen 2011, p. 311). Often pro-religious women in cite the

Islamic texts and biographies of the Prophet's wives Hatice (Khadijah) and Ayse (Aisha) who were both active outside of the home. Thus, reinterpreting religion through a feminist lens and actively incorporating those values into their daily life and experiences. One female student views education, entering the workforce and participation in society as a duty because she is a pro-religious covered woman.

“Also I took the issue as a Jihad. If I do not go to the university that I've deserved by winning the exam [ÖSS] ... then my place may be taken by someone who has nothing to do with religion. Thus in the end people who think and live like me will be excluded from intellectual society ...” (Jelen 2011, p. 312).

What she is discussing is her unique blend of pro-religious and feminist perspectives, not necessarily the islamization of society as a whole. These pro-religious women's understandings of society have been marginalized in Turkey and thus, a large portion of women's perspectives.

What the previous quote touches on is a very important issue for the women's movement in Turkey, as roughly 65% of women in Turkey are covered in some way. Generally speaking then, this means that a full 30% of the adult population in Turkey is excluded from civil society and the political sphere (Jelen 2011). Due to the headscarf ban in public institutions and the limited higher education institutions that allow the headscarf, a large portion of the Turkish population is effectively excluded and discriminated against in society. This poses a serious issue for the women's movement as it becomes clear that the women's rights gained are, for all intents, merely rights for one particular group of women. If pro-religious women continue to be marginalized then women's rights will never progress in Turkey. You cannot have one group of women segregated, call social reformation “women's rights,” as it clearly only affects a particular group of women who are capable of realizing those rights.

In the United States many pro-religious women have incorporated feminist values into their daily life: supporting a diverse platform of workplace equality issues, sexual assault and violence issues as well as contraceptive use (Manning 1999). As Brasher has shown, pro-religious women find empowerment within the gender binaries of their religious communities, creating 'female enclaves' as support systems, reinterpreting biblical texts, and generally influencing congregational life (1998). Additionally, secular women in the United States have much more diverse opinions and ambivalent understandings of abortion, often having moral and ethical issues personally, while promoting women's right to choice (May 2010). Particularistic groups of women's have plenty of common interests that are merely hidden by political rhetoric. Polarization of the debate has divided women along particularistic identity lines of liberal secular and conservative religious (Treier and Hillygus 2009). Once understanding these common held experiences, that many secular and pro-religious women share common beliefs, these labels seem frivolous.

Despite what has been considered the backlash of the 1980s, it seems that religious conservative communities have unconsciously absorbed and incorporated many feminist values. Many religious women use feminist values to justify their work outside the home, or the identity of being a single mother (Manning 1999; Ingersoll 2003). Furthermore, the restrictive religious identity pro-religious women embrace allows them to better direct the course their lives (Brasher 1998). Essentially, women empower themselves through a religious transformation, taking control of their lives in a meaningful way. Through interviews with religious women, Manning demonstrates how pro-religious women negotiate multiple identities, often incorporating feminist values into their daily lives. For example Katrina, a head nurse discusses her job, "It's not your

sex that's going to show through, it's your integrity as a person" (Manning 1999, p. 8). Religious women often compartmentalize their life into two areas, the secular feminist public sphere of work and the religious private sphere of the home. This allows them to negotiate multiple identities and resolve moral qualms that are generally thought of as incompatible.

If you take the structures of religious organizations at face value, then you conflate power and authority. Looking at congregational governance, men are privileged over women (Brasher 1998). As noted by Ingersoll those power dynamics should not be ignored, many women feel limited and discounted in traditional religions (2003). Yet in terms of religious values, "equality of gender prevailed" (Brasher 1998, p. 61). It is, "alongside the male-dominated symbolic world of overall congregational life exists a parallel symbolic world administered totally by women" (Brasher 1998, p. 19). These are what Brasher describes as, female enclaves. Negotiating around the gender binary constraints of the congregation, they construct women only, bible studies, prayer sessions, and support groups. Through these groups and the conversion into religion has created, "narratives [that] psychologically construct for them a certain freedom" (Brasher 1998, p. 56). It is through their relationship with God and support network of female enclaves that pro-religious women improve the quality of their daily lives and find empowerment. What becomes clear through these studies is that some women do find empowerment through religion and the diversity of women's lives are revealed. As a wide variety of thick identities are better understood, possibilities for building solidarity become clearer.

The religious women Manning interviews strongly support equal rights legislation within the workplace, often agreeing with contemporary opinions that the feminist movement.¹⁴ There are even some religious women who, may not completely support all reproductive rights, but who question the Catholic church's strict stance on abortion (Manning 1999, p. 25). Studies done on women's reactions to anti-abortion picketers while entering a clinic to obtain an abortion showed the majority of women identified with a religious group as 37% were Catholic and 43% were Protestant (Cozzarelli & Major 2000, p. 268). It becomes clear that conservative women have been influenced by feminist norms. While 'antifeminist' sentiments may be more common in religious traditions, there exist alternative voices that argue for gender equality (Ingersoll 2003) and empowerment (Brasher 1998). This is a key point in the research, indicating that while abortion may be a polarized stalemate debate, there is room for women to negotiate around these issues and find common ground on which a cohesive women's movement may be built. So long as groups of secular and pro-religious women do not view the 'other' solely through their 'thick,' particularistic identities. In reality, women's experiences and perspectives are not quite so dichotomous, many secular women still find moral dilemma's with birth control and abortion while pro-religious women are actively incorporating feminist values of the public sphere into their daily lives.

Women have seen a dramatic shift in contemporary American politics, while Turkish women have seen political upheaval and a move towards the conservative right. This path has led to the rise of the new right to the extreme polarization of liberal secular and conservative religious ideological camps. This polarization in politics has divided the women's movement

¹⁴ Due to the increased polarization of the political sphere, only caricatures of both sides are presented. Thus either group of women will not fully understand the ambivalent stance of the other.

along those ideological lines. Dividing the women's movement in such a manner has marginalized pro-religious women from the mainstream movement. Secular feminists of both countries often view those who are not actively combatting patriarchy as complicit or reinforcing oppressive norms. As Brasher (1998) points out the religious women she studies are not couriers of oppressive fundamentalism but rather engage in active and passive bargaining with patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988). As Kandiyoti has argued around the globe, as well as in the Turkish context, women find strategies to negotiate within concrete constraints (1988). All women work within the 'patriarchal bargain,' which, "may exhibit variations according to class, caste, and ethnicity" (Kandiyoti 1988, p. 275). I would argue that in both countries, pro-religious women are not complicit actors, but rather negotiators.

Political labels do not represent the diversity of either group of women, nor could they represent the intricate overlapping identities of individual women. Therefore it is up to women to transcend political debates and categories to achieve justice that serves the vast majority. Women need to stop fighting the battle between secular and religious ideologies because neither can fully represent women's experiences or identities. Together, women have the unique opportunity to find common interests through mutual recognition and understanding comparable experiences. One method to build solidarity between women is a reorganization of the women's movement so that all voices can be heard and all arguments tested. Organized as a 'congress of grievances' with high participation and great value placed on deliberation women will be able to negotiate their multiple identities within overlapping communities (Mill 1869, Held 2005). By creating a space for pro-religious women to enter the feminist discourse will only enhance arguments for women's rights.

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