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Introduction
There is an innate tension between modernizing and traditional strains in countries with strong religious traditions. The modernizing strain views modernization through Western eyes. It approaches social justice and change from the viewpoint of the nation-state, with citizenship as the key ingredient. Modernization promotes social and economic development in order to provide social justice. Each individual benefits from his or her social participation as a part of a national identity. In essence, modernization is measured by various indices, such as public health, state education, industrialization, post-industrial progress, increase in scale, mass communication, and mass mobilization; it is a central component of one's existence. This is the key to fulfillment in terms of both individual identity and socioeconomic goals.

This traditional strain is evident in Turkey. Muslim cultures have attempted to reconcile the secular Islamic model with the traditional Islamic model that looks to the Qur'an as the source of both individual and group identities. Turkey has attempted to assume a post-Islamic identity which includes the role of women.

The role of women in a traditional society with religiously-defined proscriptions on their position in culture and society is a flash point in Turkey, a country which is dealing with the challenges of modernization. An examination of the role of women in the fields of human services, employment, and political participation is a measure of the balance between
traditional religion and modern trends in cultural status and economic, political, and social equality.

The 19th Century

Education has proved to be the key to equality in Turkey since 1869. This includes elementary schools, whether part of the medrese networks (the madrasahs, or religiously-run schools) that ran the gamut from elementary (Qur'anic schools, often in mosques) to university level, or as secular schools that were made mandatory in that year. Villages of 500 households were to have public elementary education units with separate schools for boys and girls and for Muslims and non-Muslims, if the affected areas were sufficiently heterogeneous in nature. The schools had lessons in religion (of the students) in Turkish, Arabic, or Persian; arithmetic; accounting; mathematics; geometry; world and Ottoman history; geography; and the most important language of the area. (Since elementary school could run through the early teens, some of these subjects such as accounting or geometry were meant to be related to professional training.)

Middle schools (idada) were to be established in towns or cities of one thousand households or more and were to include three years of instruction. The curriculum included Turkish and French, logic, economic, geography, world and Ottoman history, mathematics, algebra, accounting, physical sciences, and basic draftsmanship.

Senior secondary schools, or sultana schools, were to be placed in provincial capitals and had to accept all graduates of middle schools. As these schools charged tuition, only the wealthier families could afford them. Nevertheless, a very good student could attend on scholarship. Their curriculum included humanities, Arabic, Persian, French, economic, international law, history, logic, engineering, algebra, trigonometry, all sciences, and land surveying.1
By the end of the *Tanzimat* (reform) period in Turkish history (1876), the opportunity for education on a non-sectarian and non-class basis had expanded in keeping with the premise of equality for all. Both elementary and trade schools were made available to orphans and poor boys. Trade schools were opened to retrain adults. Muslim adults were given continuing and adult educations in Istanbul. In 1873, a free lycée, or secondary school, was established for Muslim orphans. The Ministry of Education established provincial educational councils which disbursed money for buildings, teacher salaries, books, and libraries. Under the Public Education Law of 1869, teachers were certified, as were lessons, curriculum, and texts. This certification applied to the numerous foreign missionary elementary and secondary schools which had been established in the 1860s and 1870s. By the 1890s, over 90 percent of all school-aged boys and over one-third of school-aged girls were attending elementary school. By that time, secular elementary and secondary school attendance (including non-Muslims) outnumbered *medrese* attendance, especially in the cities. Even though the *waqf* (the non-profit foundation in many Muslim lands supported by religious taxes) remained active in charitable affairs, it was no longer dominant in education. Similarly, the *ulema* (*ulama*, or religious scholars) also lost their monopoly, especially in higher education.

**The Young Turk Period**

During the Young Turk period (1908-1918), other direct benefits for women occurred. The Young Turks allowed women to attend public middle and secondary schools or to acquire their education at some of the newly established private schools for girls. Between 1911 and 1923, the
country experienced almost constant warfare that resulted in the deaths of many men, including teachers, thereby creating teaching positions for women. Women were allowed to open businesses and received professional training in areas such as law and medicine. Religious courts that had repressed women's rights were placed under the control of the Ministry of Justice in 1917. Family law enacted in 1917 gave women the right to use the court to enforce stipulations of their marriage vows.5

The Turkish Republic

During the Turkish Republic (after 1923), perhaps the most significant reform was in the emancipation of women. As in many Islamic societies, Turkish women had remained secluded and were allowed very little education. Often they were veiled at fourteen, married at 15 or 16, and spent the rest of their lives at home. When they did venture out, they were fully covered from head to foot—usually in black or gray all-concealing clothing—with the exception of one or both eyes. This mode of dress is known as the chador or burka. Women sat in separate sections of public transportation so that they were not exposed to the gaze of men. Polygamy was generally practiced, since the Qur'an allowed marriage to as many as four wives.6

Between 1920 and 1940, the clothing restrictions were gradually eliminated and women were allowed to go about without the chador; they were actually encouraged to wear modern or Western clothes, particularly in the metropolitan areas. The women of the countryside were slower to adopt the modern garb, but the practice did spread.

By 1920, polygamy had been made subject to the consent of the first wife. A civil code was established in 1926 that gave women equal rights with regard to marriage and property.
It subsequently became possible for a woman to divorce, but a husband could no longer divorce his wife without her consent. The civil code also gave women equal rights in all legal matters, in addition to marriage and property matters. Women were given the right to hold municipal office and to vote in municipal elections in 1930. They were given complete voting rights in 1935. Beginning in 1935, women could serve in the National Assembly. In the 1990s, Turkey had its first female Prime Minister, Tansu Çiller.  

Universal primary and secondary education was introduced in the 1930s, and it became quite common for girls to be educated. Business and professional opportunities were made available to women. By 1940, many women, particularly in the cities, worked in shops, banks, and business offices, and it was common to see women as teachers, physicians, lawyers, and judges. Turkey appeared to be evolving into a typical Western society.

One significant development in the last few years has been the growth of the women's movement, and this has been evident in the increased support for women's issues among both Islamists and modernizers. People have attempted an amalgam between the two traditions. Many modern Turkish women wear a stylish headscarf called a *tesättür* as a way of sharing both modernity and Islam. This often bright-colored and ornate garment exhibits both a sense of style as reasonably secularist and also a sense of wanting to show respect to Islamic tradition.

Islamist women, who claim to be also modernist, state that they are against patriarchal domination and support the parts of Islamic doctrine that promote women's education, workers, and politically active Islamic activities for the public good. This is part of the reaction against the Kemalist laicism, which took the form of totally rejecting Islamic symbols and conservative Turkish social practices, proclaiming the
superiority of modernity. People now say that the women’s movement aims to end class, status, and gender cleavage in favor of social justice for all.9

The condition of women has been an issue between modernizers and Islamists. The adoption of the civil code that gave women legal rights in 1926, and the equal suffrage of women in 1934, was considered a hallmark of modernization. Similarly, Kemalists maintained that the pre-Islamic Turks of Central Asia practiced true equality.10

In general, Kemal Ataturk equated female progress with societal progress. He claimed that a republic needed democracy and recognition of women’s rights; hence women’s rights would be “recognized”11 and if knowledge and technology are necessary for society, both men and women have to have “equal access to this.”12 In fact, the major milestones in the republic in terms of modernization, i.e., secularization, Westernization, elimination of the Caliphate and religious orders, secular education, language reform (replacing the Arabic alphabet with a Roman alphabet), a Western calendar, and the metric system, all seem equally beneficial to both genders.13

The private lives of women, however, especially in the rural areas and in private sexual matters, remained subordinate during the Kemalist period. In the otherwise modern civil code, for instance, the husband is designated the head of the family and the chooser of the place of residence, as well as the provider for the family. Private female relations remained patriarchal.14

Turkish feminists, in the last 25 years, have campaigned for equality in all aspects of life. This ideal was often in conflict with Kemalist women, who pushed a republican nationalist line that only elite women could achieve. Professional equality of most women would be justified by
their modern education, even if traditional family relations and child rearing remained supreme in private life. The last 25 years has seen this template somewhat modified in an increasingly urban and individualistic Turkey.\textsuperscript{15}

At the same time, gender tension has remained. Men and women may congregate in the office or factory, but segregation often continues in gender-related tea breaks, coffee breaks, and canteen and lunch room sections. Dress and deportment also may signal a point of fissure between modern and traditional and Islamic. Economics may necessitate women in the workplace coming into contact with men who are not relatives, but they have not been habituated even in the classroom to interact on an equal fashion.\textsuperscript{16}

Sometimes, extreme ends meet in the traditional Islamic and feminist, in that both have argued against the modern middle-of-the-road secularist. Recently, for example, Islamic women joined with radical feminists to demand women-only buses and other public transport in Turkish cities.\textsuperscript{17} The motivation of one party was public protocol; the motivation of the other was equalization, but the ends did meet.

Social progress has been more apparent than real in some areas in Turkey, especially in the rural areas and the poorer sections of urban areas. One recent poll had shocking results for many Turks when it ranked Turkey 105 out of 115 on an international list on the status of women, in part due to the disparity between the elite and mass of Turkish women.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{The Current Situation}

The current crisis over the wearing of headscarves in Turkey is a prime example of the symbolic role of women in the interaction between the forces of modernization and Islam. (It should be noted that this issue has also become
a political controversy in European countries, particularly France.)

Although the Turkish constitution has never directly outlawed the headscarf in state-sponsored institutions, it has become an issue of controversy over the last quarter century. However, in recent decades, partially in response to the rise of Islamist-based political parties and as a reaction to the Iranian revolution, Kemalists and secularists in the judiciary have resorted to the Constitutional Court to rule against the wearing of headscarves on the basis of violation of the nation’s equality and secularism.\(^{19}\)

In the late 1980s and the 1990s a series of laws was passed hostile to the wearing of religious garb such as the headscarf, but it stopped short of outright prohibition. Initially, the legislation was for the protection of women who chose not to wear headscarves and who were subject to hostile pressure at universities and other public institutions from the more pious.

However, the number of women who wore the headscarf on universities increased, in spite of adverse reaction from various university administrations. One rationale for the overthrow of the previous Islamic party, Refa (Welfare), and the government’s subsequent dissolution in 1997-1998 was, according to the Court and its military supporters, the encouragement of “practices that have emerged against the law and will direct Turkey to an outdated appearance.” The successor to the outlawed Welfare Party, the Virtue Party, was dissolved in 1999 for anti-secular activities including the wearing of the headscarf.

The secularists received support for their implicit ban on the headscarf when the European Court of Human Rights in 2005 ruled that a university could prohibit the wearing of headscarves because the Turkish Constitution stated that the
The state should not show a preference for a particular religion or belief. This provision could include state-sponsored institutions, including universities. At last count, close to 100 of Turkey’s 116 universities were still unofficially observing the ban.\(^{20}\)

The present ruling Islamic party had been circumspect in its approach to this issue during its first term (between 2002 and 2007). However, after a significant party victory in the summer of 2007, and after pressure by some of its devout professional women, and a smaller coalition partner, it passed two rather mildly-worded amendments. Article 10 concerned equality and article 42 concerned the right to pursue education without impediment unless specifically stated by law; they were passed in February, 2008. Headscarf wearing women felt that these amendments were too innocuous.

Nonetheless, in reaction to these two amendments, especially amendment 42, the opposition Kemalist secular Republican People’s Party appealed this action to the chief prosecutor, who brought the case to the Constitutional Court on the grounds that the two amendments, especially amendment number 42, violated the separation of church and state. The chief prosecutor went even further and recommended that the government and the party (AKP) be dissolved and that 71 of its members, including the prime minister, be banned from public life. This has been a recent pattern in Turkey, whereby the Islamic party is dissolved and then replaced by a newer one.\(^{21}\)

On June 5, 2008 the Constitutional Court of Turkey annulled the AKP-sponsored laws on the grounds that the these provisions allowing women to wear an Islamic headscarf in universities violated the secular spirit of the Constitution.\(^{22}\) Although the party had disowned its Islamist roots in order to strengthen Turkey’s bid to join the EU (and
is now supported by pro-business liberals and center-right politicians including secularists), it appeared in danger of being banned.

The hardcore secularists are centered in the military, judiciary, parts of the bureaucracy, and much of academe. However, the party has argued that the ban on headscarves violated freedom of conscious and the right of women to have an education. Thus, there is the supreme irony of a party originally identified with an Islamic movement not known as supporting non-traditional rights for women, including modern education, should now support an action on the grounds of both liberty of conscience as well as rights for women in opposition to modernist secularists.23

On July 30, the Court by a vote of 6 of 11 voted to ban the AKP. Since seven votes were needed, the party survived. However, its funds were slashed in half. The whole episode epitomized the fragile equilibrium between secularists and Islamists when it came to a woman’s apparel.24

The role of women is central in today’s conflict between Kemalist and secular modernists, on the one hand, and traditional Islamists in Turkey, on the other. The former view has maintained that women’s role in society must be restructured if Turkey is to be accepted by the West. Legal and educational reforms in the 1920s and 1930s were meant to empower women so that they would have equal status, at least in the public sphere.

Islamists have believed that segregation of the sexes is fundamental for morality in society. Although Islamists in Turkey accept some degree of association between the sexes in the public sphere, they support the separation of young girls in public facilities and in institutions such as elementary schools. The covering of young women and girls,
especially the wearing of the headscarf, is a central tenet of this philosophy.

Each tradition feels that it represents the true Turkey. Secularists feel that certain Islamic practices such as the covering up of women are characteristic of the most backward segments of society -- the rural areas and smaller towns, particularly in eastern Anatolia. Islamists feel that elite western customs especially in the larger cities in western and central Turkey (Istanbul, Izmir, Edirne, and Ankara), are a foreign non-national intrusion.

Some secularists are often a bit taken aback in recent decades to see well-educated professional women who have chosen to continue to wear the headscarf out of "personal choice" as well as religious tradition. Indeed the tradition of tolerance about choice has carried over to public opinion. A recent poll found that 70 percent of Turks felt it was acceptable for women to wear headscarves and 64 percent of Turkish women do so in daily life. Nevertheless, the levers of power—the military, judiciary, bureaucracy, and much of the media and academe—are with the secularists so that, if seven judges of the 11-member Constitutional Court had decided so, the government and party could have been dissolved.

Although the European Union Court of Human Rights has ruled in the past in favor of secular positions, the European Union has declared that the ballot box not the court should decide if a party remains in power. As Turkey continues to seek admission to the European Union, this factor cannot be ignored.

Nonetheless, the position taken against headscarves has had an adverse impact on genuinely religious professional women in terms of professional advancement in their chosen careers. Headscarved women attorneys are barred from
representing clients in court and are barred from sitting in the parliament. Qualified women who interview for positions in banking, engineering, medicine, and other professions may find their chances, at least in large metropolitan areas, diminished in interviews and in wages.

In rural areas and in small towns in eastern Anatolia, the opposite may occur for women without headscarves as they face persecution for not wearing the garment. Women are subject to prejudice whichever choice that they may make, so polarizing has this debate become.

According to some estimates, nearly half of all students expelled from universities since 2000 have been because of the headscarf issue. In addition, after the dissolution of the Welfare Party and the Virtue Party, a citation for wearing the headscarf caused over 1,000 civil servants and more than 300 primary and secondary school teachers to lose their positions. Some estimates put the number of discharged female teachers at 5,000 since the early 1980s.28

A recent study conducted by the World Bank detailed the often glaring disparity between women and men in areas such as health, education, and employment. This report used standards established by the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as well as standards established by European Union which Turkey desires to join. In compliance with this desire and international standards, Turkey has modified its legislation in recent years by mandating gender-neutral laws in its new Civil Code (2002) and well as added amendments to its Labor Code (2003). However, Turkey has, in the opinion of external observers, some deficiencies within its Penal Code which does not deal with sensitive subjects such as “honor killings,” marital rape, and the specific minimum age for marriage.29
The report was especially telling when it compared the wages of female university graduates to those of male university graduates. In the public sector, the compensation of female university graduates was 76 percent of male university graduates; in the private sector it declined to 68 percent. Overall, there continues to be a discrepancy between male and female illiteracy and access to education. As late as 1999, 77 percent of women were literate as opposed to 94 percent of men; in 2001, 59 percent of secondary school students were men and 41 percent were women. Although 42 percent of university graduates were women, it was more a tribute to their tenacity, as only about 15 percent of university-aged women attended university as opposed to 26 percent of men of university age.

The issue of relatively low enrollment and a higher drop out rate for females has different causes in different sections of the country. In the modernizing west economic reasons are given for these actions while in the more traditional east socio-cultural causes predominated. Recent legislation has attempted to remedy this situation by making education from grades one to eight mandatory.

Reality on the ground may differ if other aspects of education are examined. Women are closer to men in academic tracks, a favorable omen for career development, but there is a greater differentiation in the vocational and technical tracks. Moreover textbooks, classroom settings, and educational supervisors are overwhelmingly male.30 Health access has remained unequal according to the report. In part, this is due to the general limitation on access to health education as part of the gender educational disparity. The particularly large disparity in vocational and technical education is one such factor. Young boys were more likely to receive medical treatment than young girls. Males continued
to make most of the decisions on fertility, especially in rural areas and in eastern Anatolia, even though induced abortion (up to 10 weeks) is a legal option.

There also continues to be a double standard in terms of premarital sexual activity. In this regard, traditional methods of contraception were favored over the pill. Examination and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases were often limited by tradition. Some families still insisted on pre-marital testing but not on post-abortion treatment. Maternal mortality remained high by European standards and there is no overall approach to female health.¹¹

Gender discrepancies remain in most economic sectors in terms of participation in both the private and public sectors. These discrepancies carry over into earning power, work conditions, and benefits. The situation is aggravated by the relative lack of childcare and on-the-job-training for females who continue to perform the majority of domestic tasks—especially in providing for the time-consuming needs of young children.

Ironically, the movement to freer markets and less regulation, as opposed to the Kemalist emphasis on the statist economy, has left women more vulnerable to discrimination in working conditions, wages, and social security. There has been an overall decline in official participation of women, because young females leave work for marriage and children (with no guarantee of jobs being kept during maternal leave) while rural migrants with little education often face sub-standard treatment.

The deregulation of the economy has left women open to exploitation by unscrupulous male employers who circumvent official legal standards in a manner reminiscent of the treatment of undocumented workers in the United States and Western Europe. Women often turn to the non-
formal sector in the underground economy. This “grey market” does not give protection to women who lack access to the infrastructure and resources available in the public sector and official private sector.

The only area where there is true parity for top female managers is the public sector; female compensation is at 96 percent of their male counterparts. However, the percentage of female compensation to male compensation dropped to 80 percent for top female managers as opposed to top male managers in the private sector.

Men had a much higher percentage in industrial employment (80 percent) while women were more likely to be employed in services such as finance, insurance, real estate, and business (34 percent) as well as community, social, and personal services (31 percent). However, men continued to lead as late as 2001 in employment in the public sector (74 percent) and private sector (84 percent).

Women were nearly twice as likely to be unemployed. Social Security covered 60 percent of men as compared to 20 percent of women. While a survey of developing countries indicated that 28 percent of entrepreneurs were women, the figure for Turkey was 15 percent. Access to credit and financial support for women entrepreneurs in both the urban and rural areas has, according to the report, been limited by both traditional attitudes and insufficient institutional support in the more free-wheeling economic atmosphere in place since the 1980s.

The most glaring disparity between legislative fiat and institutional reality lies in the realm of decision making. Turkey has a General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women that does function as a central coordinating unit for gender equality, as well as a number of organizations dedicated to more training for women, consciousness-
raising. In addition, specific lobbying groups promote gender-sensitive legislation that includes shelters for battered women. However, the situation of women in terms of decision-making position remains quite rudimentary.

The World Bank in its report placed Turkey 110 overall among 173 countries surveyed in regard to female officeholders. It reported that in the early part of this decade, women composed just 4.4 percent of members of parliament and less than 2 percent of local legislative members. These statistics compared unfavorably even with other sectors that involved women, especially with education—33.7 percent in professional positions, 17 percent in public affairs, and 11.5 percent of managers.

In other representative organizations such as labor unions women only constituted approximately 10 percent of membership. The women’s branches of political parties and trade and labor union tended to concentrate on parochial issues and were devoid of real power.

While quota systems for women had been instituted for some political parties, the two largest (the governing AK/AKP or the Justice and Development Party and the main opposition CHP or Republican Peoples Party) did not have them.

Non-government organizations (NGOs) that have been active in the cause of women’s rights since the mid-19th century have proven to be ineffectual as they have been divided among Kemalist/secularist, Islamic, Kurdish, and leftist associations whose agendas have differed. An indirect index on real attitudes toward women and their relatively low societal status is obvious in the lack of specific legislation on domestic violence, communal violence, and official violence (treatment of women in police custody and detention). Even
bride-price still exists in some rural sections of the country especially in the southeast.\textsuperscript{34}

These fissures are on full display in the headscarf controversy, which epitomizes the central dividing line in contemporary Turkey on gender equality and individual rights. Many secularists believe that the current governing Islamic-rooted AK party, as well as its Muslim predecessors, are aiming for the quiet Islamization of the country via lobbying for the wearing of headscarves for women and support for the segregation of women in public parks.

Secularists of the Kemalist school begun by Ataturk dominated most of Turkish life at least until 1950; after 1938, the rule of his Republican Party so ensured. This tradition was supported through 1980 by a coalition of army people, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, academe, media, business, and urban-educated middle and upper classes. They characterized their opponents as uneducated clerically dominated peasants from rural areas and from small towns from backward areas particularly from eastern Anatolia.

In recent decades, however, except for the military, this coalition has been penetrated. Many constituents of the old coalition, especially in the professional and business classes, have been persuaded by political Islam (as opposed to radical Islam, which opposes all modern accretions -- at least in theory). Many have come to see the secularists as being obscurantist in their unyielding opposition to headscarves.

At the same time, many religious people from rural areas and small towns from all parts of the country have joined the middle class through education and economic policies such as import substitution (which prevailed through the 1980's) that created new opportunities, thus making it easier for Islamists to accept modernization. Various social movements including the revival of Sufi mystical orders and the Gulen
movement readily embraced modern aspects of education, technology, and communication so as to enhance their appeal to professional and middle classes including women.\textsuperscript{35}

Nonetheless, activities directly or indirectly connected to the position of women have aroused suspicions of creeping Islamization by Muslim-influenced local and municipal authorities. These include the segregation of women in parks and other public facilities, revocation of liquor licenses, and the use of Islamic texts in local state-run schools. At the heart of the dispute and indeed for the hearts and minds of individual Turks is the Islamic concept of morality as a most essential aspect of human existence. They say that morality should be regulated by Islam in both public and private spheres via the Qur'an (Holy Book), Haditha (sayings of the Prophet), the Sharia (Islamic law), the Medreses (religious schools), and Ulema (religious scholars).

Secularists will argue that individual choice and conscience determine morality. (As was indicated earlier, the positions have been somewhat reversed, with Islamist AK arguing for the headscarf on the grounds of gender equality and individual choice while the secularists have argued that it violates civil code and the separation of church and state as mandated in the Turkish constitution.) This is the cultural divide in Turkey today.

Overall, although women have an equal legal status in Turkish society, the headscarf controversy, in conjunction with the continued influence of the patriarchal household, makes this equality more apparent than real.

**Conclusion**

Islamic pressure, which seeks to enforce its values upon modern Turkey, has been, in fact, influenced by the forces of modernization. This can be seen in its modified position on education and career advancement, political participation,
and some aspects of dress. However, the balance between modernization and Islam is still a work in progress. This is the case when it comes to the status and role of women caught between the crosscurrents of a modernizing world and the continued pull of traditional religion. The open espousal of Islamic sensitivities (in part a reaction to enforced laicism during the Kemalist phase of the Turkish Republic) has now caused a reaction among secular segments of society. The role of women as symbolized by the choice to wear or not wear a headscarf is the central focus of this struggle.

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