

## **Modernization Process to Make a Muslim Gendered Public Sphere: Turkish Context**

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**Abstract:** Religion and modernization of the state along with its people is a debatable issue today. Using documentary research method, this paper shows that modernization with its secular bias had influence in the analyses of the Islamic world. It swayed the central authority of Turkey, although it manipulated its public sphere according to their own, challenging the secular nature of modernization and modernity. Public sphere in Turkey emerges not as an outcome of liberal bourgeois ideology, rather of an authoritarian state modernism. Different actors like the Ottoman, the Islamists, Kemalist secularist elites and Islamist party played a vital role in the modernization process of Turkey. However, in true sense, modernization of the state did not bring women in public sphere. Women's visibility and citizenship rights were approved, but the public sphere was monitored by all the actors of modernization process, and women were the main target of modernization project without caring their consent.

**Keywords:** Modernity, Public Sphere, Islam and Turkey

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Modernity, public sphere and religion especially, Islam are the important issues these days which have turned the attention of the gender scholars. In the Muslim majority countries, Islam has been engaged as a powerful symbol for legitimacy, unity and social change by different actors in different times, and women have been the main target around which the activities of the actors have circled. Islam is considered traditional and backward by the so called progressive sections of the people. Yet it is considered as unchangeable universal regulations of human life by some so called conservative people. The question might raise here about who/what is modern in whose eyes. The so called conservatives would not think Islam as backward. In this globalized world, things are always changing and for survival some things, which are not expected for any change by some groups of people, are being changed by other groups. And thus we see debates on modernity, public sphere, religion and gender where women's life style is much focused by different actors. When any changes for modernity occurs it touches women's lives as women are considered cultural markers of the society or markers of religion. In this paper, we have discussed about how different actors play roles for the modernization of the people, and how they bring women or want to see them in the public sphere, and how the sphere has a gendered nature.

### **II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Modernity**

Generally, modernity refers to people's experience with modernization-a transition from individual communities to an integrated large-scale society through new modes of production, new technology, mass consumption, new modes of transport and new global media etc. while modernization is a social process that brings modernity into being, and keeps it in a state of lasting becoming. Modernization is a socio-economic process that includes industrialization, rapid urbanization, expansion of capitalist market, and scientific and technological innovations. Modernization theory has been manifested in the third world from the 1950s to the late 1970s. Its secular bias had influence in the analyses of the Islamic world. In the early 1960s it saw the Muslim world facing an impalpable choice. The choice was either a 'neo-Islamic totalitarianism' intending or 'resurrecting the past' or 'reformist Islam' that would open the 'the sluice gates and [be] swamped by the deluge'. Modernization theory has limitations also in the analyses of Muslim world. The limitation has been

apparent in the sharp contrast between two artificial constructs –modernity and tradition, and the consequent misunderstanding of the entrenched social functions of tradition. According to the observation of Black “If one thinks of modernization as the integration or the reintegration of societies on the basis of new principles, one must also think of it as involving the disintegration of traditional societies”. Tradition is seen as inimical to modernization and its displacement often causes violence and political instability. However, positing a sharp division between modernity and tradition oversimplifies the complex process of interaction where religion and tradition coexist with economic development and the needs of modern society (Eickelman 1996:23-24). In case of Turkey it is also evident.

HishamSharabi (1988) defines modernity as a break with traditional ways of comprehending the reality in favour of new modes of thought and his hope is that Arab society will become modern overcoming its innermost disease and patriarchy. Appearance of modernity and secular democracy would displace ‘neopatriarchal status quo’. Modernization was the project of central authority and central elite in Turkey aiming at improving the ability to cope up with the west. The notion of modernity today is mostly a peripheral concept, and this type of modernity has the capacity to produce a synthesis based on universal values that include those of the west, and paradoxically, Turkish centres (the establishment) today stand as actors are likely to impede this process (Bacik 2001:68).

Modernity is not a single phenomenon rather multiple. Vast majority of western social theorists had the notion that religion was a declining force, and with emergence of rationality superstitions would be removed. The thought is that religion would have no influence in public life. However, the reality is different today. Diverse religions are influencing the public politics and culture around the world challenging the secular nature of modernization and modernity (Hefner 1998:85). Recent refigurations of Islam, Hinduism and Christianity show that contrary to the conventional secularization theories, religion these days has not everywhere declined as a public force, nor been confined to a sphere of interiority (*ibid*:98). Religions with other factors influence modernity, and modernity gets its different shapes. In case of the modernization process in Turkey, modernity is also multiple being defined by different actors. What the Islamists do today regarding public sphere might be Islamist modernity.

## **2.2 Public Sphere**

Public sphere is a space of social life where people can meet together and identify social problems and discuss it freely for solution. This is generally done for mutual interest using collective judgement. In Habermas’ sense ‘the public sphere is a conceptual resource which designates a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is such a space where citizens deliberate about their common affairs, so it is an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. Conceptually this arena is distinct from the state. It is a space where discourses are produced and circulated, and that can in principle be critical of the state (Fraser 1993:110). Habermas’ sense of public sphere is also conceptually distinct from the official economy, and it is not a site of market relations, rather one of the broad relations. It is a theatre for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling, and this is how, the concept of public sphere allow us to keep in view the distinctions among state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic associations, distinctions that are necessary to democratic theory (*ibid*:111). Habermas’s idea of public sphere is considered essential to critical social theory and democratic political practice, albeit the public sphere by Habermas has criticism.

According to Fraser (1993: 111), public sphere by Habermas needs to undergo some critical questions and reconstruction in order to yield a type capable of theorizing the limits of actually existing democracy. Her opinion is that “Habermas stops short of developing a new, post bourgeois model of the public sphere”. He never problematizes some dubious assumptions underlying the bourgeois model of public sphere. Joan Landes, Mary Ryan and GeofEley opine that Habermas’ account idealizes liberal public sphere in which a number of significant exclusions are seen, among which gender is a key axis of exclusion. Habermas’ idea of the public sphere distinguishes the public and private issues, which normally affect women. Habermas not only idealizes the liberal public sphere, but also fails to examine other non-liberal, non-bourgeois, competing public spheres. There are multiple publics, and the relations between bourgeois publics and other publics are always conflictual. The historiography of Ryan and others argues that “bourgeois public sphere was never *the* public” (Fraser 1993: 116). Fraser evaluates Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere discussing some assumptions within his model, and offers a modern conception of the public sphere. She shows four assumptions which lie in the Habermas’ bourgeois and masculinist public sphere. One of them is that equality in society is not a necessary condition for political democracy. The second one is that a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to multiple publics. The third one is that the appearance of private interests and private issues is always undesirable, and the fourth one is that a functioning democratic public sphere needs a sharp separation between civil society and the state. Criticizing the assumptions in Habermas’ idea of public sphere, she suggests for

equality within the public sphere, multiplicity of publics, inclusion of private sphere within public sphere, and inclusion of civil society in the decision making of the state for a better public sphere.

Bourgeois public sphere shifted political power from a repressive mode of domination to a hegemonic one which implies rule not by power rather by ideology. In the universal public sphere, marginalized groups are not included, so they should form their own public spheres which can be termed as subaltern counter publics for their identities, interests and needs. In case of Turkey, the public sphere emerges not as an outcome of liberal bourgeois ideology rather of an authoritarian state modernism.

### **III. GENDERED NATURE OF PUBLIC SPHERE IN TURKEY: DIFFERENT ACTORS**

Turkish mode of modernization is considered the most radical engagement among Muslim countries since the state defined women as public citizen. Women's position in Muslim societies should be sought in the detailed examination of the political project of contemporary states and of their historical transformation. To comprehend the plight of women, state ideologies and oppositional socio-political movement are important. Evidence of different countries shows different paths of evolution. Some emerges from declining empires or dynastic rule and some from direct colonial domination (Kandiyoti 1991a:2). Turkey has emerged from declining empire like Ottoman, and it has a long history of modernization of state and society by different actors like the government or the political party.

#### **3.1 The Ottoman as Actor**

International actors like the western countries had a significant role in the modernization process in Turkey. In the modernization process of the country, the Ottoman state apparatus appeared to be more monolithic and authoritarian and more enmeshed in the ties of dependence to the west than it had ever been. *Tanzimat* bureaucracy had to assume the role adapting itself to the requirements of western power and modernization where some groups like craftsman, artisans, the urban lower middle class, petty civil servants and the lower positioned *ulema* were excluded from the new modernised structure of the state. Women were not in good situation which is known from the Namik Kemal's newspaper *ibret*. Women's married and family life was more oppressive (Kandiyoti 1991b:24-25). Even modern men felt alienated from Ottoman patriarchal structures while women were obvious victims of that system. Modernization of the state did not bring women in public sphere. The evidence of Ottoman legal reforms starting with the *Tanzimat* (1939) shows that the Turkish response to western pressures resulted in different changes in every aspect of commercial life, but not in the family and inheritance laws (Kandiyoti 1991a:8). This implies the restricted modernization of public sphere. Women's life related to personal laws or shariah laws is untouched meaning that women's visibility is poorly or not existent in the public sphere. Thus public sphere is gendered in that time in Turkey.

In the Ottoman society, power of *ulema* (Muslim clergy) was severely restricted by the *Tanzimat* reforms, but yet the *ulema* claimed the sphere of personal status and family laws as their own (*ibid*: 9). As actors, they played a role there for shaping women's life. They were in support of confining women in the private sphere.

#### **3.2 Secularist state and Islamists as actors**

In case of modernity in Turkey, public sphere is defined through women's visibility, mobility and voices that create political stakes. "Women's visibility, women's mobility, and women's voices" are pivotal in shaping the boundaries of public sphere. To know the relations between modernity, gender, politics and the public sphere, two historical moments and recent experience play an important role. One is the projects of modernization in the 1920s and another is the movements of Islamization in the 1980s (Gole 1997:61). Projects of modernization define women as public citizens and it is a most radical thing in Muslim contexts. In the last two decades turkey has witnessed islamization also. For the sake of privatization of media, veiling issue, issues of identity, secularism, ethnicity and democracy appear in debate by the intellectuals, political actors and citizens. In the debate, women's issues are in centre point in Muslim countries, and there are two broader preoccupations in terms of gender and public sphere: one is contemporary Islamism and questions of democracy—Islamists want Shariah law where women are considered as secondary, and another is questions of identity and community by the feminists and anthropologists. Questions of identity go with the western liberal bourgeoisie sphere which is a concern both for the modernists and Islamists. Therefore, public sphere emerges not out of liberal bourgeois ideology but of authoritarian state modernism. Hence modernist elites shaped the gendered public sphere.

### **3.3 Project of Modernizations in the 1920s: the actor is Kemalist secularist elite/state**

Contemporary Turkish history implies that ‘Turkey did not rise phoenix-like out of the ashes of the Ottoman empire. It was “made” in the image of the Kemalist elite which won the national struggle against foreign invaders and old regime’ (Ahmad in Keyman 1997:220). Turkish Republic was proclaimed in 1923 with the abolishment of the Khalifate in 1924. Since its inception, Turkish modernity has been primarily and essentially state-centric project. To make a secular or modern state family law was fully secularized by adopting the Swiss Civil Code in 1926, and in 1937 Turkey was declared as secular or modern state. Modernity is generally considered a break with tradition and marriage with secularism that implies the western style of daily life activities by individual or by the state. According to Peter Berger, secularization is a ‘process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols’ (*ibid*: 217). Turkish secularism followed French (democratic state) laïcité, but religion was not separated, rather controlled by the authoritarian state. Public sphere in western European history emerged as a liberal bourgeois sphere where women were initially excluded from the universal definition of citizenship, but in Turkish mode of modernization women’s visibility and citizenship rights were approved, and the public sphere was monitored by the secular elites (Gole 1997:63). Here Foucault’s concept of governmentality is significant. The state uses secularism as an effective technology of the government of the self by making a boundary between the private and public sphere, in which religious claim to identity is confined as private, individualistic and particular. Thus the state gives effort to prevent the claims to religious identity and collective rights from entering into the public sphere (Keyman 2007:219). In Turkey, public life was westernized and the non-conformist Muslims were excluded by the state. In the bourgeois public sphere men are in central figure, but women’s bodily, social and political visibility defines the public sphere in Kemalist project. Women here are seen as both agents and symbol of modernism (Gole 1997:66). Women’s appearance in the public place implies the secular or modern way of life. The modernist prestigious life would be leading the life style of European. Republican modern men called on women kind to be active agents in building the modern nation. Ensuring of women’s participation in public life as citizens and civil servants by the modern state, and women’s visibility in urban areas socializing with men defines the modern way of life in Turkey. State as an active actor tried to ensure women’s modern life leading. In fine, modernist project attempted to create a new way of being and living which was primarily transmitted women and their changing intimacies with men in a newly formed public sphere. Women are the main target of modernization to be brought in the public sphere according to the will of the project without caring the consent of women or other group. Turkish nation-state was too secular for the Islamist, too Sunni for the Alevis and too Turkish for the Kurds (Keyman 2007:225).

### **3.4 Movements of Islamization in the 1980s: the actor is Islamist party**

In the Turkish modernization project, the public sphere was rigidly monitored by the authoritarian state in the early republican years when there was prevailing single party period from 1923 to 1946, but the monitoring was normalizing gradually from the 1950s onwards with the transition to pluralistic democracy. After the military coup in 1980, the demographic transition since 1983 has paved the way for debating on the issues of identity, secularism, ethnicity and democracy by different actors like intellectuals and political actors and citizens in Turkey. In this time public sphere is making itself free from the state control (Gole 1997:62), and it obtained more autonomy from the state and became the site of competing civil society movements like the Islamist, Kurdish, Alevite and Liberal which threw challenge towards the national, secularist and homogenous character of the modernist republican project of public sphere. Female Muslim women’s demand for attending university classes in Islamic dress is the blatant assault on modernist project or modernist public sphere (*ibid*: 68).

Women play active role in the contemporary Islamist movements of the post-1980 period. New women are seen as actors of Islamism making their way to public university, politics and urban heterosexual spaces of modernity. They are seen as a kind of continuation and at the same time a reversal of modernist women’s mode of participation in public life in the mode of public participation of Islamist women. Women also symbolize and publicly endorse the plurality of civilizational choices. Thus women are seen as not secondary or auxiliary actor rather active actors both for the modernism and Islamism.

Religion plays a greater role for decreasing the power of secularist modernity. “Rather than declining and fading, religion has always remained omnipresent in Turkish society as a dominant ideology” (Keyman 2007:223). It has always been an important point of reference by which all political parties engaged themselves since the transition to multi-party based parliamentary democracy in 1945. As a part of multi-party based democracy, Democratic Party gave rise to the first powerful liberal challenge to state-centric Turkish modernity. The role and power of Islam increased a lot since 1980s, especially in the 1990s. It became an effective and strong political, economic and cultural force that dictated the changing nature of Turkish modernity. With the chronicle result, Islamic Refah Party came into the power at the municipal level on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1994, and brought the issue of existing boundaries between the public and private sphere. The Islamists

attempt for the moral control of the public sphere through compelling women's modesty by veiling, curtailing public encounters between women and men, censoring arts and banning alcohol consumption. They show the desire to moralize the public sphere on the basis of Islamic way of life criticizing severely the secular way of living of the modernist elites who imitate the western life style. Islamic dressing, living and faith, which are considered backwardness, uncivilization and the dark side of modernization, are reappropriated and accentuated by the Islamist actors. Islamism makes these Muslim actors visible in the public sphere by giving importance on their differences (Gole 1997:71). Islamist movement brought all aspects of intimate and private relations, relations between men and women to public life or to say political life and all these things reappear as a site of religious identity's resistance to the western secularism and modernity. Contemporary Islamism can be considered as an endeavour to recuperate the lost Muslim community. In fine, Islamism dealt with by the Islamist actors allow veiled women to public life regarding education and political agency, but the allowance is limited to the purported good of the community, to the missionary goal. Monitoring of the public life by the Islamist actors apparently shows the evidence of monitoring the women's life.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Modernism and Islamism valued women as educators and missionaries etc. and at the same time both modernist and Islamist images of women subordinated female identities, whether they were related to individual or collective consciousness, to values of modesty demanded by the populist nature of both ideologies. Women were expected as "modern yet modest" by the modernist actors and "Islamic thus modest" by the Islamist actors. Definitions of self, polemics about life styles and artistic expression like body politics or gender politics became a pivotal stake in the public debate, and in this case secularists opposed the Islamists. These days, it is almost impossible to think of Turkish modernity without reference to Islam, and it is also impossible to think of Turkish secularism as uncontested. The changing mode of Turkish modernity has been marked, to a large extent, by the crisis of Turkish secularism (Keyman 2007:217). Unlike the bourgeois public in which men are the central figure-rational, masculine and public etc, in Turkey women's bodily, social and political visibility define the modernist public sphere.

In Turkey, secularization of Kemalist project followed the French model of laicite, but religion was not separated rather institutionalized under the authoritarian state control to modernize and rationalize it. It also followed sectarian understanding of (Sunni) Islam which implies one type of Muslim publics. The Islamists straightforwardly wanted Islam to control women regarding public sphere to make a Muslim public sphere. Both modernist project and movements of Islamization targeted women to make a Muslim public sphere directly or indirectly controlling the public sphere, and thus public sphere in Turkey has a gendered nature.

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