# Assumptions on Gender Equality in the Narrative Of Secularism

## Sekülerizm Söyleminde Cinsiyet Eşitliğine Dair Faraziyeler

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# Sekülarizm Söyleminde Cinsiyet Eşitliğine Dair Faraziyeler

**Öz**

Aydınlanmacı söylemin merkezinde olan sekülerlik insanlığa bağımsızlık, özgürlük, kurtuluş ve ilerleme vaat eder. Ayni zamanda sekülerlik söylemi, dogma, köktencilik ve şiddetin kaynağı olarak, dini kendisinin karşıtına yerleştirir. Bu aydınlanmacı söylem, evrensel bir kurtuluş projesi ve cinsiyet eşitliği ilkesi olarak, normatiftik iddia eder. Bu calışmada, sekülerliğin çeşitli bağlamlarda cinsiyet ve cinsellik gözlüğü ile yakın bir okuması yapılarak, sekülerliğin her zaman cinsiyet eşitliğine dair bir ilerleme getirdigi dinin ise her zaman eşitsizlik ve baskı ürettiğine dair söylem sorgulanmaktadır. İlk olarak, sekülerlik ve cinsiyeti anlamada yeni alanlar açmak için ve sekülerliğin evrensellik iddiasını sorgulamak için, sekülerliğin Avrupa kökenleri ve "din" konseptinin oluşturulma süreci incelenmektedir. Ardından birbirlerini farklı bağlamlarda yeniden inşa eden sekülerlik ve dini deneyimlerin çeşitliliği ele alınmıştır. Son olarak da, cinsiyet, cinsellik ve aile bağlamında, seküler ve dini olanın somutlaşma şekillerinin, seküler ve dini ayırımlarını anlamada önemli bir husus olduğu tartışılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sekülerizm, Din, Modernite, Cinsiyet, Evrensellik

## Assumptions on Gender Equality in the Narrative of Secularism

**Abstract**

Secularism, which is central to the Enlightenment narrative, promises liberation, freedom, emancipation, and progress to humanity. At the same time, the narrative of secularism poses religion as its antithesis, which brings dogmatism, fundamentalism, and violence. In this project, I read secularism closely in various contexts from a gender and sexuality perspective and question the assumption that secularism always provides a progress for gender equality, whereas religion always produces inequality and oppression. To open up new ways of understanding secularism and gender, I firstly question the so-called universality of secularism by addressing the European origin of secularism and the concept of religion. Then, I address the diversity of secular and religious experiences which reconstruct each other in various contexts. Finally, I argue that the embodiment of secular or religious in terms of gender, sexuality and family is an important matter for the understanding of the division between religious and secular.

**Keywords:** Secularism, Religion, Modernity, Gender, Universalism.

## Introductıon

Secularism, which is central to the Enlightenment narrative, promises liberation, freedom, emancipation, and progress to humanity. At the same time, the narrative of secularism poses religion as its antithesis, which brings dogmatism, fundament

alism, and violence. According to this secular narrative, reason, as the main tool of secularism, progressively frees itself from the bonds of religion and in so doing liberates humanity. However, religion as a regressive force and dogmatism is not amenable to change, dialogue, or nonviolent conflict resolution (Jacobson & Pellegrini, 2008, p. 2). This Enlightenment narrative of secularism claims normativity as a universal project of human emancipation and a principle of gender equality. According to this narrative, to abandon the idea of secularism is to give up "the concepts of freedom, universalism, modernization, and progress" (Jacobson & Pellegrini, p. 6).

A number of recent works in the scholarship questions the doctrine of secularism, which is taken as a universal project of human emancipation, a principle of gender equality, and a way of freedom for all. Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini's volume (2008), *Secularisms,* and Cady and Fessenden's volume (2013), *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference,* are only two of these works that open up an inquiry into the ways in which the secularism has been constructed. As addressed in these volumes, in order to open spaces for other possible narratives by breaking with the traditional narrative of secularization, we need to ask in which contexts secularism has been constructed and experienced. How does either secularism or religion have different political implementations depending on the social context and the historical moment? More importantly, what are intertwined relationships between religion, secular, gender, and sexuality in various contexts regarding the regulation of gender?

In this project, to open up new ways of thinking about the secularism and gender, first, I call into question the claims about the universality of secularism by pointing out the European roots of secularism and the construction of the concept of religion. Although it claims universality, the dominant secularization narrative that develops from European and Christian origins constitutes a specifically Protestant form of secularism. (Asad, 2003, p. 96-97; Jakobsen & Pellegrini, 2008, p. 3). Moreover, I address the multiple experiences of secularism and religion that re-made each other in various contexts (Asad, p. 12). The secularism that has developed in India in relation to a dominant Hinduism, for instance, is not the same as either the secularism that relates to Islam in Turkey or the Christian secularism that predominates in the United States. Lastly, I argue that the embodiment of secular or religious in terms of gender, sexuality, and family has been a crucial pivot in the division of religious-secular. The body of women becomes a key marker to decide whether a group or society is civilized. By a

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[433]

closer reading of secularism through the prism of gender and sexuality in a variety of contexts, I call attention to the assumption that secularism always provides progress toward gender equality, while religion always produces inequality and oppression.

**Roots of Secularism: An Enlightenment Narrative**

The intellectuals of the Enlightenment believed that the inevitable consequence of modernity is the decline of religion. The rationality leads to the progress of science replacing the irrationality and superstition of religion.[i] For instance, Emile Durkheim saw modern secularity as "progress" of humanity while Max Weber believed that "rationalization" would destroy the "magical garden" of the pre-modern world (Berger, 2008, p. 23-27). The doctrine of secularism was produced within this particular context of the Enlightenment and the transition from feudalism to capitalism (Vanaik, 1997, p. 105). The idea of universal rationality presumed a universal experience of secularism that disregards historical and contemporary differences.

In the process of the Enlightenment, the goal of scholarly debates was to make religion understandable and to situate it within the human history. The Enlightenment solution to this dilemma was to recast Christianity in light of the universal morality, then, to plot all peoples and religious practices in a progressive relation to this essential religion (Masuzawa, 2005, p. 19). In this approach, "Christianity became the norm in which Judaism and Islam problematically share" even if it is dealt from a scholarly perspective rather than theological (Smith, 2004, p. 186-187). Conceptualizing religion as a universal category solved the problem of cultural differences and variations.[ii] All of these variations just represented particular instances of the universal category.

In other words, the concept of religion was re-created by scholars for intellectual purposes of the modern world (Smith, 2004, p. 193-194). The notion of religion got transposed from a "supernatural" to a "natural history" (Smith, p. 184). For instance, in *The Natural History of Religion*, David Hume reinvented religion for the modern West in the key concepts such as rationality, colonialism, and literacy. According to Hume's thesis, "polytheism or idolatry was the first and most ancient religion of mankind. Its origin must be sought in the ordinary affections of human life. Filled with anxiety, human beings seek the "unknown cause" that becomes the constant object of our hope and fear" (Smith, p. 185). In this construction, religion is a cultural confusion about the natural history of humankind. It is no longer described in terms of narratives, but, it is an "alternative account of the natural world, and a false one" (Baird, 2008, p. 169). As a result of this universalizing narrative, all religious differences are recognized as "nothing more than different surface manifestation of the same underlying, universal

reality-nature" (Baird, p. 170). Religious discourse has turned into something more fundamental that is universal and not subject to national or cultural differences. Because of this universalization, Hume's metaphors remain important for modern times because his images, metaphors, and concepts continue to inform contemporary thought and practice (Baird, p. 167).

Therefore, as Baird argues, Hume shaped "the modern category of religion whose origins lie in Christianity's encounter with Enlightenment philosophy and experimental science" (Baird, 2008, p. 174). In the process of secularizing, Christianity did not disappear or cease to exist, but continued to remain as a religion, which distinguished itself from other religions and other entities including the secularized variant of itself (Baird, p. 165). Within this particular context, secularism and Protestant Christianity are mutually inserted into the moral narrative of modernity. Then, this narrative of modernity has been used to call for the hastening reformation of religion (specifically Islam in Asad's work) on the model of the Protestant in order to make its path into the modern, secular world (Asad, 2003, p. 1-2). Put it differently, the production of the category of religion as we know it today was also part of the production of secularism in the modern era. The idea of religion as a universal category of human experience was constructed in relation to the supposedly universal discourse of secularism during Enlightenment (Jakobsen & Pellegrini, 2008, p. 7-8).

### Intertwined Construction of Secularism And Religıon

The supposedly universal doctrine of secularism, which was produced within the particular context of the eighteenth century Europe, presumes a universal experience of secularism that disregards historical and contemporary differences. However, this doctrine has been differently experienced within various secular/religious contexts around the world. The commonsense understanding of secularism is the doctrinal separation of religion from politics, and the neutrality of the state toward religion.[iii] However, in the secularization process, the narrative of secularism was formed in relations to the developments of the nationalisms around the world (Anderson, 1983). In other words, modern nation-states reconfigured substantive features of religious life in accord with a normative model of religiosity, rather than withdrawing from the religious domain (Peterson and Walhof, 2002, p. 1–16). In the Middle East, for instance, there is no given boundary separating what is religious and secular. Instead, the change toward secularity in the twentieth century was facilitated by the co-existence and intersection of the religious and the secular. However, within the popularized fundamentalism, the religious and the secular has been rendered as a dichotomy (Zubadai, 2005, p. 438-448).

Turkey is one of the countries that religion has been inserted into the secular state instead of withdrawing of religion from the secular domain. In Turkey, religion functions in the secular state as a separate section within the state in

**"İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi"**
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**[itobiad / 2147-1185]**

*Cilt/Volume: 8,*
*Sayı/Issue: 1,*
*2019*

[435]

contrast to general assumptions that increasing secularism makes religion a private matter. The Turkish case represents an enforced secularism that did not institute a completely secular state, but entailed a full subjugation of religion to the state (Grigoriades, 2009, p. 1194). The Kemalist[iv] regime banned political parties from using religion within the political platforms, however, they did not remove religion from the state structure. The General Directorate of Religious Affairs was established and assigned for all religious affairs in the country with the authority of teaching the correct Islam formed by the state. The directorate has been used to subordinate religion to the state rather than creating an autonomous religious sphere (Ulutas, 2010, p. 398).

According to Parla and Davidson, Kemalism aimed to form "an ideologically homogenous population both incapable and unwilling to question the fundamental premises or policies of the regime" (Parla and Davidson, 2008, p. 67). This form of Islam combined a nationalized version of pristine Islam based on the national characteristic of pre-Ottoman, Turkish national culture, that is, old central Asian, and the Western civilization which was described from a Kemalist perspective. Kemalist ideology used this supposedly correct formulation of Islam to legitimize exercises of its political power in an autoritarian and solidarist way (Ozbudun, 2012, p. 81), while banning the others to use religion in political sphere. Ahmet Kuru defines this type of secularism as "assertive secularism" that refers to the assertive role of the state to subordinate religion to the political and ideological purposes of the state (Kuru and Stepan, 2012, p. 95-96). In this construction, the religion does not only subordinate to the state, it is also used for political purposes of the state as the form of the Kemalist Sunni Orthodox version of Islam (Parla & Davison, p. 64).

Based on Egyptian experience, Saba Mahmood also questions the commonsense understanding of secularism as the doctrinal separation of religion from politics, and the neutrality of the state toward religion. For Mahmood, in the secularization process of modern society in the post-colonial Middle East, the state reconfigured substantive features of religious life in accord with a normative model of religiosity, rather than withdrawing itself from the religious domain. In other words, the modern nation-state brings religious doctrine under the domain of civil law and state regulation by designating what is properly religious and what is not. In countries like Egypt, where the secularization separated state and religion, especially the hegemonic power of the secular state has also controlled religious domains. For instance, the religion-based family law in Egypt is not simply legacy of the past, but emerged as the result of the secular colonial formula for privatizing religion. While colonial power imposed its own secular forms in the other legal domains, the family law

remained religious, but was transformed into a codified system of rules administrated by the centralized state (Mahmood, 2013, p. 47-52). It is a secular state that has been more responsible for maintaining patriarchal family laws, which keep women under control in the name of religious laws, than the religious authorities, which are themselves controlled by the state (Badran, 2013, p. 118). As we see, secular or religious domains have been constructed in an intertwined way in contrast to the normative assumptions about the traditional narrative of secularism.

Rajan's (2008) essay on India also contributes to this discussion by pointing the impossibility of complete or antithetical separation of religion and the state, specifically in Indian experience. The state in India recognizes various religions as arbiters of the personal law, and there are debates about if the state should move to a secular codified law. Rajan points out that establishing a uniform civil code to address some problems of sexism in the personal law would also establish a secular space which is dominated by Hinduism. In a similar way, Hinduism is re-constructed in relation to the secular formation while secularism is re-constructed in relation to Hinduism.

As seen in these examples, the doctrine of secularism obscures how the religious and secular lines are intertwined and shape each other. The privatization of religion under the reign of secularism leaves religion to find its strongest articulations in this private domain. The private sphere is secured not only as the space of personal and belief, to which all in a secular democracy are entitled. It is also the space of sexuality and the space of women. On one hand, the gendering of religion in modernity assigns the private sphere to women, religion, and family, and the public sphere to men, rationality, and citizenship. On the other hand, patriarchy dominates on either side of the public/private division. Therefore, the association of religion with domesticity, feminine sentiment, marriage, and reproduction are two sides of the same coin. In other words, while the association of both women and religion with the private sphere was the move that assigns the secularism as the space of freedom and agency, this move also re-inscribed gender inequality on both sides (Caddy & Fessenden, 2013, p. 7-10).

**Construction of Gender Within Secular Narrative**

As stated, secularism is considered as a story of human emancipation from false beliefs that undermine freedom. Those, who insist on the observance of the religious law, are regarded, from the secularist perspective, as a threat to the gains made by secularization (Cady & Fessenden, 2013, p. 5). By reading secularism through the prism of gender and sexuality in a variety of contexts, various scholars oppose the idea that advances in women rights are the inevitable result of the secularizing process (Woodhead, 2008, p. 187-193). However, the binary positioning of secular and religious obscure the gender inequality by attributing a universal emancipatory role to secularism.

**"İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi"**
**"Journal of the Human and Social Sciences Researches"**
**[itobiad / 2147-1185]**

*Cilt/Volume: 8,*
*Sayı/Issue: 1,*
*2019*

[437]

Butler argues that "gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations" (Butler, 2008, p. 14). Therefore, secularization, as a specific set of historical contexts, has not automatically brought advancement in women's rights, but formed its own sexist visions, in contrast to its traditional narrative's claims. In *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, feminist historian Joan Scott also argues that secularization is not inherently liberating for women. By examining the history of secularism, Scott shows that "equal status of men and women was not a primary concern for those who moved to separate church and state" (Scott, 2013, p. 26). At the first place, secularism did not annihilate the inequality between men and women in the social and political organizations. In many societies, women remained in a dependent and inferior position and gained their rights as the extension of group, not individuals. To exclude women from active citizenship or to promote unequal status of women in the all forms of social life, secularists replaced the "nature" with God and referred to the biological differences of sex instead of religious explanations (Scott, 2013, p. 26-28).

Gil Anidjar points out how the distinction between secular and religious maintains the distinction between men and women. Women and religion are destined to the private, while men are political actors in secular public sphere. In other words, While the patriarchal secular state control public space, patriarchal religious authority gain control over the private domain, so private/feminine was controlled by public/patriarchy division (Anidjar, 2007, p. 225-254). Put it differently, men represented the public face of the family and natural arbiter in politics, while women were related with the private and religious, the religious that is again a matter of private conscience. This vision of natural difference between men and women was linked to the division of public-private that legitimizes the political and social inequality of women and men.

For example, even after women gained their legal rights, citizenship did not change the established norms about women for a long time, and so, they were hardly equal in the family, marketplace and political arena. Until 1965-75, when provisions of the civil and criminal code of the Napoleonic era were reformed, "husband controlled their wives' wages, decided whether or not they could work for pay…Married women could not have individual bank accounts and their sexual transgressions were punished more severely than men's" (Scott, p. 29). In other words, in the idealized secularism, the sexual difference was conceived as a natural distinction rooted in physical bodies, but did not disappear.

However, even when women had no equal status in Western society, colonial powers used the treatment of women as an "index of civilization" in order to justify their conquests. For instance, before French women won

the vote; colonial power stressed the superiority of French to Arab gender relations in North Africa. During the Algerian war for independence, a ceremony, organized by wives of French colonial administrations in 1958, involved the unveiling of Muslim women as a prof of liberation. In doing so, colonial secular French displayed its "civilizing mission" as the emancipation of veiled women from religious oppression, while performing its own sexist practices at home (Lazreg, 1988, p. 90).

These arguments prove that secularism is not the antithesis of religion in terms of gender equality but rather both can prevent sexual equality and women's flourishing. Differences between secular and religious societies in their treatment of women are not always as sharp as assumed, but, the assumption of sharp distinction works to obscure the reality of problems by attributing all negatives to religion, and by creating a single emancipatory discourse for all. (Scott, 2013, p. 40-42).

For instance, the notion of "individual agency" is an emancipation tool of secularism. Within this framework, individuals are conceived as autonomous, rational and self-regulating beings that bear full responsibility for their lives. Life is narrated as the outcome of deliberative choices, unconstrained and freely chosen. Regardless of the conditions in which they live, subjects are expected to exercise their free-will and agency over external structures. Feminist projects within this framework focus on the moments of resistance and subversion in women's lives which are expected to reflect the free and deliberate choices. For this conceptualization of freedom and agency, a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf can not be acting freely, but embodis a patriarchial tradition. Even if she claims to wear a headscarf with her free choice, her act of veiling is considered either a pawn of Islamism or false consciousness.

However, in the last few decades, we have seen scholarly inquiries that use these liberal conceptions to examine Muslim women's lives—a group which has been historically portrayed as submissive and shackled by the structures of an oppressive tradition. The exclusive focus of this scholarship on the conceptualizations of freedom, agency and resistance, such as the works of Afsane Najmabadi on Iranian women, has challenged the claims about Muslim women as passive beings, instead, portrays these women as active agents (Najmabadi 2000, 39-53; Abu-Lughod 2002, 783-789; Badran 2008, 101-106; Kandiyoti 1988, 274-286). This approach refuses the explanation of Muslim women's participation in male-defined spheres in terms of false consciousness or the internalization of patriarchal norms. This scholarship strives to understand the ways in which women resist, subvert and re-adopt dominant male order by redeploying them for their own interests and argues that there is not a sharp divide between resistance and compliance because any real action always mixes both. The task undertaken by these works is to explore potential resources in religious traditions for the re-coding of women's own interests as the site of women's agency.

For instance, as the anthropologist Mayanthi Fernando argues, headscarf-wearing Muslim girls in France experience a dilemma. For these women, the veil is a freely chosen religious obligation, but for the French secularism choice to submit is not acceptable as free choice (Fernando, 2010, p. 19-35). In the secular context, equality requires "the autonomous agency of individuals" which means free choosing, and opposes to the communal pressure.[v] From this perspective, wearing a headscarf is not a free choice, but a result of the communal pressure, and so, it is seen as a symbol of oppression caused by an anti-secular system[vi] (Scott, 2013, p. 37).

However, religious traditions also might open up new spaces for the fight against sexist discrimination by forming alternative models of emancipation. Scott explains this argument with the example of the Collectif des feminists pour l'égalité (CPFE), which is a women organization in France including Muslim women. CPFE declared that "we fight against the obligatory veil and against obligatory unveiling, for the right to have our heads uncovered or covered; it is the same fight: fight for freedom of choice and, more precisely, for the right of each woman to dispose of her body as she wishes" (Scott, p. 38). This message has a complexity that combines supposedly contradictory assertions such as religious devotion and the modernist notion of individual right. These women express a strong desire to have "one's religion recognized as an integral aspect of a self – even if that self-has been given over to, or realized through, submission to God" (Scott, p. 37). They do not describe the headscarf as a self-expression tool, but the embodiment of a virtuous life, which is the prescribed forms of behavior.

By taking the critiques about secular understanding of freedom and agency further, Azza Karam, calls attention to "religious feminism" which "seek to bring together what appear to be contradictory aims: to advance women's right and gender equality from within a religious framework that ostensibly prioritizes one sex over another" (Karam, 2013, p. 66). She believes that religion as well might be an emancipatory framework for many women because the struggle between secular and religious lines is the result of different interpretations of freedoms, rights, and security rather than antithetical discourses. From some secular perspectives, women in Islamist movements are regarded as being brainwashed, unintelligent etc. For this perspective, there is no any possibility that an Islamic framework would provide emancipation for women. However, while secular women see secular laws as the means to an advanced women's status, religious women can articulate a religious framework for women's social, economic, and political advancement in Muslim societies. For example, these women regard the egalitarian interpretations of Qur'an as a powerful tool for achieving the same goals that they share with their secular counterparts (Karam, p. 64).

What is assumed religious or secular is not generalizable. For example, in the case of Iran, Muslim feminists opened up a space for secular feminism. Although it would be tempting for a secular feminist to claim that Iranian women have achieved all their rights despite and against Islamic tradition, Muslim feminists in Iran opened up a space for women in general and for secular feminism in particular (Najmabadi, 2008, p. 39-41).

Islam, secularism, nationalism, modernity, and feminism are historically defined in relation to each other. The discussion of Islam, modernity, and feminism as ahistorical generalizations sweep away important historical and contemporary differentiations among various societies (Najmabadi, 2008, p. 53). Namely, thinking of Islam as the antithesis of modernity and secularism continue to reproduce Islam as exclusive of secularism, democracy, and feminism. This antithetical approach forecloses the possibilities of new reconfigurations of religious feminism. For example, in Iran, until the unveiling campaign enforced by the government, all women who had been advocating reforms of marriage and divorce laws, all who wanted modern education, or who are willing to become professional, created a solidarity and a common space. Advocating or opposing unveiling was not the straightforward marker of modernity versus anti-modernity that it later became. However, the unveiling campaign expelled some from this common space, then, along with other measures taken by Riza Shah's government, modernization was increasingly disaffiliated from Islam and made to coincide with pre-Islamic Iranianism. In that particular form of modernization, those, who had wanted to combine their quest for modernity with a reconfiguration of Islam, were marked as traditional and anti-modern. In this process, the meaning of modernity, Iranianism, and Islam were reconfigured. Then, Iranian modernity gained a non-Islamic meaning and expelled the different kind of Iranian modernity which produces a hybrid of Iranian nationalism with Shism (Najmabadi, p. 51).

On one hand, feminism became a most privileged category marking Iranian secularism. More than any other socio-political and cultural issues, women's right became markers of the secularism of modernity (Najmabadi, 2008, p. 52). On the other hand, imperialist domination of Islamicate societies has been achieved by the undermining of religion and culture mediated through women, unlike the general assumption that gives supremacy to military and economic power in Islamist movements. In Iran, the rise of the Islamist movement in the 1970s signified the emergence of a new political sociability and the dominance of a new discourse, within which women occupied a central position. This centrality of women to the construction of an Islamist political discourse turned what had been marginal, postponed, and illegitimate into the central, immediate, and authentic. Therefore, the woman question acquired immediacy and urgency even for the supporters of the new order. To put it in Najmabadi's words, "female supporters of the Islamic Republic were placed in a position to take responsibility for its misogyny: to deny it, to justify it, to challenge it, to

**"İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi"**
**"Journal of the Human and Social Sciences Researches"**
**[itobiad / 2147-1185]**

*Cilt/Volume: 8,*
*Sayı/Issue: 1,*
*2019*

[441]

oppose it, but not to ignore it" (Najmabadi, p. 41). During the configurations of women's place in the society, both Islamist and secular feminists tend to draw clear lines between Islam and un-Islam, theocracy and secularism, to clarify their positions. Both sides considered any hybridization between religious and non-religious as a threat to women's rights. Therefore, both sides contributed to the configuration of what modernity, secularism, Islam or feminism is through the particular exclusions of the other based on the women question (Najmabadi, p. 42).

Religious and secular activism are not exclusively formed in Egypt either, so that religious activism is not purely religious in scope. For instance, the activism of Zaynab Al-Ghazali in the da'wa movement in Egypt illustrates how the histories of Islamism and secular liberalism are intimately connected, a connection that is, nonetheless, saturated with tension and ambivalence" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 70). Al-Ghazali, who had joined to the Egyptian Feminist Union at her early ages, later promoted the public visibility of Muslim women in the Islamic form. According to Mahmood, Al-Ghazali's Islamic activism was shaped by the liberal discourse rather than women's divinely ordained obligations. In her speech and writings, Al-Gazali emphasizes that Muslim women are equally called to serve da'wa by building her argument on the language of "women's rights" (Mahmood, p. 70).

Applying a normative conceptualization of secularism would be a mistake not only in the Middle East, but also in many other parts of the world. For instance, in the Indian context, "women are divided by caste, religion, class, race, and nationality, and so their interests cannot be identical" (Rajan, 2008, p. 94). If their interests are not identical, and if we do not have a universal women identity, a normative emancipatory framework, namely secularism, cannot offer solutions to these women's problems. In this case, the presumptions about secularism's emancipatory language for women may only reinforce the colonial domination, national Hindu identity, and secular patriarchy, instead of women's rights. In other words, secularism itself might form its own version of sexism, even if it is against other versions. Therefore, there is a fear among feminists that, without addressing the women question, establishing a secular civil code will reflect the dominance of Hinduism in contemporary India that currently recognizes various religions as the arbiters of personal law (Rajan, p. 97). Without attending to the women question, the presumptions about secularism's emancipatory language for women may only reinforce the colonial domination and secular patriarchy. Or the opposition to the secular domination may only follow a minority discourse that is intertwined with the patriarchal and colonial thinking (Samantrai, 2008, p. 330-347).

## Concluding Remarks

As seen in these examples, the alignment of secularism with modernity, progress, emancipation, and equality of men and women are problematical. This does not mean that we should simply agree with religion against secularism, but rather, we should be aware of the assumptions about the normativity of secularism. I reinforce the idea that secularism is not the antithesis of religion but rather both might provide an emancipatory framework in some cases, while reinforcing their own and different forms of sexism in other cases. The presumably sharp division of religion and secularism works to obscure the reality of problems by attributing all negatives to religion, and by creating a single emancipatory discourse for all. However, neither secular nor religion is singular in origin or stable in its historical context. There is no universally shared experience of secularism, oppression or emancipation, but rather there are many particular forms of secularism that are intertwined with different religions, social contexts, and particularities. Therefore, we need to examine how either secularism or religion has different political implementations depending on the social context and the historical moment, in order to avoid re-inscribing the inequalities of gender.

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**"İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi"**
**"Journal of the Human and Social Sciences Researches"**
**[itobiad / 2147-1185]**

*Cilt/Volume: 8,*
*Sayı/Issue: 1,*
*2019*

[443]

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i Bryan Wilson developed the idea that modernity is incompatible with religion in a sociologically relevant manner. According to Wilson, the industrialization and progress have weakened the impact of religion within the social life. See Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective.

ii According to Talal Asad, the problem with "universal definitions of religion" is that the idea of a universal essence "diverts us from asking questions about what the definition includes and what it excludes, how, by whom, for what purpose; about what social/linguistic context it

**"İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi"**
**"Journal of the Human and Social Sciences Researches"**
**[itobiad / 2147-1185]**

*Cilt/Volume: 8,*
*Sayı/Issue: 1,*
*2019*

[445]

makes good sense to propound a given definition and when it doesn't." See Craig, Genealogies of Religion, Twenty Years On: An Interview with Talal Asad.

iii Although thinking of secularisms as plural in this way challenges the dominant narrative of universalism, particular secularisms are not just autonomous units grounded in relation to particular religious formations. Particular secularisms are also articulated in relation to the dominating discourse of universal secularism, which is tied to the Protestant secularism (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008, 13).

iv Kemalism is the state ideology of Turkey built on ideals of founding fathers.

v The anthropologist Mayanthi Fernando argues that headscarf-wearing Muslim girls in France experience a dilemma. For these women, the veil is a freely chosen religious obligation, but for the French secularism choice to submit is not acceptable as free choice. See, Fernando, Reconfiguring Freedom, 19-35.

vi Mahmood argues that the women wearing a headscarf, as in the case of the women within the da'wa movement in Egypt, embody a virtuous life based on the ethical standards of the "historically contingent discursive traditions" which are the context of their lives (Mahmood 2005, 32)