

EXPLORING WOMEN COLUMNISTS' "IN-BETWEEN" POSITIONALITY IN
PUBLIC SPHERE: A STUDY INTO NARRATIVES ON FEMINIST IDENTITY
IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

A Ph.D Dissertation

by

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of
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June 2015

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING WOMEN COLUMNISTS' "IN-BETWEEN" POSITIONALITY IN PUBLIC SPHERE: A STUDY INTO NARRATIVES ON FEMINIST IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

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This dissertation investigates women columnists' narratives on feminist self-identification with the aim to disclose the narrative lines along which feminist identity is negotiated in 2000's Turkey. In the contemporary social and political milieu in which neoliberal, neo-conservative discourses undermine feminist demands and the poststructuralist critique makes it difficult to articulate stable identity claims, the issue of feminist self-identification comes to the forefront as a critical theme underlying the discussions on the future of feminism. These global debates also resonate at the local level with a unique tune that derives its peculiarity from the social and political context in question. Keeping this in mind, I trace the repercussions of the debates outlined above in the Turkish social and political

context. It has been widely argued that the current Justice and Development Party (AKP) rule in Turkey is heavily characterized by a neoliberal, neoconservative and antifeminist political stance. Given the antifeminist ethos of the current political landscape, public negotiations of feminist self identification in contemporary Turkey display multiple layers of complexity that are difficult to disentangle. This complexity begs the question of how feminist identity is negotiated and narrated in a discursive field in which antifeminist discourses are constantly reproduced through certain discursive opportunity structures.

Against this background, this dissertation particularly focuses on the narratives of women columnists who are well-known public intellectual figures in contemporary Turkey. The study of media is especially important for a study that intends to examine the positionality of narratives on feminism in public deliberation. It is worthwhile to investigate the alternative media domains in the high circulation mass media and map out the zones of potential that can contribute to the counter hegemonic attempts challenging the contemporary conservative gender regime in Turkey. The study of women columnists' narratives on feminism and feminist identity may provide us a fertile ground to delve into the discursive openings in the mainstream media through which profeminist discourses can acquire a considerable standing in public deliberation. It can provide us critical tools to nuance our reading of public sphere by disclosing the functioning mechanisms of publics that constantly shift between hegemonic and subaltern publics, which we could name as "publics in-between". Following the research goals described above, this study intends to delve into the prominent features of the positionality of women columnists in contemporary Turkey vis-a-vis the political struggles over the gender regime and shed light on the intricacies, the promising aspects and the limitations in women

columnists' narratives on feminism and feminist identity. As a result, it aims to disclose how women columnists situate themselves vis-a-vis feminist subaltern publics in contemporary Turkey.

Keywords: Public Sphere, Women Columnists, Feminist Identification, Narratives

ÖZET

KADIN KÖŞE YAZARLARININ KAMUSAL ALANDAKİ “ARA” KONUMLARINI KEŞFETMEK: GÜNÜMÜZ TÜRKİYE’SİNDE FEMİNİST KİMLİK ÜZERİNE ANLATILARA BİR BAKIŞ

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Bu çalışma, kadın köşe yazarlarının feminist kimlik üzerine kurdukları anlatıları inceleyerek 2000’ler Türkiye’sinde kamusal alanda feminist kimlik üzerine kurulan anlatı çizgilerini ortaya koymayı amaçlar. Postmodern, postkolonyal eleştirilerin ve yükselişteki neoliberal, muhafazakâr söylemlerin etkisiyle feminist kimliğin sabitleyici unsurlarının uğradığı irtifa kaybını gözeterik, feminist aidiyetle ilgili tartışmaları ele alır. Bu çerçevede, feminist kimlikle ilgili tartışmaların, feminizmin geleceğini biçimlendirecek kritik sorular ortaya koyduğu fikrinden yola çıkar.

Feminist literatürde kimlik ve aidiyet konularıyla ilgili güncel tartışmalar yerel bağlamda kendine has bir tonla belirlemektedir. Bu çalışma, söz konusu tartışmaların Türkiye bağlamında nasıl biçimlendiğini inceler. Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi’nin (AKP) yön verdiği günümüz Türkiye’sinde etkin olan muhafazakâr, antifeminist toplumsal cinsiyet söyleminin teşkil ettiği söylemsel sınırları tahlil eder ve bu çerçevede, kamusal alanda feminist kimlik üzerine kurulan anlatılarda öne

çıkan yapıtaşlarına, anlatı çizgilerine ve karmaşık yapılara ışık tutmaya çalışır. Sosyal ve siyasi iklimin antifeminist bileşenleri karşısında, feminist kimliğin kamusal alanda çok katmanlı, çözümlemesi zor anlatılarla tezahür ettiği görüşünü savunur.

Çalışmanın ana noktası yüksek tirajlı gazetelerde yazan ve kamusal tartışmalara yön veren kadın köşe yazarlarının feminist kimlik üzerine kurdukları anlatılardır. Medyayla ilgili çalışmalar, feminizm üzerine anlatıların kamusal alandaki konumunu değerlendirebilmek açısından kritik önem taşır. Bu çalışma da, muhafazakâr toplumsal cinsiyet söylemlerini karşı-hegemonik bir yaklaşımla eleştirebilen farklı medya alanlarını, bu alanların olanaklarını ve sınırlarını tayin eder. Bu analizin ışığında, medyadaki profeminist söylem alanlarının kuruluşuna ışık tutar ve kadın köşe yazarlarının kamusal alandaki konumlarını, kendilerini feminist karşı-kamuya göre nasıl/nerede konumlandıklarını irdeler. Kadın köşe yazarlarının kamusal alandaki girift konumlarını irdelemek, bize, hegemonik ve karşı kamular arasında gidip gelen, “ara-kamu” diye adlandırabileceğimiz bir söylem alanına tekabül eden özne konumlarının kuruluş ve çalışma mekanizmalarını anlamamızı sağlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kamusal Alan, Kadın Köşe Yazarları, Feminist Kimlik, Anlatı

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An overarching neoliberal logic characterizing social, political and economic structures appears as the chief modality of governance in the contemporary era. (Harvey 2005, Brown 2006) Governing each and every domain of life, neoliberalism has become hegemonic in the current world order and led to significant repercussions with regard to formation of subjectivities. In the neoliberal era, the classical liberal notion of absolute freedom of capitalist markets is accompanied by the infiltration of the market rationality into social discourse. (Rose 1992) In this regard, neoliberalism provides a normative framework based on the premise that individuals are self-interested actors with agency and absolute control over their lives. This individualized notion of the self with a strong stress on agency and self-interest results in the retreat of the “structural”. (Phipps, 2014: 134-135) Individual acts are abstracted from social structures that frame and constrain the acts in question. As the importance of the “structural” gradually diminishes, the neoliberal concepts such as agency, choice and self-interest predominate over the approach to social and political problems. This individualistic notion of the self and the retreat of the “structural”, in return, precludes the possibility of initiating a discussion on how to improve the social and political context in which individual choices are made.

The repercussions of the retreat of the “structural” is maybe most visible in the public presentation of identities and collective identity categories. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that since contemporary social and political order is set upon individualized notions of self and society, collective categories such as gender, class and ethnicity are destabilized. This destabilization can be clearly observed in the changing character of the category of “woman”, gendered subjectivity and feminist identity.

Feminist thought and activism have long been occupied with a self-reflexive endeavour to revise the essentialist conceptions of “woman”, “feminist”, “feminism”. The poststructural and postcolonial lines of thinking, which dismantled monolithic, unified categories and identities, have greatly contributed to this self-reflexive attempt. On the other hand, while the revisionist strands in feminist thought and activism updated feminist theoretical tools in line with the contemporary challenges, the neoliberal, neoconservative social and political order has given way to other complications that feminist activists and theorists have to deal with. Recent studies conducted in the Western context suggest that given the current stress on individualized notions of self, young women today increasingly tend to disassociate themselves from feminist goals and ideas, deeming feminism as passé. (Budgeon 2001, Rich 2005, Scharff 2013) It has been noted that although young women negotiate their lives around gendered dynamics, they construct an identity narrative in which they regard feminism as a past phenomenon irrelevant to the contemporary social world. (Rich 2005, Budgeon 2001) Their individualist position appears as a key factor propelling them to disclaim feminist self-identification.

It has been suggested that the neoliberal discourses of individualism and self-liberation, which in return result in repudiation of the feminist struggle for gender

equality, are deeply embedded in political discourses and popular culture in the Western context today. (McRobbie 2004, 2007) The neoliberal repudiation of feminism goes hand in hand with a conservative backlash discourse that labels feminism as extreme, anti-family and anti-man. (Faludi 1991) As a consequence of the conservative discursive regimes, the backlash discourse holds feminists and the feminist struggle responsible for the dismantling of family as an institution, blames feminism for the disruption of the moral order and suggests an anti-feminist “antidote” to cure the existing social malfunctions.

Considering the demise of feminist self-identification in contemporary neoliberal times marked by increased individualism and backlash discourses, one can safely suggest that the issue of public self-presentation and endorsement of identity claims are pressing issues for feminist thought and activism today. This necessitates a thorough analysis of the concept of identity with a special focus on its limits as well as its promising features. Scholars agree that identity is a troublesome concept to be revised and modified in accordance with the demands of the current social and political order. In this line of thought, static, frozen understandings of identity are abandoned, while dynamic, flexible approaches to identity, identification and subject formation are increasingly incorporated into scholarly analyses. As a result, a great portion of the recent feminist theory has come into being against the background of contemporary contestations over the concept of identity.

The relentless attempts to revise and modify “identity” in line with the current social and political demands do not undermine the significance of identity for feminist scholarly analyses. The indispensable character of identity also prevails for feminist activism. Identity as an analytical concept is too crucial for feminist activism to be abandoned since the absolute abandoning of identity and the category

of women would result in a deadlock for feminist politics. Scholars point out that the poststructural dismissal of the category “woman” eliminates the possibility of making collective demands in the name of women, rendering feminist activism and politics futile. (Alcoff 2006, Bordo 1995) Thus, it has been extensively argued that identity categories can be revised and modified through antiessentialist lenses so as to make them in tune with flexible, dynamic social and political demands. (Lloyd 2005, Alcoff 2006) This new reading of identity categories mitigating between the poststructural critique and the political need for identity claims, in return, generates a new modality of feminist politics informed by hybridity, flexibility and change.

In the contemporary social and political milieu in which neoliberal, neo-conservative discourses undermine feminist demands and the poststructuralist critique makes it difficult to articulate stable identity claims, the issue of feminist self-identification comes to the forefront as a critical theme underlying the discussions on the future of feminism. Given the excessive stress on choice, agency and self-control on the one hand and the disarticulation of feminist identification on the other, contemporary feminist studies, regardless of their contextual focus, cannot afford to ignore the debates on consequences of neoliberalism for feminism, the issue of identification and the future of feminism. These global debates also resonate at the local level with a unique tune that derives its peculiarity from the social and political context in question.

In this frame, it is important to explore how the impasse in feminist theory regarding the articulation of identity positions is resolved. Going beyond the poststructuralist dismissal of identity and the essentialist fixation of subject positions, some feminist scholars search for novel ways in which they can argue for articulation of stable identity demands without falling into the trap of producing essentialist

narratives. By calling this particular cohort of feminist theories as “mid-way” theories, this dissertation appropriates a revolutionary, “mid-way” approach in order to deconstruct the coexistence of agency, intentionality and dynamic, unstable conceptions of identity. In this sense, women columnists’ narratives on feminist identity provide a useful ground to explore the potentialities and feasibility of “mid-way” feminist theories on identity.

This dissertation also engages in an attempt to explore the usefulness of the concept of narrative for disentangling the multiple layers and the intricate character of identity narratives. It investigates the constitutive elements of the narrative logic with the aim to disclose the close relationship between the idea of narrative and the articulation of identity positions. Since narratives serve as analytical tools to interpret the social, political and cultural contexts, narrative analysis of identity positions has the potential to uncover the complexities and dynamic aspects of subjects’ positionalities. Therefore, this study departs from the fact that the study of narrative can reveal both the peculiarities of the contextual setting shaping the constitution of identity narratives and the gist of subjective experiences that endows subjects with a particular interpretive horizon. In this regard, it aims to shed light on the applicability and relevance of the concept of narrative for studies on intricate identity positions.

Furthermore, another key aspect in the dissertation is to complicate the conceptualization of public sphere so as to render it more fruitful in order to capture the heterogeneity of positionalities in the public sphere. Contrary to the Habermasian understanding that regards public sphere as an arena where all particularities are left out and inclusivity of all is ensured, the feminist critique argues that the ideal of inclusivity is a myth that cannot account for the power dimension involved in public deliberation. Feminist scholars contend that communicative procedures of reaching

an agreement in the Habermasian framework do not automatically lead to accessibility into public debates. In this vein, the idea of a single, overarching public sphere has been deeply questioned and the existence of competing publics has been stressed in feminist scholarship. The feminist critique points out that there is not one monolithic, unifying public but multiple publics with different agendas. Fraser (1990) calls these parallel discursive arenas “subaltern counter publics” where members of subordinated social groups can circulate counter-discourses. Accordingly, counterpublics reveal the differential power relations among diverse publics of a multiple public sphere and articulate alternatives to wider publics that exclude the interests of marginalized groups.

The current feminist scholarship on the Habermasian public sphere mainly deals with the antagonistic relationship between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic publics and delves into the perpetual contestation over stabilization of meaning in public deliberation. Nevertheless, under certain circumstances this two-pillar conception of public sphere may not suffice to elucidate the transitivity characterizing hybrid, complex discourses that go back and forth between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discursive fields. The complexity of such discourses arises from the fact that they are difficult to pin down in a stable location that can be clearly described as hegemonic or counter-hegemonic. In this sense, they can be defined as *borderland discourses* constantly in shift in accordance with the changing contextual setting, subjective experiences and/or strategic concerns. It is important to note that neither hegemonic nor counter hegemonic publics display monolithic, homogeneous traits. They may contain hybrid positionalities that exceed the limits of the discursive field characterizing the public in question. However, some positionalities are even more unstable and elusive, which propels us to situate them on the borderland. In this

study, I aim to complicate the conceptualization of public sphere by pointing out how borderland positionalities destabilize two-pillar accounts that rest on the contestation between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic publics.

With these thoughts in mind, I decided to trace the repercussions of the debates outlined above in the Turkish social and political context. Women's studies literature in the post-1980 period in Turkey has been quite prolific in its attempts to deconstruct the discourses configuring the gender regime in the late Ottoman period and in modern Turkey. Many significant studies have been conducted with the aim to provide a critical perspective to historical periods, political discourses and gender relations in modern Turkey. However, the issue of feminist self-identification in the Turkish context has not been investigated thoroughly so far. Keeping this in mind, I believe that the study of feminist identity and identification is more crucial today than ever because it can shed light on the contemporary gender discourses in the current social and political milieu in Turkey marked by pro-Islamism, conservatism and anti-feminism.

It has been widely noted that the current Justice and Development Party (JDP) [AKP] rule is heavily characterized by a neoliberal, neoconservative and anti-feminist political stance. Studies on AKP's gender politics reveal that the party's policies and political discourses implicitly reproduce traditional gender roles and confine women to familial roles. (Çitak and Tür 2008, Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2011) Moreover, the patriarchal tones in AKP discourses are further reinforced through attempts to disassociate feminism and gender equality and marginalize feminism as an extreme ideology. Relying on stereotypical understandings of feminism, conservative party discourses regard feminism as inherently prone to result in clash between sexes and thus replace it with the Islamic belief of complementarity between

sexes. Consequently, feminism becomes the “other” of the AKP’s gender politics. Keeping the current antifeminist gender regime in mind, it is significant to study the peculiarities of feminist self-identification in Turkey in this particular era marked by a striking proliferation of antifeminist political discourses. Given the antifeminist ethos of the era, public negotiations of feminist self identification in contemporary Turkey display multiple layers of complexity that are difficult to disentangle. This complexity begs the question of how feminist identity is negotiated and narrated in a discursive field in which antifeminist discourses are constantly reproduced through certain discursive opportunity structures. At a political moment in which politics for women and feminist identification do not overlap, the study of feminist identity and identification in the public sphere can be useful to point out the limitations, intricacies, hybridities as well as the promising aspects underlying the unique standing of feminism in public discourses today.

To avoid ahistorical, static conceptualizations of “feminism” and “feminist”, this study puts at its very center the dynamic, historical and contextual character of the meanings attached to the concepts of “feminism” and “feminist”. In this sense, it derives its momentum from the fact that the word feminism has undergone striking transformation in meaning over the years. Introducing differences among women into scholarly analyses and challenging the association of feminism with Western, white, secular, middle class women, scholars in recent decades have attempted to incorporate the identities, demands and needs of women from different backgrounds and situations into feminist scholarship. In this research, I take the position that feminist scholarship has to be informed by this inclusivity and depart from the fact that the concept of feminism and feminist evolve in time, depending on geographies, contexts, subjects’ positionalities and the character of the discursive regime.

My interest in studying feminist self-identification in contemporary Turkey does not only stem from the particularities of the Turkish context, the contemporary debates on identity in feminist scholarship and the embeddedness of the meanings of feminism in the local context but it has also a personal root. I have been highly intrigued by the remarkable variety of rhetorical strategies that people use when they try to explain their relationship to feminism. It is striking to observe that identity claims are always meticulously formed because they are supposed to be the carrier of our uniqueness. They are compact and multi-layered; they may simultaneously entail affirmation and denial of certain identity claims. In this sense, conventional statements such as “I am not a feminist but...” or “I am a feminist but...” do not simply connote a slippery, evasive identity position but lean against sophisticated negotiations of feminisms and feminist identities. As such, identity claims are always incomplete, never enough to reveal one’s feelings about who one really is, though one is frequently expected to make herself known to others through stable identity claims. Thus, I believe that a study of feminist self-identification has the potential of bringing into the open this multi-layered, intricate nature of narratives on identity and identification.

Dissertation Scope and Research Objectives

This study investigates public narratives on feminist identity in the social and political context in contemporary Turkey and aims to understand the complexities of the negotiation of the feminist label, the social and political factors affecting it and the reasonings put forward to justify these negotiations. It particularly focuses on the

narratives of women columnists who are well-known public intellectual figures in contemporary Turkey and greatly contribute to the trajectory of public debates.

The study of media is especially important for a study that intends to examine the positionality of narratives on feminism in public deliberation. Analyzing how narratives on feminism are situated in the media vis-a-vis conservative gender discourses may give us clues about the functioning mechanisms and governing rules of the current gender regime. In recent decades, feminist research on women and media have extensively studied the representation of women in media and communication, disclosing the overarching character of sexist approach to women in the media sphere. However, the study of women media professionals that focus on the prospects of profeminist activism in the media sphere, still constitutes a marginal research area in the wider body of women and media literature. (Byerly and Ross 2006, Minic 2014) In this sense, studying women columnists in the media with the aim to identify their positionality vis-a-vis the feminist counter public is important as it may help us comprehend the unique character of the positionality of women columnists as prominent public intellectuals. Women intellectuals have always been marginal actors in the intellectual field. (Moi 1994) This marginality, in return, may result in certain idiosyncracies regarding the position that women columnists take up vis-a-vis hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses. Moreover, the contextual specificities further contribute to the unique character of women columnists' positionality.

Scholars note that the media under the AKP rule has emerged as one of the critical domains where hegemonic struggles over meaning are fought vehemently. (Kaya and Çakmur 2010, Akser and Baybars-Hawks 2012) Particularly the last years under the AKP administration has been characterized by political pressure,

surveillance, legal restraints on news-reporting and accreditation discrimination. In this sense, deeply divided into two camps, namely the secularist and pro-Islamist, media in today's Turkey is a principal locus of political contestations. Given the critical standing of media in the contemporary political landscape in Turkey, one can suggest that the media sphere has massive influence over the trajectory of public debates today. Ferree et al. (2002: 16) argue that in the contemporary world social actors evaluate the effectiveness of their own discourses by looking at the coverage in the mass media. One can suggest that coverage in the mass media is key for public discourses to display efficacy in public deliberation. Mass media as the major site of political contest in contemporary Turkey witnesses hegemonic power struggles over meaning and allows for discussion of norms of democratic deliberation on a variety of policy domains including gender. While certain media domains constantly reproduce hegemonic discourses on gender, there are also alternative media domains where counter hegemonic discourses can be articulated. In this sense, one should keep in mind that mass media does not represent a monolithic block but displays heterogeneity.

To point out the heterogeneity in the mass media, Dahlgren (1995: 155-159) elaborates on the differential status attributed to hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses in the "common domain" and "advocacy domain" in the media. According to this differentiation, the common domain in the mass media is marked by an aspiration to appeal to a general public, which eventually contributes to the reproduction of hegemonic discourses. Contrary to this, the advocacy domain displays a multi-perspective approach that makes room for oppositional publics to articulate their group identities and political demands and enter into public deliberation. In this formulation, it is the advocacy domain in the media that

contributes to counter hegemonic projects and contests the boundaries of hegemonic publics.

Drawing on this differentiation, it is worthwhile to investigate the alternative media domains in the high circulation mass media and map out the zones of potential that can contribute to the counter hegemonic attempts challenging the contemporary conservative gender regime in Turkey. In this regard, the study of women columnists' narratives on feminism and feminist identity may provide us a fertile ground to delve into the discursive openings in the mainstream media through which profeminist discourses can acquire a considerable standing in public deliberation.

Women columnists are crucial public figures in the public sphere in contemporary Turkey. With the proliferation of the mass media in the post-1980 period, the number of intellectual women, who write columns about general public matters, has greatly increased. Considering that the media in Turkey, as everywhere else, is a male-dominated sphere, the presence of women columnists in the media sphere, especially of those who write through gendered lenses, can be regarded as a significant intervention into the male codes of public deliberation.

It is possible to say that the writings of columnists under consideration in this study are by and large informed by gendered lenses. In this sense, their position in the media sphere is of critical importance for the ongoing discursive struggles on gender norms in contemporary Turkey. Having said this, one should note here that the high circulation of patriarchal discourses in contemporary public debates in Turkey does not mean that conservative, anti-feminist gender discourses exhaust all possibilities of meaning making. On the contrary, since meaning is never fixed in the discursive realm (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), attempts to reinforce conservative

gender norms are counterweighed by profeminist discourses striving to be more visible and influential. Fraser (1990) and Felski (1989) underscore that at times when the need to appeal to broader masses and intervene into the gender agenda is politically urgent, feminist subaltern discourses may assume a highly publicist character. At such moments, feminist subaltern politics may rely on strategic coalitions with profeminist discourses available in the public sphere. It is also true that profeminist public discourses acknowledging the need for mobilization may prefer to align with the feminist subaltern public vis-a-vis the rising conservative gender regime. As a result, the boundaries of the feminist subaltern public may expand towards the hegemonic public so as to counterweigh the political attempts to fix meaning over gender norms.

Taking into account the complexities underlying the interactions between the subaltern and hegemonic publics, this study aims to understand the positionality of women columnists in contemporary Turkey vis-a-vis the political struggles over the gender regime. As noted above, with each conservative, anti-feminist attempt to reinforce the meaning in a discursive field, other possibilities for meaning strive to be more influential. Thus, it is crucial to analyze the intricacies, the promising aspects and the limitations in women columnists' narratives on feminism and feminist identity in order to shed light on how they situate themselves vis-a-vis the feminist subaltern public. In this frame, following the feminist critique of the Habermasian public sphere and Fraser's idea of "subaltern counter publics", this study examines whether women intellectuals under consideration here, generate an alternative domain in the media sphere that can challenge the proliferation of antifeminist tones in the current gender regime.

Given that the rise of the AKP has changed the structural and discursive characteristics of Turkish society and politics, this study also pays particular attention to the prominent traits of gender politics under the AKP rule. It examines the narrative lines in the current proliferation of discourse on women's identities, bodies and sexualities and discloses the constitutive elements of the gender regime in contemporary Turkey. Investigating in detail the ways in which women columnists in question attempt to challenge the proliferation of anti-feminist discourses in contemporary public debates, it aims to unravel the repercussions of the current patriarchal discourses upon the public narratives on feminism and feminist identity.

Research Questions

The following research questions will constitute a guideline for this study as I examine women columnists' positioning in the public sphere and their conception of the formation of public discourses and negotiation of marginalized identities.

Can women columnists' columns be considered as part of the "advocacy domain" in the mass media that collaborates with counter public discourses? If so, what kind of counter public issues stand out in their writings? How do they frame these issues? Can counterpublic discourses be effectively represented in their writings? Such questions will help us figure out where women columnists position themselves in the heterogenous mass media sphere. Along with these questions, it is also important to investigate how women columnists think of the formation of public discourses and the negotiation of marginalized identities in the public sphere. Do they acknowledge the heterogeneity and multiplicity in the public sphere? At what points do they question the hegemonic boundary drawing in dominant publics? Do

they acknowledge the flexible and always-in-process character of identities in counter public settings? What are the limits of their approach to counter hegemonic discourses and identities?

It is also important to explore the characteristics of the identity narratives that women columnists construct while reflecting on their relationship with feminism. How do women columnists negotiate the label “feminist” in contemporary Turkey? How do they see the relationship between feminist identity and the feminist label? What kind of an identity position does the label “feminist” generate in their imagination? In what ways do their narratives reflect the multi-layered character of identity positions? How do they make use of the idea of narrative to deal with the challenges of reflecting on the feminist identity position?

Finally, as this study pays particular attention to the relationship between the conservative gender regime in contemporary Turkey and women columnists’ self-positioning vis-a-vis the rising patriarchal discourses, it is crucial to ask questions about the impacts of the contextual setting on identification with a feminist position. The following questions can provide a useful guideline in this regard: How do women columnists engage with contemporary public debates on pressing gender issues? What are the prospects and limits of their positioning vis-a-vis the current public discourses on gender? How is their unique positionality in the contemporary gender regime gets translated into their narratives on feminist identification?

Hoping to find answers to the questions outlined above, this study relies on a three pillar analytical framework. First, it investigates the applicability of mid-way feminist theories on identity to women columnists’ unique positionality and their self-positioning vis-a-vis the feminist subaltern public. Second, it examines women columnists’ narratives in terms of their approach to the dynamic relationship between

identity and narrative, thereby bringing into the open the limits and promising sides of the narratives in question. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the concept of public sphere by testing its limits with regard to borderland discourses that constantly mitigate between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic publics. Third, it explores the implications of the contemporary gender regime in Turkey for feminist identity positions. It delves into whether the rise of patriarchal discourses in the public sphere has led profeminist subject positions to align with the feminist subaltern public in more organic ways.

Methodological Framework and Time Scope

This study draws on twelve in-depth interviews conducted between September 2012 and June 2013 with well-known women columnists in contemporary Turkey. Considering that qualitative interviewing is a useful method to listen to people's subjective interpreting of the social and political world, it makes use of interviews to reveal how women columnists interpret feminism, feminist identity and the gender regime in Turkey. In addition to in-depth, semi-structured interviews, this study also analyzes women columnists' newspaper articles regarding controversial public debates on gender issues in the last years.

Women columnists under consideration in this study actively engage in public deliberation on the political agenda and write about contemporary gender issues. Apart from the up-to-date coverage of political debates and the gender sensitive approach in their columns, it is also important to note that they represent a wide spectrum of ideological positions in contemporary Turkey. To ensure the diversity of ideological positions represented in this study, women columnists from

various mainstream newspapers, i.e. *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Vatan*, *Posta*, *Habertürk*, *Zaman*, *Star*, *Taraf*, have been selected and incorporated into the study.

Interview questions asked during interviews inquire about women columnists' professional lives in the media sector and investigate to what extent they attribute priority to their gender identity in their professional lives. These questions aim to reveal how women columnists conceptualize feminism and feminist identity, what their main criticisms against feminism are and whether or not they call themselves feminist.

While inquiring about women columnists' narratives on their relationship with feminism, I intentionally avoid from providing a list of predictors for measuring feminist identity and defining what feminism is. The fixation of feminisms' meanings and the ideological components of feminist identities through operationalizing a list of predictors would be contrary to the aims of this study. Rather than evaluating women columnists' negotiation of feminist identity according to a fixed set of predictors, the aim here is to grasp how women columnists themselves operationalize feminist identity. In this regard, the complexity of the feminist identity claims, different shades of feminist positions (weak, strong, etc.) and different reasonings (strategic, ideological, practical, etc.) involved in the negotiation of feminist identity are taken into account here while exploring narratives on feminist identity.

Narrative analysis will be used in this study to disentangle the intricacies of women columnists' narratives on feminism and feminist identity. Following the increased interest in in subjectivity and in the meanings attached by individuals to their actions, scholars from a wide spectrum of disciplines have incorporated

narrative analysis into the social science research. (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997, Sommers 1994, Plummer 1995) Narrative as a useful concept can be thought of as a means of exploring the ways in which social actors interpret the world and their place within it. Sommers (1992: 603) identifies four features of narrativity particularly relevant for social sciences: (1) relationality of parts; (2) causal emplotment; (3) selective appropriation; and (4) temporality, sequence, and place. Keeping these features in mind, I will outline the constitutive themes in women columnists' responses by making a thematic analysis. I will also make a structural analysis and elaborate on the relationality of parts, casual emplotment, selective appropriation and temporality in columnists' narratives. Furthermore, I will analyze the contextual factors that affect the formation of narratives in question. As a result, relying on both thematic, structural and contextual narrative analysis, I will try to locate women's narratives on a web of power configurations vis-a-vis hegemonic public narratives in the public sphere in contemporary Turkey.

Dissertation Outline

The analytical framework described above is portrayed in nine chapters in this study. Chapter II maps out the contours of the literature on identity studies and feminist identity studies. It starts with a brief survey on the rise of identity politics in the last decades. Identifying the openings as well as the limitations of identity politics, it outlines the criticisms posed against identity politics and identifies the main narrative lines in the anti-identity trend in contemporary scholarship. In addition to the criticisms, it also points out the scholarly attempts to redefine identity in line with the contemporary social and political demands. Against this background, this chapter

tries to portray how the feminist theory positions itself vis-a-vis the recent challenge to identity.

Chapter III provides a theoretical framework that will serve as a useful guideline for the purposes of this study. With its focus on feminist identity theories, it introduces new theoretical tools in feminist scholarship that attempt to mitigate between poststructural dismissal of identity and essentialist conceptions of identity politics. In the subsection on “midway feminist identity theories”, new terminology and conceptual openings in feminist scholarship such as identity metaphors (nomad, mestiza, cyborg), identification (Hall 1996, Brubaker and Cooper 2000, Weir 2008), identity as interpretive horizon (Alcoff 2006) and as ungrounded ground (Hekman 2004), narrative identity (Benhabib 1999), interrelational identity (Weir 1996, 2008), intersectionality (McCall 2005, Ferree 2009, Davis 2011) and strategic essentialism (Spivak 1990) are introduced. As a result, this subsection maps out the contours of the contemporary conceptual terrain in which feminist identity studies are reconfigured. It explores the potentials as well as the limits of the concepts and theories that will constitute a major pillar in the theoretical framework of this study.

The next subsection in this chapter explicates the relevance of the feminist critique of the Habermasian understanding of the public sphere for the purposes of this study. It explains the feminist revision to the idealistic character of the Habermasian public sphere and puts forward the promising aspects of the feminist conception of “subaltern public” for a thorough analysis of women columnists’ positionality in the public sphere in contemporary Turkey.

Chapter IV puts forward the methodological frame of the study. It gives detailed information on the qualitative method of the study, research participants and

the scope of the questions asked during in-depth interviews. It also presents the challenges of the operationalization of feminist identity in contemporary studies. Next, the chapter introduces narrative analysis as a useful methodological tool to analyze women columnists' narratives on feminist identity and self-identification. Here, it focuses on the key features of narrativity, thereby providing a roadmap for exploring the narrative structure, the content and the contextual elements in women columnists' responses.

Chapter V situates this study against the background of the contemporary gender regime in Turkey. It particularly focuses on the social and political conservatization under the AKP rule and its repercussions for gender relations in Turkey. In this way, this chapter prepares the ground for a discussion as to how women columnists position themselves vis-a-vis patriarchal gender discourses in contemporary Turkey.

To decode the contextual aspects of women's positionality in the public sphere, Chapter VI investigates the limits of what women columnists can say about contemporary gender debates. To this end, it engages into a detailed analysis of women columnists' newspaper articles on pressing gender issues in Turkey. It attempts to put forward at what junctures in public debates women columnists raise their voice in their columns to oppose the patriarchal discourses in Turkey.

Chapter VII discusses secular women columnists' narratives on feminism and feminist identification. By closely reading their narratives, here I aim to disclose the narrative logic that secular women columnists utilize to make sense of feminist identity. A main aim in this chapter is to expose the peculiarities of the secular character of their positionality in the public sphere. Analyzing the prominent themes

in the narratives in question, this chapter lays the groundwork for a comparison between secular and pious women columnists' positionalities.

Chapter VIII unearths the conceptions of Islamic feminism and feminist self-identification in pious women columnists' narratives. Providing a contextual analysis of the symbolic meanings underlying veiling in modern Turkey, this chapter follows the trajectory of the rise of pious women writers in the public sphere and attempts to identify the intricacies and peculiarities of their positionality. Along these lines, it scrutinizes how pious women columnists interviewed in this study interpret feminism and feminist self-identification.

Finally, chapter IX provides a concluding analysis, explicating the complexities of women columnists' narratives in the light of the theoretical framework used in this study. In this frame, this study hopes to shed light on the multiplicities, contradictions, strategic elements, constantly shifting belongings and contextual positionings that characterize the configuration of identity narratives. It also aims to illuminate the multi-layered, intricate character of profeminist women intellectuals' positionality in the public sphere in contemporary Turkey. Situating this analysis against the background of the social and political landscape in Turkey, this study investigates the repercussions of the current gender regime in Turkey on narratives on feminism and feminist identity. This three-pillar analytical structure enables the study to provide an insight into the positionality of feminist subaltern discourses in the public sphere in Turkey at a time when neoliberalism, neoconservatism, pro-Islamism and antifeminism converge, leading to dramatic shifts in the gender regime.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW ON IDENTITY POLITICS

2.1. A Brief Survey on The Rise of Identity Politics and Its Contemporary Dilemmas

The concept of identity and difference has become a key concept in the political, social and cultural theory in the last decades. The impact of new social movements on society such as second-wave feminism, black liberation movements, gay liberation, peace and environmental movements and also the postmodern and poststructuralist critiques of traditional approaches to identity has been quite influential in this trend. (Weedon 1999) Challenging the oppressive conditions in society, identity politics signifies a particular way of making politics based on the assertion of distinctiveness and demand for recognition. The universal idea of citizenship, which is above differences such as gender, religion, race, etc., has been shattered through this emphasis on identity and difference.

Identity politics emerged in the 1960s and 70s and politicized areas of life that have not been defined as political until then such as sexuality, environment and lifestyle. To understand the role of identity in these social movements, New Social

Movement Theory, the first theory to deal with the challenges of collective action in identity based social movements, distinguishes class-based movements from contemporary movements that prioritize concepts such as gender, peace, environment and youth. According to this theory, these new movements are organized on postmaterial values, rather than on an exclusive concern on economic survival and signify a shift to a post-industrial society. (Touraine 1981) In this frame, along with the rise of postmaterial values in the second half of the 20th century, identity politics has appeared as a mode of articulating unified claims to challenge oppression mechanisms that marginalize and discriminate against certain groups.

The notion of “difference” is at the very core of identity politics. Former claims for recognition that demand equality on the basis of universally shared human attributes are turned into claims for recognition of differences and a language of authenticity. Kruks (2000: 85) explains this as follows: “The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of ‘universal humankind’ on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect ‘in spite of’ one’s differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself *as* different.” To underscore the idea of difference, identity politics uses the language of authenticity, which points out the unique and politically laden character of subjects’ experience of oppression.

On the one hand, the concepts of identity and difference have been in demand in scholarly debates in the last decades; on the other hand, a wide range of critiques of identity politics has come to the foreground. One can identify different axes of critique in the challenge posed against identity politics. Firstly, scholars criticize identity politics by claiming that it lacks any prospect for building coalitions and social change and thus leads to a chaotic, splitted society. They maintain that identity groups are organized around narrow categories and make particularistic claims,

which preclude a universal vision for social change and compartmentalize society into narrow identity visions. (Gitlin 1994) In this line of thought, since identities are governed by particularistic self-understandings and are dividing, they are seen as a political threat for any political agenda that seeks majority support. (Alcoff 2006: 5) Elshtain (1995) suggests that identities involve a set of interests, values, beliefs, which limits the sort of reasoning concerning the public ends. For her, to rationally think about public ends, we must be able to distance ourselves from identities before entering the arena of public debate. In a similar vein, Kaufman (1990) argues that since it lacks a vision to bring about institutional and structural change, identity politics is limited to personal expression and self-transformation and thus is apolitical.

On the other hand, it is claimed that identity politics can be totalizing in that it does not take into account the internal differences within an identity-based community. Referring to the intragroup dynamics, Fraser (2000) underlines that because of the discouragement of the internal differences, identity politics may curtail the ability to creatively interpret one's own identity and lead to conformism, intolerance and patriarchy. Accordingly, since identity politics urges mobilization around a single axis, it may put pressure on participants to identify that particular axis as their defining feature, even when they do not want to define themselves so reductively.

Apart from the criticisms above, scholars also point out the dilemmas in the emphasis put on victimhood. Regarding this, Brown (1995) argues that identity politics is very much prone to stabilization of identity through producing victimhood discourses. She alleges that the advocacy of rights based on marginalized identities will only result in the reification of discrimination. Therefore, from Brown's

perspective, since identity politics involves fixing of identity in that of the injured victim, it cannot be liberatory.

The other line of criticism in the anti-identity trend in current scholarship is based on the argument that while the stress on differences is helpful in pointing out the exclusionary properties of the universal notion of the subject, it creates another essentializing narrative. The emphasis put on the experience of the subject, especially his or her experience of oppression makes identity politics very prone to essentialism. According to this critique, identity politics rests on unifying claims about the experiences of subjects and in this way defines a fixed, essential essence for the constitution of identities. This criticism of identity politics mostly draws on the postmodern and poststructuralist accounts. In the postmodern critiques of the modern conceptions of subject, subjectivity is often theorized as an effect of the social and political context and the unified notion of the self is replaced with a fragmented, multiple, fluid self. (Foucault 1980, Butler 1990) In these approaches to identity, the stress is on the incompleteness, fragmentation and contradictions of identity. For example, in the Foucauldian framework, there is no identity prior to politics. Rather than identity constituting the terms of politics, it is politics that defines identity. (Lloyd 2005) To explain this further, it is necessary to briefly touch upon Foucault's notions of knowledge, power and subject.

By redefining the concept of discourse as a system of representation, Foucault gives discourse a different meaning. Rather than treating discourse simply as a linguistic concept, he studies the rules and practices that produce meaningful statements. (Hall, 2001: 73) For Foucault, discourse connotes a particular way of representing knowledge. In this understanding, discourse reveals the production of knowledge through language. Discursive structures shape the limits of who can

speak and what can be said. Statements in discourse define the limits of what can be known about the object of discourse. In other words, meaning is constructed within discourse.

For Foucault, it is not the subject that produces knowledge but the rules of discourse govern what is sayable and thinkable by prescribing certain ways of talking. (Ibid, 79) Drawing on this, Foucault harshly criticizes the idea of the subject endowed with autonomous agency, consciousness and a core self. (Ibid) Subjects in the Foucauldian framework are not autonomous producers of knowledge and meaning but operate within the limits of the discursive formations; they are produced within discourse. By submitting to the rules of discursive formations, subjects construct certain subject positions and become bearers of certain knowledge. Hall (2001: 80) explains this as follows: “Individuals have different, ethnic, racial, gendered characteristics but they will not be able to take meaning until they have identified with those positions which the discourse constructs.”

This particular conception of discourse and subject relies on the idea that identity is not a metaphysical but a deeply political notion formed within a certain power configuration. Since subjects are products of discursive formations, the identities that the subjects bear cannot be grounded on a fixed substance or a stable essence, but should be regarded as dynamic and historical. They are constituted through norms, rules and historically produced modes of behaviour. In this sense, there is no prediscursive subject and all subject positions as well as the metaphysical claims for essential core are effects of power.

Foucauldian understanding of subjectivation, when appropriated by an anti-identity approach, relies on the premise that identity as a stable construct imposed

from outside cannot capture the fluid, context-dependent and relational character of selfhood. On the other hand, this understanding may also make room for social constructionist accounts of selfhood that affirm identification and articulation of belonging as reflections of self-agency. In this sense, Tarver (2011: 806) notes that self is not given shape passively by power relations but it rather takes shape through active involvement in those relations. Challenging the assumption that what comes from the social world is necessarily constraining and pernicious, this latter account aims to redefine the subject's relation to the other's power to name as a dialectical process in which the self is not a passive construction but actively engages in interaction with the social. In this frame, Tarver (2011) reminds us that Foucault's insistence that power is not a monocausal force, makes the attempt to separate the active "what comes from the subject" from the passive "what shapes the subject from outside" futile. Accordingly, the dialectical processes of subjectivation may accommodate the idea that subjectivation can also be enabling to the extent that it involves the self's active engagement with the social.

Scholars who try to reinvigorate identity as a critical concept to make sense of social phenomena, adopt this latter approach in accounting for the dynamic processes of identification and formation of selfhood. Taking into account the recent criticisms posed against the concept of identity, Hall (1996) suggests that it is no more possible to think of identity in the old way but identity still matters as a critical concept without which key questions cannot be thought at all. Yet, he also notes that the concept of identity to be deployed is not an essentialist entity but a strategic and positional one. It does not assume a stable core self, unfolding from beginning to end without change. It accepts that identities are never unified, never singular,

increasingly fractured and multiply across different, intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices, positions.

In a similar vein, Alcoff (2006) interprets identity as an indispensable concept. She questions the contemporary suspicion on identity politics by arguing that differences in social identity do not necessarily lead to political relativism or fragmentation, but that, quite the reverse; it is the refusal to acknowledge the importance of differences in our identities that has led to miscommunication and disunity. She opposes the claim that identities are constraining, exclusive and imposed from outside. In her view, identity is not merely that which is given to an individual or group, but is also a way of interpreting and working through an objective social location. (Ibid, 42) In this account, it is possible to define identities as positioned or located lived experiences in which both individuals and groups work to construct meaning in relation to historical experience and historical narratives. Thus, Alcoff proposes to view identities as a site from which one must engage in the process of meaning-making.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) distinguish between strong and weak conceptions of identity. Accordingly, while the former tie identity to a core self and fixed interests, the latter define identity as multiple, fluid, fluctuating. Pointing out the openings of the weak conception of identity, Brubaker and Cooper (Ibid) aim to disassociate identity from reifying connotations while stressing the identification acts that are deeply embedded in modern life and help one locate oneself vis-a-vis others.

It is plausible to suggest that in the recent literature on identity, soft conceptions of identity still matter whereas strong conceptions of identity have become mostly outmoded. How does feminist theory position itself vis-a-vis the recent challenge to identity? What are the challenges posed by feminist theory

against the concept of identity? Does the feminist thinking produce theories defending identity? These questions will help us build a theoretical framework to understand the dynamics of the feminist self-identification among women columnists in Turkey.

2.2. Feminism and Identity Politics

In response to the proliferating debates on identity and identity politics, feminism has engaged in a self-reflexive endeavour to revise its former assumptions. As a result, third wave feminism as a new current of feminism has come out. Postmodernist and poststructuralist feminist approaches and also feminist postcolonial theory have contributed to the emergence of third wave feminism. (Coleman 2009) Postmodern and poststructuralist feminists have critically questioned the notion of coherent identities and viewed freedom as resistance to categorization and identity. (Butler 1990, Nicholson 1990) Feminist post-colonial theory, on the other hand, posed a great challenge to the idea of the common experience of being woman. Scholars like Mohanty (1991) pointed out the broad range of differences among women and the implausibility to talk about a universal idea of womanhood.

Emphasizing the equality of men and women, first-wave feminism had addressed the problem of women's political identity by attempting to fit women into the universal category of "citizen". The solution offered by second-wave feminism was the emphasis on differences between men and women and a definition of feminist politics in terms of the universal category "woman". However, this turned out to be equally flawed because the category of "woman" enshrined the hegemony of white, middle-class, heterosexual women, relegating other women to the margins of feminist politics. (Mohanty 1991)

Second wave feminism argued that the commonalities that women share in terms of nature and experience unify them and form the basis of feminist politics. Theory in the second wave was regarded as the search for one key factor that would account for sexism cross-culturally. (Alcoff, 2006: 252) The metanarrative conception of feminist theory obviously ignored historically and culturally situated elements in women's experiences. For example, Firestone (1972) invoked biological differences between women and men to explain sexism and tried to locate roots of gender differences in biology. In her book *Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow (1978) argued that female mothering produces women whose sense of self is relational and men whose sense of self is not relational. In such accounts, the cause of prevailing gender relations are sought in ahistorical and cross-cultural terms. Since the claim that women can be unified on the basis of shared characteristics turned out to be divisive for women precisely because it does not reflect the experiences, demands and needs of all women, second wave feminism had to respond to various sources of dissension. In the Anglo-Saxon world, one of the first reactions posed against the epistemic privileges of white, middle class women was black feminists' demands for inclusionary feminism. Some black women even rejected the term "feminism" and adopted "womanism" instead with the aim to point out the association of feminism with whiteness. (Walker 1984) This critique of the epistemic privilege embedded in the second wave feminism and the call for the inclusion of differences such as race, ethnicity, class in the feminist project compelled many feminists to rethink the category of "woman".

By collaborating with the poststructuralist arguments, the recent stage of feminist thought puts the "unified" category of woman under suspect. A main source

for contemporary feminist questioning of identity is Butler's poststructuralist theory that has deeply affected the modality of feminist line of thinking.

2.2.1. Butler's Performative Theory and Critique of Identity

At the center of Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) is the replacement of the notion of a fixed, essential identity with that of an identity constituted by fluctuating and fluid discursive forces. The modernist subject that Butler rejects is rational, autonomous and disembodied. In the political realm this subject translates into the "universal citizen" who has no race, class, gender or culture. Butler proposes "performativity" as an alternative theory to the modernist subject. For her, there is no substance behind gender identity. This idea of identity as free-floating and not connected to an essence views gender as a reiterated acting. According to this view, the category of "woman" conceals the political, discursive origins of the fabricated core of gender identity.

For Butler, gender is not something one is, it is something one does; it is a sequence of acts, a doing rather than a being. Gender only comes into being through these gendering acts such as wearing certain gender-coded clothing or walking and sitting in certain gender-coded ways. Genders are true and real only to the extent that they are performed. (Butler 1990, 278–9). They are instituted through a stylized repetition of habitual acts. No ontological status apart from the various gender coded acts constitutes the reality of genders. In this view, not only gender but also sex is socially constructed. Second wave feminist formulations of the sex/gender distinction claimed that while *female* biology corresponds to certain anatomical features, being a *woman* is an individual's socially acquired role and sense of

identity. Opposing this gap between sex and gender, Butler argues that sex is as socially constructed as gender. This means that our sexed bodies are also performative; there is no pre-discursive sexed body. Sexed bodies become intelligible only through discursive construction. According to this, if the gendering activities would come to an end, then there will be no point in distinguishing physical bodies as man and woman. In this frame, Butler draws attention to the practices and speech acts that attribute sexed bodies their meaning. For her, although sexed bodies do not exist outside regulatory discursive mechanisms, they are constructed as if they provide foundational material sources for gendering activities. Her performative theory rejects the fixation of women as females with feminine traits and a heterosexual desire towards men and men as males with masculine traits and a heterosexual desire towards women. By making heterosexuality appear as natural and presenting homosexuality as deviant, these gender codes, for her, attempt to render gender identities unify through the binary logic of heteronormativity. (Butler 1990, 42) To underscore that there is no substance to gender identity, she states that “a good ten percent of the population has chromosomal variations that do not fit neatly into the XX-female and XY-male set of categories.” (1990: 137).

In sum, relying on the Foucauldian framework, Butler argues that sex and gender identities are never prior to social and linguistic influences but are effects of multiple discourses, practices and institutions. Moreover, for her these identities are constantly reproduced through regulative institutions such as heteronormativity and by enforcing particular gender performances. (Weir, 1996: 113) In this vision, identities are constructed in such a way that power/language configurations make them appear natural. Deconstructing the claim that identities are natural and descriptive, Butler discloses that subjectification and identity construction are always

normative and regulatory, forcing individuals fit into certain fixed identity categories.

2.2.2.The Category of “Woman”

Butler’s performative theory has some consequences for feminist identity politics. Since gender identities acquire their meaning only through certain gender coded ways of behavior, the gender identity of “woman” should be always in process, which in return leads to the conclusion that there cannot be any categorical definition of “woman”. The argument that subjects are overdetermined by a set of social discourses and are totally imprinted by history leads to the view that the category woman is a fiction without objective basis and that feminist efforts must be directed towards dismantling this fiction. In this view, essentialist formulations of womanhood tie the individual to her identity as a woman and thus cannot represent a solution to sexism. Therefore, this line of thinking suggests that politics of gender or sexual difference must be replaced with a plurality of difference where gender loses its position of significance. (Alcoff 2006: 133) Yet, according to this, it is not enough to recognize the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in the construction of women’s identities, rather it is necessary to totally abandon the attempts to define “woman” as a category. For Butler (1990: 9), since identity categories are always normative and exclusionary, any attempt to define woman would result in normative requirements and exclusions. The very subjects that the feminist movement struggle to liberate are products of power relations that are sustained through certain exclusionary practices and definitions of “ideal” identities such as heterosexual, white, etc. Therefore, in Butler’s thought, the main focus of

feminism should be limited to the revelation of the ways in which bodies are socially constructed as sexes and the performative acts constituting genders.

In this line of thought, an effective feminism could only be a wholly negative feminism, deconstructing everything and refusing to construct anything. (Ibid., 141)

This is also the position that Kristeva adopts. She claims the following:

“A woman cannot be; it is something which does not even belong in the order of being... the problematic character of subjectivity does not mean, then, that there can be no political struggle, but that the struggle can have only a “negative function” rejecting “everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning in the existing state of society”. (1981; 137, 166)

It follows that feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with already what exists. Since any definition of the category “woman” would lead to normative prescription, Butler (1990: 9, 43) suggests that feminists should regard the identity of woman as open to intervention and resignification, abandon the category of woman as the foundation of feminist politics and disclose the power relations shaping gender identities.

2.2.2.1. End of Feminist Politics?

Postmodernism and postcolonialism have provided a new epistemological vision for feminisms to avoid the accounts that limit feminist imaginary to the experiences of white, middle class, western women. Alcoff (2006: 142) notes some of the attractions of the postmodern critique of the category “woman” for feminists as follows: First, it facilitates the idea of plurality of differences unhampered by any pre-determined gender identity as formulated either by patriarchy or cultural feminism. Second, it can explain the construction of female subjectivity, which cultural and liberal feminisms leave untouched. In this way, it can relate sexist

oppression to social discourses. Third, it also gives us an enhanced capacity to explain women who embrace patriarchy and to understand in general how ideology is reproduced. However, these advantages do not suffice for feminism and postmodernism to become allies. The postmodern dismantling of the stable self, objective knowledge and universal reason has left the theoretical terrain with questions about how to talk about gender, self and knowledge without reproducing teleological and binary ways of thinking. Nicholson (1990: 8) identifies the central question for feminism in the time of crisis as follows: “If postmodernism entails abandoning the use of cross-cultural categories, what happens then to the category of gender?”

There is this concern that the modernist view from nowhere is replaced with the equally flawed postmodernist view from everywhere. Bordo criticizes this view from everywhere by deeming it an impossible fantasy:

“Gender is criticized for its fixed, binary structuring of reality and is replaced with a narrative ideal of ceaseless textual play. This remains animated by its own fantasies of attaining an epistemological perspective free of locatedness and limitations of embodied experience- a fantasy that I call “a dream of everywhere”. (In Nicholson, 1990: 136)

For Bordo, humans are always invested with social, political and personal interests and thus cannot adopt endlessly shifting vantage points.

The postmodern critique of the subject treats subjectivity purely as a linguistic effect, reduces the self to signification and leaves no room for agency and intentionality. Dismissing the category of woman as fiction, they define the self as undecidable and always in the process of becoming. According to Alcoff (2006: 143), the claim that meaning is always undecidable cannot be a useful one for feminism because movements are never mobilized just as negations or rejections. In this view, the thesis of undecidability may reduce feminism to a deconstructive task.

Alcoff asks, if gender identity is simply a social construct, then what can we demand in the name of women if women do not exist; how can we speak against sexism if the category is a fiction. (Ibid) For her, the undecidability thesis leaves women unprotected with respect to oppressive gender relations. Young's following statement echoes Alcoff's concern: 'Without some sense in which "woman" is the name of a social collective, there is nothing specific about feminist politics'. (1994: 714) In a similar vein, Benhabib asks whether it is really necessary to abandon the concepts of selfhood, agency and autonomy for the sake of critiquing certain prepositions of feminism and identity politics. Her answer is as follows:

"Postmodernism can teach us about how the theoretical and political traps of utopias and foundational thinking can go wrong but it should not lead to a retreat from utopia altogether. For we, as women, have much to lose by giving up the utopian hope." (1995: 30)

Here, the main idea behind the criticism directed against the dismissal of the category of woman is that once the construction of a gender identity happens through performative acts, it may give way to situations in which the political necessity of speaking as a woman can hardly be ignored.

Based on the positions presented above, one can say that the defense of the category of woman and the postmodern anti-categorical stance has emerged as one of the fundamental debates of contemporary feminist theory. Thus, one of the striking questions on the feminist agenda today is "whether or not feminism can claim to *be* postmodern if the actual conditions of modernity remain." (Howie & Tauchert, 2004: 44) In this vein, one can suggest that although postmodernism can provide crucial insights about how to avoid essentialism, it falls short when it comes to dealing with the reality of already formed gender identities.

2.2.3. An Attempt to Resolve the “End of Feminist Politics” Debate

How would women make collective demands if the attempts to ground identity in a shared nature or experience are already outdated? What should feminism’s relation to identity be? These questions have occupied a great bulk of the recent feminist thought. Some feminist scholars have responded to feminists’ worries about the future of feminist politics by suggesting that the postmodern dismantling of the category of “woman” does not necessarily have to lead to the end of feminist politics. For example, Lloyd (2005) argues that acknowledging the flexible, dynamic character of subject formation does not entail the demise of feminist politics. She denies the binary opposition between the post-structural ideas about subjectivity and essential feminist claims. As explained above, poststructuralist scholars maintain that identity politics understood as the expression of authentic selves is always regulatory, normative and thus exclusionary. It operates through establishing the parameters of what counts as authentic behaviour and disciplining the subjects in accordance with these parameters. (Lloyd, 2005: 57) On the other hand, essentialist feminists argue that without the idea of stable subject, it is impossible to articulate feminist demands. To deconstruct the binary opposition between these two camps, Lloyd alleges that the relation inbetween is not oppositional but strategic. Drawing on Spivak’s idea of strategic essentialism, she argues that because politics is organized around interest representation, constituencies and parties, there are times when it is necessary to make demands on behalf of women. (2005: 66) She notes that the political realm gives legitimacy only to those who can speak on behalf of real needs and desires of specific people and thus strategic essentialism is inevitable for feminism. Yet, Lloyd also warns that her affirmation of strategic essentialism does

not entail acknowledgment of stable, fixed, unitary subject. On the contrary, the replacement of stable subject with the dynamic, flexible accounts of subjectivity is vital in her conception of feminism. She explains this as the following:

“We have to understand that to invoke a stable subject as the active agent of politics is not to refer to a subject that precedes discourse or politics; it is to performatively enact that subject as the initiator of politics... Similarly to say that identity grounds politics is not to refer to identity understood metaphysically but it is to performatively invoke that identity as organizational of politics.” (2005: 58)

In this frame, Lloyd underscores that identities are not prior to politics but are effects of power. However, in order to deconstruct the binary thinking that presents poststructural and essential claims in oppositional terms, Lloyd (2005: 63) states that identities understood as essence also involve identity production. Similarly, performatively produced identities postulate truth claims about selves. She gives lesbian identity as an example and says that lesbian identity does not appear all of a sudden but one realizes that one is lesbian by participating in certain communities and discourses. Using these discourses within a certain historical moment, the self constructs a lesbian self. In this sense, lesbian subjectivity is the product of discourses and practices that name it, not an essence that exists prior to those discourses. Yet at the same time, the self makes certain truth claims about her authentic lesbian experiences. Thus, in Lloyd’s thinking the projection of a truth about oneself is itself a performative effect, it is an identity produced in its articulation. (2005: 43) In short, the claim that the essentialist identity itself is a performative construction helps Lloyd rethink the space between poststructuralist and essentialist claims as a strategic space that can be deployed for making political demands. In this way, she provides a resolution to the “end of feminism” debate without giving up the postmodern project of dismantling the unitary, fixed subject.

This in return produces some implications for feminism. It challenges the feminist assumption that feminist politics requires a stable subject to ground its demands. Drawing on an understanding of subjectivity that is not prior to politics but is generated by politics itself, it reconciles liberatory politics of social movements with the complex, dynamic, multiple character of subject production.

2.2.4. Postfeminisms

The question of feminist self-identification has come to the forefront especially in the recent debates on postfeminism in the Anglo-Saxon context. In some of these debates, postfeminism is associated with the current conjuncture in which feminism is perceived as no longer relevant and necessary to women who have benefited from the gains of earlier feminist movements and have become powerful actors in their public and private lives. In this sense, postfeminism is perceived as a reaction against earlier feminisms so much so that the meaning of the prefix 'post' thus becomes equivalent to 'anti'. (Braithwaite, 2002: 4)

In fact, it is quite hard to say that there is consensus about the meanings of postfeminism. It is appropriated to refer to a variety of different discourses such as backlash feminism, third way feminism, Girl Power, power feminism and postmodern feminism. (Genz and Brabon 2009) The term "postfeminism" first became tangible in the 1980s in its alignment with the rise of conservative politics. In this contextual setting, it signified an antifeminist stance and was associated with the view that women no longer need feminism since they already have benefited from

earlier feminisms and achieved powerful positions in the public sphere.¹ According to Henry (2004), postfeminism understood as such has a paradoxical implication because it connotes both to the failures and successes of feminism. On the one hand, the term originates from the decline of the women's movement and the rejection of feminism; on the other hand, it signifies "the time after feminism" in which the accomplishments of feminism have already yielded to gender equality.

This association of postfeminism with women who argue that feminism is passé, has occupied many critics in the 1990s. This particular interpretation of postfeminism as antifeminist has been developed in the Anglo-American scholarship by second wave feminist critics such as Faludi (1991) or French (1992) in relation to the best-selling writers such as Naomi Klein, Katie Roiphe, Rene Denfield or Laura Doyle, who identify themselves as feminist but reject the assumptions of earlier feminisms. In these critiques, the distinguishing aspects of the writings of the postfeminist generation are identified as follows: First, it is maintained that the young postfeminist writers refuse the second wave's emphasis on "victim" feminism in favor of "power feminism", "equity feminism" or "new feminism". This definition of feminism as power feminism has been subject to heavy criticisms because it creates the impression as if gender equality is fully achieved. (Faludi 1991) Second, it is argued that postfeminists' emphasis on the individual lifestyle choices and personal pleasures provided by consumer culture turns feminism into a matter of lifestyle and deprives it of its potential as a social movement for initiating large scaled social change for women. (Ibid) In short, in this understanding postfeminism

¹ Henry (2004: 19) notes that the first text to apply the term "post-feminist" to the 1980's and to the generation of women who came age during the late 1970s and early 1980s is Susan Bolotin's "Views From The Postfeminist Generation" published in the New York Times Magazine in 1982. Bolotin noted that the women she interviewed who were born between 1957 and 1964 viewed feminism as no more necessary for their generation.

is seen as a patriarchal construction that designates a pre-feminist stage. Tania Modleski expresses this point as follows: “Texts... proclaiming... the advent of postfeminism are actually... underminig the goals of feminism, delivering us back into a prefeminist world”. (cited in Genz & Brabon, 2009: 16)

Moreover, the popular press has also been held responsible for the proliferation of postfeminist discourses in the form of anti-feminism. Faludi (1991) sees media as the major perpetrator of backlash against feminism. Drawing on news stories, articles, TV shows and Hollywood movies, she tries to display how the media blames feminism for a series of illnesses such as infertility or mental health problems. In this line of thought, the backlash media is seen as the main site where stereotypical images of feminists are constructed as humorless, angry women unconcerned about their appearance and fanatically obsessed with political correctness. (Bailey, 1997: 22) According to these criticisms, this media discourse envisions home and motherhood as the domain of female autonomy and the choice to remain childless as unhealthy.² Scholars, both those who regard postfeminism as anti-feminism (Faludi 1991) and those who acknowledge the multifaceted character of postfeminism and regard it as a timely reponse to the changing conceptions of subjectivity and agency in the contemporary era (Genz and Brabon 2009), identify these backlash discourses in the media as retrograde and point out conservative politics as their source of origin.

²Such a conception of the domestic sphere is obviously quite different from the way it was perceived under the second wave feminism, especially in Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique*. Friedan describes the housewife as trapped in the daily routine, as the epitome of female non-identity. In opposition to this, some postfeminist discourses remove the idea of home from this association with confinement and link it to women’s autonomy and power.

As mentioned at the beginning, the meanings of postfeminism is not limited to anti-feminism. Other scholars such as Genz and Brabon (2009: 39) argue that postfeminism cannot be seen as a purely patriarchal creation. In this sense, they maintain that the attempt to fix postfeminism's meaning is futile and even misguided. They remind us that feminism never had one universal definition but always has had a number of working definitions that are relative to particular contexts, specific issues and personal experiences. Likewise, Rupp and Taylor (1999: 363) note that history of feminism is full of different strands of feminisms and feminists who would hardly find a common ground such as "Nazi feminists and Jewish feminists, Catholic feminists and Islamic feminists, socialist feminists and utopian feminists, social feminists and equity feminists, imperial feminists and national feminists". Relying on the multiplicity of the meanings of feminism, Genz and Brabon (2009:4) urge for the acknowledgement of the multifaceted character of postfeminism. Scholars like Budgeon (2001), Braithwaite (2002) and Siegel (1997) also criticize the freezing of postfeminism's meaning as anti-feminist since for them, this antifeminist label reflects a problematic belief in the definitional stability of feminism as a term, which excludes multiple meanings that exemplify feminism today. Alternatively, it is suggested that feminism can be seen as a term with multiple histories and multiple meanings. In this sense, postfeminism implies the plurality of feminism, may acquire quite different meanings within different contexts and relies on the view that it is no more possible to assume a unanimous feminist realm. (Genz and Brabon, 2009: 29)

In this alternative reading of postfeminism, postfeminism could be a way to talk about the changes in feminist thinking that took place in the last decades with the influences coming from postmodernist, poststructuralist and postcolonial theory. (Brooks 1997, Gamble 2000)

The changing meaning of feminism in the postfeminist times in the perception of young generations is clearly illustrated in the following remark:

“Young women coming of age today wrestle with the term feminism because we have a different vantage point on the world than that of our foremothers... for many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen and understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn't allow for individuality... we fear that the identity will dictate and regulate our lives... forcing us to choose inflexible and unchanging sides, female against male, black against white, oppressed against oppressor, good against bad” (Walker, 1995: xxxiii)

Walker's statement is indicative of the fact that the new generation of feminist women who have become visible in the public sphere beginning with the early 1990s argue for a new feminism which would be corrective to the rigidity of the second wave. In another remark, she defines the current stage of feminism as third wave feminism: “I am not postfeminism's feminist; I am the Third Wave.” (Henry, 2004: 25) Here, Walker first rejects any association with the antifeminist backlash. She does not want to be treated in the same camp with publicized figures such as Katie Roiphe, Rene Denfeld or Camille Paglia whose works caricaturize second wave feminism. In contrast to these figures, she and other third wave feminists do not reject second wave feminism altogether. (Synder, 2008: 3) Third wave's espousal of second wave feminism holds true to a certain extent in their imagination. Having denied any linkage with antifeminist backlash, Walker, in her above-mentioned statement, emphasizes that although she labels herself as feminist, this feminist identification does not belong to the “old”, i.e., second wave feminist narrative but designates a new stage in feminism's history. Following Walker's articulation of the new wave feminism, many books appeared in the U.S context, consolidating the existence of the third wave: Barbara Findlen's *Listen Up: Voices From the Next Feminist Generation* (1995), Leslie Heywood and Jenifer Drake's *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (1997), Jenifer Baumgardner and Amy

Richards' *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future* (2000), Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier's *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century* (2003).

Henry (2004: 34) suggests that the reference to generation and age underlies many of the third wave narratives. These narratives frequently bring up the issue of changing needs and demands of young women, cast second wave as outmoded and imply the beginning of a new era. Henry (Ibid) also notes that third wave ideas heavily rely on the analytical tools provided by the postmodern and postcolonial thinking. Bearing these in mind, she proposes that third wave feminism could be envisioned as a response to the contemporary challenges regarding gender debates. In a similar way, Synder (2008: 14) maintains that third wave feminism can be viewed as a tactical response to postmodernity. Accordingly, relying on the postmodern critique of essentialism, third wave feminism dismisses the idea that women share a common experience of womanhood. In this vein, third wave feminist ideas about identity acknowledge contradiction, multiplicity and ambiguity in identity positions. They also embrace an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism. Third wave feminists argue that this new wave welcomes identities which used to be seen as clashing with feminism. Accordingly, it is possible to conform to the consumerism of beauty culture and at the same time identify with feminism. (Ibid., p.7) Third wave feminists claim that this new stage of feminism is different from the second wave feminism in terms of its welcoming of differences and inclusiveness. Drawing on third-wave texts and practices, Purvis (2004: 14) defines this new stage of feminism as an awareness of intricate workings of power and the complicated character of subject positions that do not fit into the fictitious category of "perfect" feminism. Affirming the third wave feminist position, she

alleges that since ideas about how to be a feminist are constantly under interrogation, it is impossible to set fixed boundaries for feminist positions.

Considering the recent postfeminist or third wave feminist arguments that redefine feminisms through multiplicity, one can suggest that the implications of the feminist self-identification in the contemporary setting are more complicated than before. Scholars argue that in the contemporary era where anti-essentialist critiques destabilized old feminist assumptions about women's shared characteristics, giving way to contradictions and ambivalence, feminisms are confronted with the rise of antifeminist discourses fed by the patriarchal ideology. Women, especially young women, are increasingly refraining from the feminist label by resorting to the statement "I'm not a feminist but..." (Burgeon 2001) One can argue that the refrainment from the label "feminist" is nothing new. In other words, the same statement "I'm not a feminist but..." is not unique to the current stage of feminism but was also articulated in earlier stages of the history of feminism. Women, who resort to this rhetorical strategy, want to avoid the social ostracism that usually accompanies the feminist label or they do not share most of the feminist ideas but think that supporting gender equality is politically correct. However, this refrainment from the feminist label or the negotiation of it has gained new dimensions today. It has gone beyond the feminist/anti-feminist dichotomy and has come to encompass the current debates about difference, identity and feminist identity politics. The statement "I am not a feminist but..." has multiplied through the emergence of other statements like "I am third wave" or "I am not a second wave feminist". In this sense, all statements that imply a certain distancing from the statement "I am a feminist" engage in attempts to rethink certain feminist assumptions, ideas and approaches in the light of the recent of poststructuralist, postcolonial critiques

dismantling the unitary, fixed conceptions of identity. Therefore, in this research, while analyzing women columnists' narratives about their relationship with feminism, I will keep in mind the complex web of meanings embedded in the espousal or denial of the feminist label. For example, the negotiation of the feminist label may involve certain strategic tactics which provide the subject a protective shelter to avoid social ostracism or it may involve an oppositional stance vis-a-vis unifying, exclusionary tendencies of orthodox feminist narratives that fail to capture the multiplicity of contemporary feminist subject positions. In this sense, the statement "I am not a feminist but..." can be read along multiple lines marked by different political and personal motivations. On the other hand, the statement "I am not a feminist but..." also entails an ideological component that positions subjects vis-a-vis feminism critically. Here, the negotiation of the feminist label gains further meanings if the meanings of feminism in the mind-set of the subject in question are informed or affected by the recent feminist debates on identity and difference. If so, then the statement "I am a feminist" or "I am not a feminist" may display not one single color but different shades of that color, reflecting the contradictions and ambivalences underlying feminism today.

2.2.5. Identity Politics and Feminism in Turkey in 2000's

Women's identity in modern Turkey has always been strategically addressed by major macro social and political projects. (Kadıoğlu 1998) Westernization, Islamism, nationalism, the Republican project of modernization and socialism have been grand discourses that in one way or another tried to incorporate women's identity into their projects. They regarded women's identity either as the facilitator of their ideals or as

the marker of their ideological boundaries. In modern Turkey, an autonomous flourishing of feminist ideas took place in the post-1980 period. The rise of the feminist movement and scholarship in the post-1980 period has challenged this discursive utilization of women's status (Arat 2004). Since then, many critical studies have been conducted about the Republican emancipation of women, pointing out the strategic utilization of the image of modern woman by the modernization project. (Durakbaşa 1998, Kandiyoti 1988, Kadioğlu 1994)

This initial momentum of feminist critique, which was mainly limited to the gendered subjectivities of secular, middle class women, has gained a new dimension with the flourishing of the studies taking into account different subject positions and identity claims in Turkey. As a result of this recognition of differences among women, the category of "woman" as a unified block has come to be deconstructed in the new cohort of women's studies in the post-1980s Turkey. The post-1980 period, which witnessed the rise of identity politics along with a plurality of discourses—namely, feminist, Islamist, Kurdish, has been a turning point that has redefined the social, cultural and political codes in Turkey. Following the openings of the era, scholars resorted to the concept of "difference" to understand the multiplicity of experiences of being a woman in Turkey. Göle (1991), Özdalga (1998) and Saktanber (2002) have conducted studies about the identity of Islamist woman and pointed out the inadequacies of the Kemalist paradigm to account for the complexities of the newly rising identities of urban, well-educated, veiled women. For example, employing personal interviews with university students who are part of the Islamic veiling movement in Turkey during the post 1983 period, Göle (1991) interrogates how educated Islamist women contest the cherished master narrative that traditions and religion will disappear with the advent of modernity and education. In

this way, she challenges the opposition between modernity and Islamic identity and explains how veiling in its contemporary form is different from traditional Muslim women's use of headscarf. For her, the contemporary reappropriation of veiling from traditional to modern forms of life indicates the emergence of a new figure on the political scene, i.e., female Islamist intellectual who differentiates herself from traditional, uneducated women through her claims on Islamic knowledge and politics. On the other hand, in her book *Veiling Issue: Official Secularism and Popular Islam in Modern Turkey*, Özdalga (1998) sheds light on personal and political aspirations of three women who have chosen to wear headscarf. In this way, she initiates a debate on the choice to veil that goes beyond the limits of the official ideologies. As in Göle's work, Özdalga's book redefines veiling as women's autonomous choice that is not necessarily a form of submission to the confines of traditions but may signify a new appropriation of veiling informed by women's agency, aspirations, personal and political demands. In a similar vein, Saktanber (2002) brings to the forefront the experiences of women as crucial actors in Islamic revivalism in Turkey and how they conceive Islam as a living social practice. In short, these new cohort of studies have initiated a new turn for feminist knowledge production and history writing in Turkey in that they provided a significant ground for scholarly debates where differences among women matter.

Feminist studies have also delved into the diversification of the women's movement in the post-1990 period. In this period, along with the rising demands of Kurdish and Islamic women, women's organizations have multiplied, reflecting the enlargement of the discursive space where dissolution of unitary conceptions of womanhood and multiplication of women's demands and needs can be articulated. Aldıkaçtı-Marshall (2005), Coşar and Gençoğlu (2008), Diner and Toktaş (2010),

Fisher Onar and Paker (2012) point out the broadening of the scope of women's activism that takes place in tandem with the rise of identity politics in the post-1980 period. These studies put forward that the multiplication of women's organizations is reflective of the heterogenous array of women's demands and needs in Turkey.

The focus on differences among women has broadened with studies investigating the dynamics of the Kurdish women's movement. In her pioneering study, Çağlayan (2007) exposes the interaction between ethnic/nationalist processes and gender relations and discusses the repercussions of women's presence in the Kurdish movement. In this frame, she discloses the unique characters of the movement and its potentials in terms of gender equality. For example, she argues that unlike other anti-colonial nation building processes in other geographies at the beginning of the 20th century, the Kurdish movement did not impose on women the burden to protect the authentic national self. Rather than being confined to their symbolic tasks at home, women are seen as active participants of the movement. She also notes that in the late 1990s the idea of gender equality has become much more significant for the left-wing and secular strands of the Kurdish movement as women's active participation in the movement has considerably increased. For her, this, in return, has affected the organizational structure of the Kurdish movement and its ideological composition.

Another crucial attempt in feminist studies in Turkey that has rendered the ethnic differences among women visible, is Ekmekçioğlu and Bilal's study (2006) on Armenian feminist writers in the late Ottoman period. Focusing on the works of Elbis Gesaratsyan, Sırpuhi Düsap, Zabel Asadur, Zabel Yesayan and Hayganuş Mark, Ekmekçioğlu and Bilal provide crucial insights into how these writers negotiate the interplay between their gender and Armenian identities and their

conceptions of equality and freedom for women. In this sense, this work makes a substantial contribution to the process of generating a new feminist historiography that takes into account religious and ethnic differences in women's identities.

Furthermore, differences among women in terms of class positions have also been incorporated into feminist research. (Özyeğin 2001, Bora 2005) For instance, Bora (2005) analyzed how different gendered positions enter into dialogue in the context of domestic labour and regenerate each other. Relying on the Bourdieusian framework, she focused on the regenerative effects of the encounter in question and the dilemmas, possibilities and inequalities embedded in it.

The portrayal above reveals that the unified category of "woman" is no more the unit of analysis in feminist studies in Turkey. As a result of the critique of epistemic privilege in the feminist knowledge production that prioritizes the demands of the "elite" women while ignoring less powerful or marginal identity positions, gendered subjectivities that were once invisible have come to the foreground of scholarly debates. Yet, these recent attempts to render the "invisible" visible, do not thoroughly capture the entire spectrum of the contemporary feminist scholarship. What is also needed is to take into account the recent debates about the encounter between feminism and postmodernism, which problematizes the very idea of identity in feminism. As explained earlier, the postmodern critique questions the claim that identity is prior to politics; it argues that identities are effects of power and contests each and every identity claim on the basis of its fictionality and its regulatory and disciplinary character. The postmodern dismantling of the idea of subject has been quite problematic for feminist politics for a number of reasons explained before. Yet, the critique of essentialism that underscores the historically situated, dynamic and fictional character of gender identities has proved to be quite useful to grasp the

complex functionings of gender identities. Therefore, I believe that while reflecting on gendered subjectivities and questions about identity and identity politics in Turkey, one has to keep in mind that identities and identity formations are never monolithic, monocausal, unified and fixed. To grasp the operating mechanisms underlying different modalities of identity formations, it is necessary to be aware of the multiple, flexible and hybrid qualities of the statements regarding the self.

Studies conducted on feminist identity politics in Turkey constitute another point of reference for this research. These studies usually focus on feminist activism, feminist publications, feminist NGOs and women's organization. Some studies disclose the effects of women's movements on the democratization processes in Turkey. (Arat 1994; Marshall 2009, 2011) Others provide insight into the political demands of feminist organizations. (Arat 1999, Bora 2002) There are some other studies that investigate the trajectory of the women's movement in Turkey and unmask the transformation of demands. (Esim & Cindođlu 1999, Özçürümez & Cengiz 2011) Moreover, some of the works focus on feminist publications and their contribution to the dissemination of feminist discourses in the public sphere. (Arat 2004, Koçali 2002, Kırca 2001, Öztürkmen 1998). Finally, one can also find studies that compare and contrast different women's organizations and feminist NGOs in the light of each other. (Aldıkaçtı-Marshall 2005, Coşar & Gençođlu 2008) However, despite this broad range of focus on feminist identity politics, the issue of feminist self-identification has not been interrogated so far. How do women negotiate the label "feminist" in Turkey? How do they see the relationship between feminist identity and feminist label? What kind of an identity position does the label "feminist" generate in their imagination? All these questions regarding the dynamics

of feminist self-identification that await to be answered constitute a huge vacuum in feminist scholarship in Turkey.

Considering these missing points in the trajectory of feminist studies in Turkey, this research will attempt to uncover feminist self-identification among women intellectuals by taking into account the recent feminist debates on identity and identity politics.

CHAPTER III

INTERPRETIVE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Mid-way Theories in Feminist Debates

“Neat, clear distinctions distort the complexity of the issues raised by the problem of identity. Identity must be understood from within this complexity, not through a denial of it.” (Susan Hekman, *Private Identities*, 8)

“We are voyagers, discovers / of the not-known, /the unrecorded; / we have no map”(H.D., *Trilogy*, 59)

“You must live *sin fronteras* [without borders]/ be a crossroads.” (Anzaldua, 195)

Feminist theory today is undergoing a profound identity crisis. The poststructuralist critique of essentialist accounts on identity has dismantled the category of “woman”, claiming that this category ignores the differences among women and inevitably leads to fixed, stable identity narratives. Rejecting the essential identity of the modernist tradition, the poststructuralist critique has replaced it with incoherent, unstable, performative selves. Accordingly, any attempt to define the category of “woman” is misguided. Criticizing the conception of modernist subject as a stable,

coherent unity, Butler argues that there is no substance embedded in subjectivity; a substansive unity is a fictive construct. In this regard, she defines gender identity as a relentless reiteration of gendered acts:

“There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results. Thus, gender identity is its acts; without the acts there would be no gender. It follows that [g]ender ought not to be considered as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.” (1990, 25, 140)

Interpreting the category of woman as fiction, Butler’s critique of the modernist subject proposes an alternative to the essentialist accounts of gender identity. This poststructuralist position in feminist theory mainly targets at “cultural feminism”, i.e., a form of feminism that aims to challenge the patriarchal definitions of woman’s nature by redefining woman’s nature in a way that is highly prone to essentialism. To reconstruct woman’s nature, cultural feminists replace woman’s passivity with her peacefulness and her sentimentality with her proclivity to nurture. Instead of challenging the very act of defining “woman”, they redefine the definition given by men. (Alcoff, 2006: 134) Yet, this new definition is equally flawed in that it homogenizes women, erasing the differences among them. In the poststructuralist critique, the replacement of the passivity attributed to women with positive attributes is seen as nothing but the duplication of misogynist strategies. (Ibid) In this frame, the main poststructuralist criticism is that cultural feminism is based on the essentialist fixing of gender identity, which in return generates a hierarchy among women. Accordingly, gender politics has to be rethought in such a way that sexual difference loses its significance and is replaced with a multiplicity of differences that are acknowledged to be fictive and always in process.

In the poststructuralist account, not only the category “woman” but “identity” in general is a very problematic concept. Hekman (2004: 101) notes that identity is generally defined through sameness. It is defined as “the quality of being the same in substance” and “sameness of a person or thing at all times and in all circumstances”. (Ibid) This definition of identity as “sameness in substance under all circumstances” makes it an alien concept to poststructuralist accounts. The poststructuralist critique concludes that sameness embedded in the concept of identity makes identity an oppressive tool that disciplines subjects by fixing their position into stable identity categories.

The poststructuralist dismantling of identity in return has led to the question as to whether such a critical move signifies the end of feminist politics. If one cannot talk about the category of “woman”, how can one make political demands in the name of women? In recent years, there has been various attempts in the feminist scholarship to mitigate the impasse between the poststructuralist accounts on identity and claims for autonomy. The theoretical deadlock caused by the binary opposition between the modernist subject as a stable, coherent entity and the poststructural subject as fictive, flexible and incoherent turned out to be unproductive to deal with current problems regarding feminist politics, feminist identification and sexual difference. Therefore, what is currently needed in feminist theory is an alternative account that can provide a new perspective, going beyond the binary opposition between the arguments for stable and flexible self. With the aim to come up with an alternative account, scholars have attempted to develop mid-way theories that employ the postmodern critique on identities without discarding the idea of autonomy and agency. This alternative perspective is a hybrid way of dealing with

questions of identity today since it combines elements both from the modernist and the poststructuralist accounts of subject.

Proponents of the concept of identity who argue for the third way point out the critical importance of “identity” to analyze the key aspects of the current social, cultural and political phenomena. Echoing the postmodern theories, they claim that identities are effects of power, never fixed but always in process. Critiquing the idea of a stable subject position, such accounts stress unstable, flexible formation of subject that may encapsulate multiple aspects of subjectivity. Here, the subject is positioned within several connected axes of identity, which are always open to rearticulation. Peeling these identity layers does not reveal a core, essential self. However, in such accounts the acknowledgement of power effects, flexibility and multiplicity in the constitution of identities does not eradicate the possibility of making truth claims at certain historical moments.

As one of the proponents of the third way, Hekman (2004) strongly argues against the “either/or” choice in feminist theory today. The “either/or” choice that confronts scholars working on identities today is as follows: Either you accept the poststructuralist fictive subject or the only alternative is the stable, essentialist accounts of the modernist subject. Hekman (Ibid, 6) alleges that the fictive subject of the poststructuralist theory is not the only alternative to the modernist subject. According to her, we do not reinvent ourselves every day as the poststructuralist theory says; nor are we wholly constructed by hegemonic discursive formations. Hekman stresses that the unique aspects of our identity equip ourselves with a coherent core which does not have to be necessarily an essentialist counterpart of the modernist subject.

In the same vein, Lloyd (2005) points out the possibility of reconciling truth claims with flexible understandings of subject. According to her, the fact that identities are dynamic, flexible and are produced as effects of power does not mean that it is impossible to talk about authentic experiences that subjects form around certain identity categories. She underscores that even though the claims about fixed, shared experiences of group identities have become already outdated as a result of postmodern criticisms, it is still possible to make collective demands. In this regard, she states the following:

“Every identity is performatively produced and each performative production involves positing a constative claim. Each time feminists appeal to the idea of woman they performatively invoke her, but each performative invocation produces her anew and differently.” (2005: 56)

Here, similar to Hekman, Lloyd suggests that even performative selves display a stable unity once they are performatively constituted. Before making this argument, she underlines that subject is an effect of politics; there is no subject prior to politics. Accordingly, politics does not express the demands of a pre-constituted identity; rather the demands of that constituency are constituted in politics. Yet, for Lloyd, this acknowledgement of the fact that identities are always saturated with power relations should not be regarded as a constraint for feminist politics. As noted above, in the poststructuralist account there is no authentic self of being a woman that is already there outside power relations. Lloyd notes that this does not signify the end of feminist political demands but rather it can be seen as regeneration of feminist politics and its adaptation to current accounts of identity. Even though identities are seen as flexible and always “in process”, it is possible to talk about experiences formed around such identities. These experiences, Lloyd argues, are not representations of pre-given identities but products of a certain time and place. As

such, politics of identity is not always entirely constraining, as poststructuralists claim. One can acknowledge the contingent, performative character of identities yet at the same time talk about truth claims related to such identities. In short, espousing that identities are performatively formed does not necessarily obscure the postulation of truth claims. Accordingly, Lloyd maintains that feminist scholars today should not see performativity and truth claims in binary opposition. Rather, what is needed is to acknowledge that they are in an agonistic relationship, feeding and transforming each other and always in interplay, not in opposition.

It is clear that both Lloyd and Hekman try to reconcile the idea of a stable self with the poststructuralist account of incoherent, flexible selves. The main idea in their critique of the anti-identity stance is that most of the prevalent assumptions about identity and identity politics are based on a deficient picture of what identity is. In the anti-identity theories, identity is imagined as inevitably fixed, monolithic and oppressive. Scholars such as Hekman, Alcoff and Lloyd remind that identities in fact have the potential to problematize the relationship between identity and politics. In other words, politics of identity can accommodate the fact that identities are not prior to politics but they are effects of politics. As such, identities do not have to be imagined as inherently monolithic and oppressive. As discussed earlier, one of the main critiques against identity politics is that since identities involve a pre-defined set of values, interests and practices, they discipline those who identify with those identities and lead to conformism, fixation and suppression. Accordingly, in identity politics, identity operates as a site of closure. It assumes that the values and interests of identity groups are intrinsic to them and transcend history, culture and geography. As a result, firm boundaries set around “authentic” identity turn identities into ahistorical categories and produce an exclusionary logic by defining those who do

not commit to the ideals of that particular identity as absolute “others”. (Lloyd, 2005: 37) As a result of the identitarian logic, those who fail to conform with the descriptive ideal of the identity group fall outside the boundaries that form the authentic identity. Opposing this stable, monolithic account about identities, Lloyd (2005) underlines that identities are to be redefined as flexible and unstable. Furthermore, she argues that when identity demands are articulated, they are not necessarily derived from an essential core but are provisional.

On the other hand, Hekman (2004) explains the progressive potential in politics of identity through the differentiation between private and public identities. She states that identities are constituted by an array of different influences and experiences which make each person unique. Her argument is that public identity categories cannot be monolithic and stable; rather they are quite complex as they are not standard reproduction of already defined identity categories but contain the unique aspects of personal identity, which further complicates public identity categories. Here, Hekman (Ibid, 7) points out to the fact that when one enters the public arena espousing a particular public identity category, this does not mean that that public identity category can represent each and every aspect of the identity of the person in question. The main idea in Hekman’s reminder is that the complexities of identities exceed the representative character of public identification. In short, two points come forward in Hekman’s reminder: First, public identity categories are reinterpreted in line with unique aspects of personal identities. This means that different public identifications may overlap with each other but they do not have to be identical. For instance, the category “woman” may assume different meanings in different individual cases. Second, public identifications do not exhaust the multiple character of identities; identities are not fixed by a particular public identity category.

Since one cannot bring each and every aspect of her identity into the public identification in question, espousing a particular public identity category such as “woman” does not fix one’s identity as “woman”. This means that identifications and multiple aspects of identities do not have to be thought in binary opposition but can be perfectly compatible.

In a similar vein to Hekman and Lloyd, Alcoff (2006) also challenges the deficient aspects in the fixation of identities as monolithic and oppressive units. For her, identities are not always imposed on people from outside. They involve peculiar meaning making processes as they are derived from one’s own daily reality, i.e, the materiality of experience which is unique. (Ibid, 42) Thus, Alcoff (Ibid, 43) asserts that identities are “interpretive horizon”s that help us interpret and work through our peculiar social location and group history. This hermeneutic aspect in identities in Alcoff’s account operates as a safety bell against the fixation of identities as stable, universal and oppressive categories.

To sum up, feminist scholars today engage in various attempts to indicate that stable, monolithic and universal identities are already outdated. These attempts diverge from each other when it comes to proposing an alternative to the old accounts of identities. While poststructuralists always consider identities as oppressive and thus avoid the identitarian logic, some other scholars point out the deficient aspects in the anti-identity theories, claiming that these theories obscure the potential in identities to problematize the relationship between politics, political demands and subjects. The latter group proposes a third way as a remedy to the theoretical deadlock caused by the opposition between modernist and poststructural accounts of subject. As seen above, such attempts to overcome the binary opposition between the modernist and the poststructural subject have been abundant in recent

feminist theory. I believe that the third way reconciling modernist and poststructuralist accounts of identities is quite useful to gain a thorough insight into the challenges and complexities of feminist identification.³ While negotiating a particular identity category, one may produce a dynamic and fragmented narrative about that particular identity, which would be in line with the poststructuralist accounts. Yet, at the same time one may also produce a narrative that presupposes a core self with a certain set of experiences, political demands and values formed at a certain time and place. The theoretical framework presented below reflects these complexities of the concept of identity and outlines different theoretical approaches that criticize old, stable accounts on identity and make revisions in the conceptualization of identity in order to render it compatible with the current social and political demands and needs.

3.1.1. Metaphors About “Subject in Process”

As noted before, second wave feminism often assumed that all women share common demands and experiences. This in return was accepted as the unifying basis of feminist politics. Yet, in the last decades this unified category of woman has been

³ Different concepts and terminology that approach to the same phenomenon from different angles can always be useful to comprehend the complexity of the phenomenon in question. In this sense, the anthropological concept “liminality”, coming from the Latin word *limen*, i.e., threshold, can be cited here as a useful analytical tool to further reflect on the dynamism of identities. In Turner’s anthropology of the ritual process, the liminal corresponds to a particular phase of a ritual process in which the subject redefines her identity in a setting that has “few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (Turner 1969: 94) For Turner, this is “an instant of pure potentiality” (1979: 41), which makes the transgression of norms and conventions possible. In this sense, the idea of liminality is in tune with mobile, dynamic selves in mid-way feminist theories. Thus, the term “liminal” would be also an explanatory adjective to express the terms in which nomadic, border identities are in a flux of change.

deeply interrogated on the basis that it mainly refers to white, middle class women. In line with the postmodern theory, this critique problematized the idea of stable subject and underlined that subject positions are never fixed but always open to transformation. In this account subjects are mobile and do not contain an essential self. Ferguson puts it as follows:

“Mobile subjects are ambiguous, messy and multiple, unstable but persevering. They are ironic, attentive to the manyness of things... They are politically difficult in their refusal to stick consistently to one stable identity claim.” (Ferguson, 1993: 154)

This account of subjects as units permanently open to rearticulation deconstructs fixed boundaries and prevents fixation of subject positions. Mobile selves in this account are ambiguous, messy, multiple and unstable. Ferguson (Ibid) articulates that such selves are “politically difficult in their refusal to stick consistently to one stable identity claim.” Such complexities of identities can be sometimes best expressed through metaphors. To be able to indicate various axes embedded in the construction of identities and the continual state of flux in subject positions, some scholars use metaphors such as “cyborg”, “nomad” or “mestiza”. These metaphors indicate that subject formation processes are coalitional as various axes of identity are brought together in these processes. (Lloyd, 2005: 15)

3.1.1.1.Mestiza

As a Chicana residing in the United States and as the lesbian daughter of a Mexican mother and a white father, Anzaldua (1987) uses the metaphor “mestiza” to refer to a subject position that is tolerant of differences, ambiguities, contradictions and acknowledges the co-existence of multiple differences in a subject position. To

emphasize the reflections of class, sexuality, hybridity and ghettoization on mestiza identity, Anzaldua writes the following: “As mestizas, we have different surfaces for each aspect of identity... We are written all over with sharp needles of experience”: (cited in Lloyd, 2005: 47) As an influential metaphor for multiple subjectivity, “mestiza” emblemizes the contradictions, the ambivalent character and plurality in marginal identities. According to Lloyd (2005: 48), the idea of borderland is pivotal to Anzaldua’s conception of mestiza identity. Borderland for Anzaldua does not only correspond to the geographical border between the U.S. and Mexico. Metaphorically, it signifies a space that is inhabited by those who transcend the confines of the “normal”. It is a site where the subject refuses all kinds of fixations. The idea of borderland confines the mestiza. Thus, she refuses to be contained by borders that define the mestiza as marginal. This strong denial of the binary thinking between the “normal” and the “marginal” renders the mestiza identity disorientating. (Lloyd, 2005: 49) Regarding mestiza’s relation to borders, Anzaldua (1987: 195) says that to survive in the borderlands, one has to be a crossroads. As Lloyd notes, being a crossroads also means that one is open to be transformed by others as well as transforms others. This possibility for fruitful dialogue points out the interrelational aspects of multiple identities and their potential for building coalitions with different subject positions.

In this frame, “mestiza” metaphorically resonates the poststructuralist idea that identity is always shifting and incomplete. This process of becoming is a creative but also a perplexing process. Lloyd (Ibid, 50) notes that the mestiza identity both signifies a desire for identity and the impossibility for it. In this way, it reveals the intricate and heterogenous nature of identity. The mestiza renders her identity formation a creative process in that she turns her volatile position between cultures

and races into a positive asset by stressing the mixed person's ability to translate and negotiate the diversity of meanings, practices and forms of life. However, this positive meaning attributed to mestiza identity in Anzaldua's account should not be seen as a romantic portrait. To point out the intricate aspects of mestiza identity, Anzaldua writes the following:

“The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The mestiza's dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness...” (1987: 78).

Anzaldua's remark brings into the open that mestizas' attempt to deconstruct the binary thinking between the “marginal” and the “normal” may result in mental disturbance and the indecisiveness of mestiza identity position, which, in return, demolishes the romantic portrait of being a mestiza.

3.1.1.2.Nomad

In *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti (1994) employs the metaphor of “nomadic subjectivity” to elaborate on the image of becoming. The term “nomadic subjectivity” is an attempt to explore how to live in a different way with multiple differences. Braidotti (Ibid, 66) posits that in order to make sense of the world, one requires an identity (sexual, national, social), yet not a fixed identity, valid for all time. In this regard, the nomadic subject develops an identity based on transitions, shifts and flexibility. In this sense, it is a multiple entity, a site for multiple forms of subjectivity, which cannot be reduced to a single, homogenous, monolithic form. Lloyd (2005: 16) states that nomad is a traveller who is always en route to somewhere else; she is never anywhere in particular. This refusal of the stableness of

fixed identity makes it a poignant metaphor for becoming other. Braidotti describes the nomad as follows:

“The nomad is intensive, multiple identity, functioning in a net of interconnections. S/he cannot be reduced to a linear, teleological form of subjectivity but is rather the site of multiple conceptions. She is embodied and therefore cultural; she is a technological compound of human and posthuman. She is complex and endowed with multiple capacities for interconnectedness in the impersonal mode. She is a cyborg but quipped also with an unconscious.” (1994: 36)

Braidotti’s employment of the metaphor “nomad” is a useful theoretical tool to grasp the transformation of bodies, identities and belongings in a culturally and ethnically heterogenous world. It entails multiple forms of belonging of subjects and reveals different ways in which a subject can have multiple belongings. It is possible to map out multiple ways of belonging that are subject to change depending on the particular location the subject occupies each time. Thus, nomadic subjectivity allows one to see alternative trajectories of subject formation and in this way dismantles the idea of unitary subject that belongs entirely to one location. As such, nomadic subjects are “subjects in transition” constituted by continuous shifts and changes. Nomadic subjects challenge hegemonic discourses and practices as they resist fixation of boundaries and being included in the pre-set, fixed identity categories and social structures. They attempt to blur all kinds of boundaries that discipline subjects into established social categories. In this sense, nomadic consciousness can be regarded as a form of political resistance to hegemonic views of subjectivity. Braidotti (1994: 25) argues that like the Foucauldian notion of counter-memory, nomadic consciousness can enact “a rebellion of subjugated knowledges”. The potential for resistance in the nomadic subjectivity does not originate from the literal act of travelling; nomadic subject can subvert hegemonic discourses without necessarily

changing her habitat. The potential for political resistance is related to the nomadic processes of becoming. Thus, the potential in nomadism to subvert conventions renders it a creative act that makes room for otherwise unlikely encounters, belongings and interactions. (Ibid, 6)

The fluidity in nomadism deterritorializes the self, thereby deconstructing identity categories. In its detachment from fixed identity categories, the nomadic self appreciates all kinds of differences such as race, class and gender without establishing a hierarchy among them. Braidotti (Ibid, 25) argues that this acknowledgement of the entangled relationships in the foundation of the self is “a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self.” As such, nomadic subjectivity provides a setting for interactions of axes of differentiation such as class, race, ethnicity, gender or age and reveals the multiple aspects of the self.

Alcoff (2006: 276) points out the connections between the nomadic self and the postmodernist notion of the indeterminate self. She quotes Braidotti stating that “the nomad’s relationship to the earth is one of transitory attachment and cyclical frequentation.” (Ibid) Alcoff also notes Braidotti’s detachment from embodiment of the self. For her, in rejecting certainties and incorporating differences, this account employs a useful safety belt against dogmatism. Yet, Alcoff argues that Braidotti’s conception of identity categories as inherently prone to essentialism and her rejection of embodiment cannot grasp the true character of entangled relationships in the construction of the self. Alcoff maintains that entangled relationships do not uproot the self, rather they reveal its complexities. In this sense, in Alcoff’s interpretation Braidotti’s nomadic self resists commitments, obligation and avoids responsibility by having only “transitory” attachments. She explains her position as below:

“The nomad self is bounded to no community and in actuality represents an absence of identity rather than a multiply entangled and engaged identity... To be a free-floating unbound variable is not the same as being multiply categorized...” (2006: 276)

Considering Alcoff’s point, one should ask the following the question: Is the nomadic subjectivity an attempt to uproot the self? Braidotti (1994: 31-33) clearly states that “being a nomad does not require one to sever all the ties that sustain identity, nor does it mean that one has no sense of identity.” For her, being a nomad means living in transition but this does not mean that one cannot create stable bases for identity that is necessary to function in a community. (Ibid, 33) Accordingly, the nomadic self makes the necessarily situated connections but this does not lead her to function within the limits of a fixed identity.

As a result, one can state that the idea of nomadic subjectivity corresponds to a self that is always in transition and at the same time can create stable ties, make commitments, feel obligations or fulfill responsibilities. Braidotti’s account of nomadism excludes any idea of identity as a fixed, stable entity yet it may be reconciled with flexible, dynamic accounts of attachments and ties. Instead of identity, the term “identification”, which I will explain later in this chapter, can be compatible with nomadism.

3.1.1.3.Cyborg

Haraway, in her essay *A Cyborg Manifesto*, argues against the conventional understandings of feminism which place gender and identity politics at the center. She introduces the image of “cyborg” to point out the shift from the unified human subject of identity to the posthuman of technoscience. Cyborg promotes hybridism

defined by biopower and techno-science, which devalues the categorical purity of modernity. (Gonzalez 2008) Haraway (1991: 149, 254) states this as the following: “A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction... We are all chimeras, theorized hybrids, and made of machine and organism; in one word, we are *cyborgs*”. The cyborg metaphor puts an end to the unity and substantive vision of the subject. It contributes to ruptures separating humans and animals; and distinguishing between animal-human organisms and machines. In this sense, it dismantles the binaries of physical-nonphysical, human, animal and machine and transgresses the binary opposition between nature and culture. Through its hybrid and mosaic character, it points out the possibility for open-ended subjectivity and its potential for relentless permutation. The “cyborg” metaphor problematizes the idea of boundaries and blurs them by rendering them obsolete. It blurs the boundaries between organic and mechanical, artificial and natural, real and fictional. Accordingly, what makes us human is neither wholly natural nor artificial. This posthuman person is both organic and mechanical, artificial and natural, real and fictional in Haraway’s account.

Targeting at binary oppositions between nature and culture, mind and body, cyborg as a postmodernist strategy signifies the post-gender world where the differentiation between female and male bodies loses its meaning. Identity politics based on essential unity of particular identities is totally eliminated from the cyborg narrative. In this frame, Haraway (1991: 297) calls for a cyborg feminism. For her, other conventional forms of feminisms generate taxonomies that define what the official woman’s experience will be and therefore are based on a matrix of women’s domination of each other. In Haraway’s account, cyborg feminism argues against any kind of belief in essential unity and confronts dominations of unified categories such

as race, gender, sexuality, class. Identity in cyborg feminism is replaced with affinity. (Ibid, 296) If diffuse political coalitions are to be united, this unification can only be realized along the lines of affinity. Affinity in this account turns out to be a strategic term that has nothing to do with natural identification but signifies only a momentary, strategic coalition formed to render a particular subject position visible. Haraway (Ibid) gives the situation of U.S. black women as an example. Oppressive mechanisms embedded in the category of gender and race may not allow them to speak under these categories but they can consciously construct a space for themselves to speak as women of colour. However, this coalitional space based on an affinity of interests is never a unified category since those who affirm their identity as a U.S. woman of colour, diverge from each other because of many differences they have.

To conclude, the metaphors described above are all attempts to bring to light the complexities and multiplicities of the self. The idea of becoming, hybridity, borderlands and the act of transgressing fixed boundaries are pivotal to these metaphors. In place of identity as a fixed, stable entity, they introduce the idea of “subject in process”. This dynamic form of subject resists fixation, categorization and blurs fixed boundaries that attempt to categorize the subject as marginal. In this sense, it can enact a rebellion of subjugated knowledges. The metaphors explained above are not just linguistic forms but they are important instruments with a capacity to shed light on contemporary questions regarding identity. One of the challenges that confronts feminist theory today is to find new images that can help us gain an insight of the changing conditions of the subject. The metaphors explained above serve this purpose. The fluidity, hybridity and flexibility in their character distinguishes them from essentialist, fixed conceptions of identity. Gonzalez (2008:

24) employs the metaphor of an “island” to depict the modernist, fixed conceptions of identity. The image of an island is surrounded by stable borders. In this sense, this image clearly depicts the modernist conception of identity as a natural and fixed entity. In opposition to the fixity of the image of island, *mestiza*, *nomad* and *cyborg* stress the journey of becoming and point out to a subject position where binary oppositions are exchanged with hybrid forms of being.

Keeping in mind these useful theoretical tools, one should also ask whether these dynamic metaphors undervalue commitments, responsibilities and narratives of belonging altogether, as Alcoff argues. With this concern in mind, it is necessary to conceptualize these metaphors in such a way that they do not uproot the self but rather render it both flexible and situated at the same time.

3.2. Attempts to Generate A New Terminology Instead of “Identity”

Critics of identity point out that identities are contextual as they change depending on the character of the historical time and place in question. Moreover, they underline that identity categories are neither stable nor homogenous. Postmodern scholars such as Butler interpret identity categories as fictive by unmasking their discursive formation and dismantling the idea of essence. Accordingly, authentic or exemplary women’s experience does not exist because women’s experiences are different from each other, which makes it impossible to unify different women under the signifier “woman”. As a result, any account of “authentic women’s experience” is prone to naturalize a particular group of women’s experiences while marginalizing others. The attempt to identify authentic women’s experience obscures the power relations involved in the production and maintenance of the identity category in question.

Challenging the attempts to mystify identities as natural, this critique has greatly enhanced the approach to identities in the contemporary era. However, scholars today are quite divided on whether identity is still a useful concept to comprehend the social and political phenomena. Some poststructuralist theorists argue for the abandonment of the category of identity altogether since any argument based on identity categories, they suggest, is doomed to operate through a myriad of exclusions. On the other hand, pro-identity theorists oppose this proposal for abandoning identity as they maintain that identity is a crucial marker for history, social location, and positionality and therefore a key concept to analyze how the self is positioned in the social and political world. What they suggest instead is a new way of thinking about identity. Going beyond the dichotomy between “essentialist” and “postmodernist” theories of identity, they contend that an adequate theory of identity should allow a social theorist to analyze the possibilities and limits of different identities. For them, neither identity nor politics of identity is inherently constraining. In this account, it is alleged that identities can also be enabling and enriching forms of attachment and feeling. Accordingly, acknowledging that identities are significant modes by which people experience, understand, and know the world, does not necessarily lead one to adopt an essentialist approach. The pro-identity approach explained here defends the category of identity without relying on a mystified or reified essence. Rather, it sees identities as context-specific, socially embodied narratives about ourselves. Avoiding from defining identities as natural facts of who we are, it reconfigures the idea of identity as the locus by which social locations are hierarchically organized and power relations are reinforced as well as challenged. Contrary to the postmodern thinking which evaluates identities as discursive enforcements and disciplinary categories imposed on subjects, the pro-

identity approach regards the idea of identity as a positive and meaningful entity that provides room for individual interpretation of one's social location.

In short, contemporary social world is no longer a field that operates through fixed, static categories. It is relentlessly reshaped along with the changing categories used to account for our position in the midst of this transformation. The postmodern move that aims to deessentialize identities in line with the changing conditions of contemporary world does not necessarily require the abandonment of identities. (Nicholson and Seidman, 1995: 25) Rather, what is needed here is finding out new ways to think about identities while avoiding essentialism. This deconstruction of essential identities presupposes a new form of politics which is not based on unified identity categories but is organized around specific issues, struggles, goals that bring different parties together and generate coalitions. (Ibid, 28) This new understanding of politics does not automatically lead to the abandonment of the concept of "woman" or signify the beginning of a post-gender world. Mouffe (2005: 87) argues that "partial fixations can take place and precarious forms of identification can be established around the category 'women' that provide the basis for a feminist identity and a feminist struggle". It is also necessary to note that such identifications will be complex formations that are not exclusively centered on gender but also interlock with class, sexuality, race, nationality, and so on. If the deconstruction of essential identities is possible without disavowing the possibility of forming political mobilization and making political demands, the task of the social theorist is to generate a new language that would express this new reconfiguration of identities. To this aim, scholars have employed different terms to reflect on the contemporary challenges regarding the issue of identity. Their main effort is to point out the

centrality of the concept of identity by avoiding essentialist approaches. Below is a review of the theoretical openings generated by such efforts.

3.2.1. Identity As “Ungrounded Ground”

To develop a new approach to identity that transcends the impasse characterizing current debates on identity, in her book *Private Selves, Public Identities*, Hekman (2004) identifies the misconceptions that are embedded in the prevalent conceptualizations of identity. For her, the fictive subject in the postmodern theory is not the only alternative to the modernist subject. She argues that the notion of a coherent identity in the postmodern thinking is often falsely condemned as being repressive. In Hekman's account, we are not wholly formed by hegemonic discourses, as postmodernist theorists argue. Rather, individuals are endowed with unique attributes that distinguish them from standardized identity categories, which grants them the ability to interpret the discourses around them through their own perspective and take a position accordingly. In this sense, for Hekman, everyone possesses a core self that allows one to operate in public life. This core self is constituted both by public forces such as hegemonic discourses affecting the limits of what one can say and personal forces such as character or family. (Ibid, 7) Through making a distinction between private and public selves, Hekman aims to overcome the claim that identities inherently lead to conformism, uniformity and thus ignore multiplicities and diversities. She underlines that public identity categories are redefined in each individual case in line with the unique attributes that the core self has. In this sense, she defines political action as a site of interface between public and personal identity. For example, espousing the identity “woman” in the public arena

does not make one identical with others who make the same identification. Nor does it mean that this identification subsumes all the unique aspects of personal identity under the category “woman”. This point reminds us that personal selves do not have to be fixed by public identity categories. As Hekman (Ibid, 7) argues, “we are all embedded in social structures but our embeddedness occurs at different locations.”

In this frame, Hekman identifies two precautions against the fixation of identities. First, she states that those who espouse a particular public identity category may share similar interests or positions with each other. Yet, they are by no means identical since the unique aspects of their personal identities lead them to reinterpret the public identity category in question in line with their own needs and demands. Second, Hekman underlines that identifying with a public identity category does not mean to be subsumed entirely under that category since the complex character of personal identities far exceeds the scope of that category in question. Relying on this point, one can claim that identification with a particular public identity category does not constitute an obstacle to the multiple aspects of the self.

Hekman acknowledges that there is no clear-cut distinction between public and personal selves as they mutually constitute each other. Without ignoring this point, she draws attention to the differences between public and private selves, which allows her to indicate that identities are not necessarily oppressive and unifying. For her, the core self that everyone possesses is formed by a complex array of forces that are both public and personal. By relying on object relations theory, she maintains that the core self that is formed in relation to significant others in the early years of life persists over time. (Ibid, 102) It is this core self that constitutes the key aspect of Hekman’s critique against postmodern understandings of identity. According to her, the postmodern approach fails to acknowledge the differences among different

identity positions. The claim that we are all determined by social forces can explain the complexities of our identities only to a certain extent. For Hekman, an adequate theory of identity must be able to account for the unique, individual aspects of identities and their effects on our social position:

“An adequate theory of identity must have an explanation for how hegemonic concepts such as “woman” are filtered through the lens of individual situations. It must explain how race, class, and ethnicity as well as the peculiarities of particular families shape identities not as identical but as different. It must be able to explain the intersection of public identities such as “woman,” “middle class,” “black,” “Italian,” and so on with the particulars of individual families and social situations and how these combine to construct a personal identity.” (2004: 16)

In Hekman’s reading, Butler’s postmodern approach envisions identity as an entity wholly produced by the surrounding discourses, thereby reducing identity to a void. Hekman argues that this approach eliminates the idea of agency and the ability to act since it reduces subjects to discursive formations. For Butler (1993: 115), what is needed against the perils of the modernist subject is the political resistance of incoherent identities. Accordingly, since fixed, coherent identities are always cohesive, all the attributes of the modernist subject must be rejected. Yet, this argument leaves Butler’s account in a difficult position since it undermines the ability of the fictive subject to act. For Butler, identity politics fixes the essence of each identity category through hegemonic discourses. In relation to feminist politics, she argues that “the category of woman, the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought”. (1990: 2). In Butler’s account, organizing feminist politics around the category of woman conceals the discursive origins of the fabricated core of gender identity. What she proposes instead is to deconstruct identity politics in order to reveal the very terms through which identity is articulated (1990:148). In this frame, the only way to resist hegemonic fabrication of essential core of gender identities is to resort to

pastiche. Since gender identity in Butler's theory is produced through repeated performative acts, the resistance strategy requires the undoing of these entrenched performative gender acts. In this sense, Butler suggest that the strategy of *pastiche* entails the mocking of the notion of an original. It allows one to subvert essential gender identities and not to perform gender as it is supposed to be performed. However, the idea of resistance is quite problematic in Butler's theory because there is always the danger of promoting the power that one is struggling against. Butler (1993: 241) herself asks the following: "How is it possible to tell the difference between the power we promote and the power we oppose?" For example, she argues that a lesbian who opposes heterosexuality absolutely may be more in its power than a straight woman since she establishes her opposition as opposed to the norms of heterosexuality and therefore cannot transcend the discursive boundaries established by the power that she opposes. (Ibid, 116–17). Since there is no exact formula to know the difference between the power we promote and the power we oppose, the scope of action for Butler's fictive subject is quite fragile. Hekman (2004: 15) alleges that it is unclear how the fictive, performative subjects can act, what actions they might perform and what power they might subvert. Thus, she concludes that there is no conceivable political strategy that emerges from Butler's strategy of *pastiche*. (Ibid)

In short, Hekman distances herself from Butler's theory on the basis of two problematic points explained above: First, she opposes the rigid social constructionism in Butler's account and instead suggests that subjects are not social dupes that are wholly constructed by discourses in an identical way. To oppose this point, she underscores the fact that public identity categories are reinterpreted through unique aspects of personal identity. Second, she criticizes Butler's idea of fictive self

on the basis that its ability to act has serious limitations. As a result, she develops a third way by arguing that it is possible to theorize a stable core of identity without abandoning social construction or presupposing an essential subject. The core self that Hekman proposes is socially constructed in the early years of childhood. This “ungrounded ground” provides a secure base to act without abandoning the idea of social construction.

3.2.2. Identity As “Interpretive Horizon”

In *Visible Identities*, Alcoff (2006) challenges the argument that identity claims lead to distrust, miscommunication, and disunity. To make identities more visible and point out their central character in social and political analysis, she deconstructs the anti-identity trend in scholarship by challenging the main political arguments behind the contemporary critique of identity, which she outlines as below: (Ibid, 38)

- (1) Identities inevitably lead to conflicting loyalties within a larger grouping, such as a nation. (Schlessinger 1992)
- (2) By encouraging the reification of group identities, identity politics results in conformism, intolerance, and patriarchalism. (Fraser, 2000, 112–13).
- (3) Since rational reflection requires a certain distance from identities, strongly felt identities pose major problems for rational deliberation.

For Alcoff, these critiques are either based on a misconception of identity as necessarily oppressive and unifying or they rely on the liberal conception of generic human which erases the particularities of identities for the sake of objective reasoning. Alcoff (2006: 6) states that it is the refusal to acknowledge the particularities of identities that paves the way to miscommunication and disunity:

“When I refuse to listen to how you are different from me, I am refusing to know who you are. But without understanding fully who you are, I will never be able to appreciate precisely how we are more alike than I might have originally supposed.”

For Alcoff, it is not possible to identify a vantage point that is above particularities since everyone speaks from a particular location, experience and context. Setting aside particularities signifies the impossibility of communication, given that individuals make judgements as subjects who are embedded in a particular frame of reference. In this perspective, there can be no reasoning without sight, without some background. An environmentalist, for example, cannot engage in a debate about the use of energy resources without relying on her perspective on environmental issues. To stress the situatedness of judgements and perceptions, Alcoff argues the following:

“To say that we have identities, histories, social locations, experiences, cultures, and so on is simply to say that we exist. Identities are best understood as ways in which we and others around us represent our material ties to historical events and social structures.” (Ibid, 287)

Accordingly, identities matter especially for those whose experiences are marginally positioned vis-a-vis others. To clearly designate the salience of identities on the representation of selves, Alcoff elaborates on “visible” identities such as gender and race whose marks on the body cannot be erased. For her, age can be masked, homosexuality or class can be hidden but markers such as gender and race are inevitably visible and thus have to be incorporated into social and political analyses in order to uncover the mechanisms by which they are enacted and reproduced. (Ibid, 6) In this frame, Alcoff engages in an attempt to reconstruct identity as a counter model of the abstract individual citizen who has no gender, race, or cultural background. Yet, Alcoff’s reconstruction does not mean going back to essentialist accounts. She opposes essentialist approaches by underlining the dynamic and

socially constructed character of identities. In Alcoff's account, identities are not simply "there" prior to the politics of interpretation; rather, they are produced as a result of complex processes of interpreting and working through an objective social location and group history. (Ibid, 9) As entities deeply grounded in social locations, identities resonate with the lived experience of subjecthood. In this sense, the materiality of lived experience is quite central to Alcoff's conception of identities. Accordingly, identities provide meaning in line with the subject's daily reality. Moreover, they are constituted in particular contextual conditions and at particular historical periods. Individuals and groups attempt to give meaning to their located lived experiences in relation to historical narratives. Thus, Alcoff suggests that the particularities of identities are best understood through specific context-based analyses. (Ibid)

To point out the situatedness of the self, Alcoff relies on the concept of "horizon" used by Charles Taylor (1989). In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor provides an alternative account of selfhood, which challenges the disengaged self of modernity. In the accounts on the modern subject, self-mastery is defined in such a way that it is only achieved through objectifying the surrounding world, i.e., disengaged reasoning. (Mason, 2010) Opposing this picture of the self, Taylor argues the following:

"My identity is defined by the commitments and identification which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose" (1989: 27)

Drawing on Taylor's views, Alcoff defines identity as "interpretive horizon", i.e., as a site where one engages in meaning making processes. This horizon of intelligibility corresponds to a "perspectival location from which the interpreter looks out at the

world". (2006: 95) According to this, identities as interpretive locations enable individuals to make judgments about their selves and the social world in which they live. By making use of the hermeneutic approach, Alcoff argues that the self is always culturally located, which in return endows it with a horizon as a specific location. This hermeneutic insight makes it possible to construct a dynamic account of identity, given that meanings are always made and remade in relation to the changing contextual conditions. The meanings of a particular identity are constructed in different ways since differently located embodied subjects interpret the meanings of their identities in line with the peculiarities of their social location. In other words, identities do not operate on the basis of a stable set of interests, but rather function as an interpretive site in relation to a specific horizon, rendering the self open to change. (Ibid, 43) In this account, identity does not lead to a deterministic interpretation of social locations and historical narratives; as an interpretive horizon, it helps us bring out certain experiences and condition into the open. The interpretive horizon embedded in identities provides one a certain vantage point in line with the historical situatedness and lived experiences, which, in return, is helpful in illuminating the political implications of identities. This vantage point may facilitate to access to certain historical conditions that were invisible before. For instance, after they perceive gender discrimination, women, who used to believe that downplaying their identity as women in public life will ensure their fair treatment, may become feminists. (Ibid, 147)

So far, it is clear that in Alcoff's account, identities do not determine one's interpretation of the social world but only provide horizons which help one disclose certain experiences, historical narratives or contextual conditions. In this account of identity as interpretive horizon that allows individuals to make sense of the world,

contextual conditions as well as the materiality of lived experience provide the setting for making judgements about the self and the world. The social world and the self is always apprehended from within the historical location. Therefore, the primary point here is to disclose different perspectival locations and different meanings derived through them.

As noted above, materiality of lived experience is especially crucial for Alcoff's account. For Alcoff (Ibid, 113) the situatedness of horizons is not simply perspectival but also material and embodied. In this sense, she alleges that interpretive horizon does not only operate in the form of presuppositions and perceptual orientations but it also has a tacit presence in the body in the form of gender or race. The materiality of lived experience helps Alcoff challenge the liberal picture of the separate, autonomous and disembodied self. In this way, she argues for an embodied subjectivity and attempts to build up a concept of identity closer to reality.

Another crucial aspect of Alcoff's account on identities is its relational character. Alcoff points out that the other is internal to the self's substantive content. For Alcoff (Ibid, 45), this is not a relation of dependence but a mutually constitutive relationship in which the other is a part of one's identity, i.e, a part of one's horizon. Alcoff (Ibid, 79) argues that in both modern and postmodern accounts what comes to the individual from the social- whether it is named as discourse, disciplinary mechanisms or cultural traditions- is seen as necessarily constraining. She opposes this claim by arguing that the self cannot make any judgements outside the specific horizon constituted by Others since the self operates in a situated plane. (Ibid, 82) Given the hermeneutic insight that the self is always culturally located, the mutually constitutive relationship that the self constitutes with Others provides the backbone

of the perspectival location of the self. Therefore, Alcoff underlines that self-other relations are fundamental to the concept of identity, rationality and autonomy. This view on the self-other relationships also contributes to the idea that rather than leading to disunity, identities in fact facilitate communication as they are formed in close relation to others.

In Alcoff's model, critical rationality and moral agency develop and operate within specific social contexts. The act of discerning meaning is always performed in a particular place and time. To underline the particularities of interpretations of the social world, Alcoff employs the term "situated reasoning". (Ibid, 94) Accordingly, meanings can change depending on the historical situations in which they are formed. In this view, reasoning is regarded as "an interpretive process involving the social location of the knower". (Ibid, 95) Like the idea of interpretive horizon, situated reasoning captures the experiences of the individual and the context in which the act of interpretation takes place. Both the concept of horizon and situated reasoning point out the mediated nature of experience and the fluid character of identity. In this sense, the concept of interpretive horizon as a perspectival location affecting one's perceptions and interpretations is essential to explain situated reasoning. (Ibid,102)

"Positionality", which signifies a continuous engagement of the self into social reality, is in tune with Alcoff's views on identities. To challenge the gender-neutral aspects of modern notions of subjectivity and the post-gender orientation in postmodern theory, "subject as positionality" links the idea of social construct with human agency. De Lauretis (1984: 159) argues that the self is produced by one's subjective engagement with the social world. The idea of subjectivity formed as a result of the interaction with the world implies that agency is not simply produced by

external structures of meaning. Individuals can enact their agency within the frames of particular discursive formations. Accordingly, gendered subjectivity is set both by the social location and by individual judgements and choices made from within the social location in question. The gendered self is part of the historicized narrative and at the same time actively contributes to the context in which she is positioned. This conception of the subject as positionality, as non-essentialized and emergent from historical experience and yet located in social structures, challenges the essential, universally same and ahistorical accounts of gendered subjectivity. Accordingly, the self is reconstructed anew each time when the horizon of meanings available in a culture changes. Alcoff (2006: 147) notes that if identity politics is reinterpreted through the lenses provided by the idea of subject as positionality, it can gain a new meaning that does not presuppose a stable set of judgements, perceptions and demands. In this way, it can incorporate identity into political analysis as an enabling, perspectival location. For Alcoff, this view allows one to avoid essentialist definitions that define women's identity through ahistorical, universal categories such as peacefulness or disposition to nurture. Moreover, it helps one overcome the mere politics of negation in postmodern thinking that opposes all identity claims and identity-based interpellations and definitions. Alcoff (Ibid, 152) argues that it is possible to do better than to say, "I will make demands in the name of women even though I don't accept the category of 'women.'" For her, since women exist in particular locations, we should make demands that reflect women's needs on the condition that we don't universalize their needs or the content of their political goals.

3.2.3. “Identification” Instead of Identity

Another example of the pro-identity stand which tries to find a mid-way between essentialism and the postmodern dismantling of identity, is the replacement of the term identity with “identification”. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) suggest that the heavily burdened, deeply ambiguous character of the term “identity” today makes it necessary to come up with a new terminology that can capture the contemporary problems related to the subject’s position in the social world. They label the essentialist accounts as “strong” conceptions of identity and those which stress fluidity and flexibility as “weak” conceptions. Accordingly, while “strong” conceptions of identity signify sameness, group boundedness and homogeneity, “weak” conceptions persistently insist that identities are multiple, malleable and fluid. For Brubaker and Cooper, the former account is too “strong” to deal with elastic aspects of identity issues, whereas the latter is so infinitely elastic that it cannot comprehend the particular aspects of identity that remain same and identical over time. To compensate for the limitations of each approach, Brubaker and Cooper suggest the employment of the term “identification” in order to overcome the problems and ambiguities in strong and weak conceptions of identity.

On the other hand, Hall (1996: 2) argues that in the contemporary theoretical world, in which postmodern thinking puts key concepts under erasure, identity cannot be dealt with by employing old analytical methods. Yet, it cannot be totally eliminated either since it is a central concept in social and political analysis without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all. Questions of agency and politics are deeply related to identity issues. To transcend the impasse generated by the binary opposition between essentialist and postmodern thinking, Hall, like

Brubaker and Cooper, proposes the concept of “identification” as a new framework that can help us tackle with the key questions regarding self and agency.

Hall agrees with the poststructuralist critique, namely with Foucault by claiming that the focus should be put on the discursive practices rather than on the knowing subject. Identities, in Hall’s account, are deeply embedded in history, language and culture; they designate the process of “becoming” rather than “being”. They are constituted by questions about the representation of the self: How we have been represented and how we might represent ourselves. (Ibid, 4) As such, identities are socially constructed entities that come into being only within representation. Hall claims that its socially constructed character or its fictional nature that arises from the the narrativization of the self does not undermine the political effectivity of identity. Therefore, to understand identities, one has to acknowledge that they are produced within discursive formations and practices through specific modalities of power.

In this frame, Hall (Ibid, 6) argues that identities are points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct. The term “identification” helps Hall avoid the reifying connotations of identity and capture the idea of identity as constituted within representation. Identification, for Hall (Ibid, 3) is a process of articulation that entails discursive work and marking of symbolic boundaries. It does not assume a stable core-self, unfolding from beginning to end without change. Self as such is never unified, increasingly fractured, never singular but multiplies across different, intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices, positions. Thus, this process of articulation can never be completed; but it is always conditional, contingent and always in flux.

However, for Hall, this discursive character of identification does not imply the abolition or abandonment of agency. He states that the focus on discursive

practice in the analysis of subjects and identity positions can not reach its goal without taking into account the practices of subjective self-constitution. (Ibid, 13) In this sense, for Hall, the Foucauldian discursive approach to identity has to be complemented with a theory that can investigate the mechanisms by which individuals identify (or do not identify) with subject positions available to them, how they interpret, negotiate and perform these positions. In short, Hall calls for a theory that can account for the relations that subjects form with discursive practices. In a similar way to this, Hekman claims that the poststructural thinking does not provide useful tools to explain the individual negotiations of subject positions and the differences in identities that arise from these negotiations:

“If, as Butler claims, we are all products of the discourses that constitute us, how can we explain the differences between us, particularly between women who are, on her account, constituted by the hegemonic concept “woman”? Specifically, how do we explain the fact that some women resist and others conform?” (2004: 16)

In Brubaker and Cooper’s conception of identification, there is a similar stress on individual agents who do the act of identifying. Brubaker and Cooper argue that identification is intrinsic to social life. Modern life may necessitate many identification acts through which one locates oneself vis-a-vis others, in a narrative or in a public category. These identification acts are contextual in the sense that they may vary depending on the context in which they take place. Power relations and discursive practices deeply affect how one identifies oneself and how one is identified by others. Yet, Brubaker and Cooper’s conception of identification does not treat individuals as social dupes who have no power to interpret the social world. By complementing “identification” with the term “self-understanding”, they emphasize agency and situated subjectivity. To point out the peculiarities of subjective reasoning, they incorporate into the analysis the factors which affect one's

own understanding of oneself. Being an African-American, a Kurd or a lesbian generate effects on how one negotiates subjects positions constituted in a particular discursive formation.

The stress put on intentionality, reflexivity and agency along with the acknowledgement that identities are dynamic, can also be found in Weir's account. Weir (2008) suggests that the complexity of identity questions cannot be reduced to questions of category which ignore the individuality embedded in negotiations of identity. Instead of categorization, Weir (2008: 115) proposes to employ "identification-with": "identification with others, identification with values and ideals, identification with ourselves". For her, through such an approach it is possible to replace the so-called categorical "objectivity" with the subjectivity of identifications. Weir (Ibid, 116) states that this approach involves "a shift from a metaphysical to an ethical and political model of identity; from a static to a relational model; from a model of identity as sameness to a model of identity that focuses on what matters, what is meaningful for us". In this model, questions of identity are dealt with through the lenses of one's attachments and commitments, i.e, one's identifications. In this frame, Weir redefines identity politics as politics of identification. She specifies three kinds of identifications: First, we identify with certain values and ideals that we are committed to. For example, if we identify with feminist ideals, we develop a certain critique of male oppression yet this does not mean that we develop the same kind of critique with others and identify with the same values and ideals. Moreover, in Weir's model our values and ideals are not static but change depending on time and context. The key idea here is that these identifications that we develop inform our practices. Second, we identify as a "we", which translates into solidarity and collective action. Third, we also form

identifications with others. In Weir's conception, identifications with ideals, with "we's" and with each other render us historically situated. Even though at one point one may come up with an "objective" categorical identity, it is necessary to acknowledge that it interacts with a "subjective, interest-driven, identification-based, relational identity." (Ibid, 116) From here, it is clear that for Weir, identities should be dealt with as interpretations and affective commitments. This non-categorical conception of identity excludes identity as sameness; it puts the emphasis on relationships with other people and on identifications with what is significant to us. In this way, it argues for an ethical-relational and political model of identity. To stress the need to take into account the subjective aspects of identifications, Weir quotes Taylor's following statement:

"The question "Who am I?" can't necessarily be answered by giving name and genealogy. What does answer this question for us is an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand." (cited in Weir, 2008: 117)

Accordingly, questions about identity cannot be answered in terms of categories and fixed labels; they can only be tackled with by asking what matters to oneself: "What is the meaning and significance of my life? In other words, to what and to whom am I attached? With what and with whom do I identify?" (Ibid) In short, this subjective, interest-driven, strategic conception of identity helps one reconfigure identities as identifications that are defined through one's relations with oneself, others and the social world. In this way, it takes into account the multiplicity of identity negotiations generated by subjective interpretations. In a similar vein, bell hooks (2000) states that to acknowledge differences between feminisms, one has to avoid categorical identities but formulate commitments and ideals in terms of

identifications. Instead of the phrase “I am a feminist”, she proposes the statement “I advocate feminism”. For her, the former statement plugs one into stereotypical, heavily loaded conceptions of feminist identity, while the latter provides room for differences in conceptions of feminism. (2000: 29) This model of identification replaces identity politics as a firmly set belonging to fixed identity categories with an understanding of identity formed through relations, identifications and narratives in a constant meaning making process.

3.2.4. Narrative Identity

The idea of narrative provides a fresh ground to deal with questions about agency and intentionality which are concepts usually regarded as passé in the current postmodern era. Some feminist scholars such as Benhabib (1999), McNay (1999) and Lara (1998) resort to the idea of narrative with the aim to define a more active conception of the self. They maintain that the poststructuralist paradigm neglects the hermeneutic dimension of experience by reducing subjects to discursive effects, which deprives social analysts of any tools to investigate the question as to how social actors interpret the world.

Narratives represent storied ways of communicating. (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997) They help individuals construct storied accounts of themselves and their relation to the social world. As such, narratives are a significant mode of communication through which people attribute meaning to the past and present and connect together self and other. The idea of narrative corresponds to the act of connecting episodes and events in life with the help of temporality. (Ricoeur 1984) The question as to what has happened over time and how can one make sense of it by connecting it to other events, is fundamental to the idea of narrative.

In this frame, the narrative account of identity brings together the postmodern emphasis on social constructedness with the idea of a coherent self. The narrative account is anti-essentialist in that it opposes the idea that meaning is inherent to action. Rather, meaning in this account is produced as a result of interpretive strategies. Accordingly, narratives are interpretive devices produced in a specific context by specific people who are not passive carriers of experience but give meaning to the social world through their interpretive ability. (Lawler, 2003: 242) In addition to this, this account incorporates the idea of constant change into the analysis of self and identity and in this way, replaces the fixity of essentialist accounts with a dynamic account. Since the idea of narrative attempts to understand human experience in time, this inherent temporality of experience in the idea of narrative prevents closure of identities. The flux of events accommodate the emergence of new possibilities and new meaning making processes. Therefore, in line with the postmodern accounts, narrative conception of identity espouses that identity is always dynamic and incorporates the flux of experience. However, this does not mean that identity is free-floating. In the narrative account, the self is endowed with an active concept of agency and strong notions of self-expression and reflexivity. According to this account, by viewing the coherent and unified subject as a discursive imposition, the post-structuralist view neglects the continuity of the self over time. (McNay, 1999: 89–94) Therefore, one can say that one of the main goals of the narrative account is to replace the free floating subject in the postmodern thinking with a situated subject who can connect events in the social world in order to make sense of it. This account moves from a negative paradigm of subject formation, which regards identities as inherently repressive and limits the scope of action to the subversion of the discursively imposed identities, to a generative

paradigm endowing subjects with intentionality and acknowledging their creative ability to interpret the available historical narratives. (Ibid)

Benhabib (1999) argues that the narrative account defines identities in time not in terms of strong, fixed evaluative commitments but in terms of an ability to make sense. Accordingly, one's commitments and attachments may shift in time but the need to attribute meaning to one's experiences in a social world always persists. Benhabib (Ibid, 14) also notes that this need to make sense does not necessarily refer to an Aristotelian or Victorian narrative with a clear beginning and ending. She states that the need to make sense does not always produce one single narrative but many since narration processes contain constant attempts to retell, remember and reconfigure. In addition, Benhabib acknowledges that the drive to narrative unity does not exhaust the contradictory dimensions of subjectivity that do not perfectly fit into the narrative in question. Therefore, for her, the need to narrate should not be seen as an imposition but as an interpretive lens through which the relations between the self and the social world are rendered meaningful, whenever possible. In this frame, the main argument in the narrative account is that not each and every conception of identity suggests a stable, frozen subject and that it is possible to reconcile dynamism and coherence of the self.

Relying on the discussions so far, one can suggest that Alcoff's conception of identity as "interpretive horizon" bears resemblance to the narrative account of identity in the sense that they both point out the hermeneutic aspect of experience. In both of these accounts, the interpretive strategies that the self employs play a key function in the production of meaning. The narrative account also shares similarities with Hekman's view of identity as "ungrounded ground" in its stress on the coherent aspects of the self. Both Hekman's approach and the narrative approach attempt to

come up with a new theoretical frame which points out that the coherence of the self and its dynamism may coexist.

Another crucial characteristics of the narrative account is its stress on the interrelational aspects of identity. Replacing the postmodern theory of performativity with the narrative approach to the self, Benhabib provides an elaborate discussion on the interrelational aspects of narrative identity. In her approach, she aims to propose a more developed account of communicative-pragmatic abilities of everyday life to explain creativity underlying individuals' negotiations of subject positions available in the social world. To underscore the inventiveness that subjects can employ to resist norms of subordination and create new ways of being, Benhabib revises the Habermasian theoretical framework by taking into account contextuality and situated subjectivity. The Habermasian dialogic model of moral deliberation argues for an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters, which is open and accessible to all. The "communicative rationality" in the Habermasian model assumes that through a non-coercive, unifying consensus-building force of discourse, participants in a public debate can overcome their subjective views and reach a rationally motivated agreement. (Habermas 1987: 294, 315) For some feminist scholars, the Habermasian commitment to formalism, impartiality and universalism, which I will discuss in more detail in the next part, cannot capture the mechanisms through which power relations operate in the public sphere. Trying to incorporate points of view that each participant will introduce to the procedures of deliberation, Benhabib argues for a situated self. For her, the idea of narrative may be employed as a remedy for the formalism and universalism of the Habermasian communicative theory since it encompasses more nuanced notions of intersubjectivity and agency and attributes greater sensitivity to difference. (McNay, 1999: 6) Benhabib's

conception of narrative identity attempts to overcome formalism and universalism of the Habermasian communicative ethics as well as the problem of fixity in the static accounts of the modern subject, by locating the self in an interrelational web. Benhabib (1999: 345) argues that to be a self is to act from within “webs of interlocution”, which range from micro narratives such as family to macro narratives of gender or nation. The interweaving of these multiple, historically and culturally specific narratives constitute an individual’s sense of the self. In this sense, individuals choose particular narratives from within a repertoire of public narratives.

To link the individual and the collective through narrative, Sommers and Gibson (1994: 62) refer to the concept of “public narratives”, which they define as narratives that are attached to social and institutional formations rather than the single individual. This idea of public narrative suggest that there is a limit to what kind of narratives can be told and what can be said in these narratives. Individuals do not produce narratives in isolation but they choose from a repertoire of already emplotted stories. In short, narratives are not freely fabricated but largely depend on public narratives and how individuals are positioned vis-a-vis them.

However, as Benhabib (1999: 345) argues, the fact that narrative codes are never freely chosen does not mean that they exclude inventiveness or the capacity to “initiate new actions and new sentences in conversation”. The hermeneutic aspect involved in the narrative allows one to retell public narratives in a myriad of different ways. A person's temporal and spatial location in the repertoire of available representations and stories in the social world provides a unique perspective for the narration processes and makes it possible to revise or reconstruct public narratives.

To be inserted into webs of interlocution also involves a conversation with others. Narratives are subject to change and always in process also because others' narratives prevent closure of one's own narratives. Benhabib (1999: 348) point out that others are not just the subject matter of one's own narrative; rather, in telling their own stories they unsettle one's self-understanding. Thus, since there always will be aspects of others' narratives, narratives can never have a precise closure, which renders the narrative account of identity alert about the dangers of fixity.

3.2.5. Interrelational Identity

As a response to the need for new models of individuation, agency, and autonomy, Weir reformulates the self in such a way that it can include difference and heterogeneity. She argues that an adequate theory of identity should be able to acknowledge that individuals are embedded, localized, constituted, fragmented and also subject to systems of power, oppression and exploitation. (1996: 184) With these concerns in mind, she attempts to find a third way that can reconcile the relational feminist theories on subject formation with the postmodern accounts of the self. Weir's reformulation addresses some of the main concerns of both relational feminist theories which imagine the self only in its relations with others and postmodern theories that limit the construction of the self to discursive effects. Weir maintains that the construction of identity takes place as a result of complex processes which entail the embodiment and multiplicity of selves as well as the power of language and discourse.

For Weir, although it is crucial to acknowledge the constructive effects of the relations that the self forms with others, the relational feminist accounts such as

Chodorow's theory misrepresents identity formation as the direct effect of relations with others. In *Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow (1978) argues that the identity of the child is formed in his/her relation to the figure of mother. In this frame, she elaborates on the origins of the separate male self marked by a denial of connection to the mother and the connection between the daughter and the mother that fixes the identity of the daughter as relational and caring. Accordingly, identifying with the father figure and developing a possessive interest in the mother, the male child easily develops an independent male agency, while the female child is bound with her intense ties with the mother, which in return renders her more bound with relationships. Weir acknowledges the significant effects of relationships on the self formation. Yet, she also notes that any theory that deals with the self outside the context and fails to take into account the effects of power relations in that context cannot provide an adequate picture of the self formation.

As for the postmodern theories about the self, she states that these theories view identity as produced by exclusions of difference in systems of power. (1996: 17) In this sense, they regard any attempt to articulate a particular identity position as an imposition of unity. With the aim to point out the limitations of postmodern accounts, Weir elaborates on Butler's critique of the violence of identity in great detail. As discussed earlier, in Butler's thought, regulative institutions maintain and reproduce specific power relations by enforcing particular performances of gender. By stressing the discursively and culturally constituted character of sex and gender identities, Butler develops a metatheory of identity and suggests that any identity is produced as a result of the power relations embedded in discourses and practices, which constantly reproduce binary oppositions. Arguing that language imposes false identities that foreclose the emergence of different voices, Butler calls into question

any claim to women's identity. Identities in her account are portrayed as inherently repressive in that they fix multiplicity into a fictional unity. (Weir, 1996: 118) In short, Butler regards the identitarian logic as violence since it excludes possible experiences for the sake of rendering identities intelligible.

Weir criticizes Butler's theory on the basis that it fails to differentiate between repressive and non-repressive, exclusive and inclusive, metaphysical and socially constructed forms of identities. She states that "gender identity, women's identity, lesbian identity, feminist identity, identity as uniqueness and sameness are all understood to be expressions of a single sacrificial logic of identity". (Ibid) Moreover, for Weir, Butler's interpretation of identity as violence makes it impossible to acknowledge the empowering effects of political identities upon participants of marginalized social groups such as feminists, gays and lesbians or ethnic minorities. Instead of Butler's association of identity claims as acts oriented towards reification and transcendental essence, Weir (Ibid, 129) suggests that identity or more specifically, the category of "woman", can be seen as a socially constructed form of identity that is open to change.

As seen from above, in Weir's thinking both relational feminist accounts and postmodern accounts have serious limitations in their approach to issues of identity. While the former account interprets identities as locked in relations with others and ignores power relations and the idea of mediation in language, postmodern theories limit the analysis to discursive effects and leave out the dynamism and change generated by intersubjectivity. Acknowledging the effects of relations on subject formation on the one hand and the power of discursive effects on the other, Weir develops an alternative account that goes beyond the assumption that all identity claims operate according to the exclusionary, repressive and unifying logic of

identity. Weir (1996: 18) defines identity formation as “a socially and a symbolically mediated process of negotiating and interpreting socially given and socially redeemed meanings”. In line with the Habermasian account, she emphasizes the intersubjective constitution of individual identity through communication. According to this account, one’s identity is constituted through taking up communicative positions and negotiating claims. It is achieved through the ability to negotiate differences discursively. Participation in communities, institutions, systems of meanings and intersubjective interactions render the self intelligible. In this relational account, the capacity to experience oneself as an active participant in a social world invests the self with meaning. This capacity for interaction with others introduces reflexivity and intersubjectivity into the formation of the self. Throughout this complex process in which self is constituted through intersubjective interactions, identities become subject to constant change as others’ existence prevent their closure. This relational model of identity formed in interaction with others is political in that it takes into account the power dimensions underlying the negotiations of meanings and values. It is also historical since it deals with processes of creating meaning through interactions over time.

Weir notes that this relational conception of identity as a political, historical process of creating meaning over time through interrelations and practices of identification operates in tune with the narrative understanding of identity. Just like the narrative account, it rejects ahistorical, frozen conception of identities and proposes a dynamic conception that incorporates into the analysis the time dimension as well as the effects of others’ stories on the self. This conception of identity as a meaning making process over time through interrelations entails a capacity to identify with a life that matters. Weir states that this capacity to articulate a life worth

living allows one to hold oneself together through connections and identifications with oneself, one's values and other people. She denotes that this kind of identity formation based on interconnections and identifications requires the ability to identify with another, to recognize her experiences and meanings and to see oneself in the other. This cognitive and affective aspect is an essential component in the conceptualization of relational identity as it allows one to recognize one's interdependence.

In Weir's thought, this relational account of identities constitutes a "transformative identity politics" which recognizes the other as a figure who destabilizes our identity narratives and makes us acknowledge our interdependence. Weir states that this recognition of interdependence does not imply sameness or sharing the same experiences. Rather, it transforms identity formation into a constant process of remaking meaning through interrelations.

"Traveling to the other's world, seeing oneself in another, requires an active process of getting to know the other, through an imaginative and empathic engagement that goes beyond recognizing how we are the same, and beyond "putting oneself in the other's place," without change to the self. This engagement with the other requires learning about her world, learning to take her perspective, and thus forever changing my own." (Weir, 2008: 125)

According to Weir, each time when one connects with the other, identities are destabilized and constituted anew through travelling to each other's world and expanding the selves to include the relation with each other. This communication entails knowing, listening to and witnessing others' experiences. Opening the self to learning about differences results in a transformation that goes both ways: the transformation of the self and the other. However, this intersubjective relation and the transformation of the self does not take place outside the web of power relations. In other words, there is no isolated process of transforming the other and being

transformed by the other outside the mediations generated by power relations. Therefore, Weir combines the relational account with the idea of self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity in her account is the awareness of the subject that she is the one who invests her existence with meaning. In this meaning making process one must try to be alert about one's position in the web of power relations. Therefore, the capacity to relate to others is bound with the capacity to reflect on one's privileged positions of power. Moreover, one should also recognize repressed parts of one's self to acknowledge the oppressive aspects of the social world that may be commonly shared with others. (Ibid, 126) In sum, what Weir suggests is that relations of identification in the intersubjective account of identities should be combined with the recognition of our positions in relations of power.

In addition, one should note that the idea of difference is a crucial aspect of Weir's interrelational account of identities. Arguing for the openness of the self to transformation, this account regards differences not as something to be resolved but espouses them as a product of our interdependence. Weir (1996:186) states that the identitarian logic and differences are usually thought of as mutually exclusive. In postmodern accounts, any attempt to identity is seen as an act of violence since the constitution of an identity is imagined as repression of other possible expressions of experience. According to this, every subject position is regarded as a play of various differences that cannot be resolved because attempts to resolve them or put them within fixed boundaries would be an act of domination. To maintain a model of the self as an open process of change, one should leave contradictions unresolved. Challenging this view, Weir claims that one should not be afraid of making use of the identitarian logic if identity is reformulated through a relational account. Given that the self is constituted through relations with others and thus entails others'

differences in its composition, resolving contradictions or making identity claims will not result in fixation of identities. Therefore, Weir (Ibid, 187) suggests that “the struggle to resolve conflicts through an openness to difference is essential to the practice of change.” In this sense, with its stress on interdependence, Weir’s alternative account of identity makes it possible to reconcile the idea of identity and difference. Criticizing non-identity and arguing for resolution of contradictory aspects of identities, this account does not attempt to deny the multiplicity of selves; on the contrary, the idea of multiplicity is central to it. Weir (Ibid, 18) contends that a key feature of modern self-identity is the capacity to reconcile “conflictual multiple identities”. Yet, her attempt to reconcile differences does not result in the erasure of these differences; her recognition of the intersubjective character of identity formation allows her to incorporate differences into the formation of identities. Opposing the postmodern view that contradictions should be left unresolved, Weir alleges that the capacity for self-knowledge is essential for the definition of one’s identity; it is this capacity that allows one to engage in self-critique.

3.3. Useful Theoretical Tools

3.3.1. Intersectionality

As discussed earlier, in the last decades non-white and non-western feminists who criticize the limited focus of the Anglo-Saxon feminist theory have claimed that for those women who do not come from a privileged background, “womanhood” on its own is not the only axis of oppression; there are other axis of oppression which intersect with “being a woman”. (hooks 1984, Mohanty 1991) Based on this criticism, the intersectionality theory underlines women’s different positions in

power relations and suggests that the experience of womanhood is subject to change depending on whether one is black, white, rich, poor, heterosexual, homosexual, etc. Unless the intersections of these multiple facets of identities are taken into account, it will not be possible to make some women's experiences visible. One can state that the gist of the intersectional approach is about 'decentring' the 'normative subject' of feminism. (Brahd and Phoenix 2004) While the category of woman signifies all women as a homogeneous group across classes and cultures, the intersectional line of thinking outcasts this category or enriches it with multiplicity. According to the intersectionalist position, all the attempts to define the category of woman as a unified, homogenous group are illusory and totalizing. (Haraway 1991: 173). Drawing on this new line of thinking, feminist theory has attempted to combine the postmodern reconfiguration of subject and agency with the social-critical power of feminism.

In this frame, intersectionality can be seen as another response to the claim that identity politics ignores multiple aspects of identities, privileges some aspects of identity over others, fails to acknowledge diversity within groups and imposes a uniform identity. To challenge the static conception of identity, the feminist literature on intersectionality reconceptualizes identity politics as an attempt to articulate knowledge derived from the material conditions, lived experience and social location of participants. In this way, it challenges ahistorical, frozen accounts on identities. Yuval Davis (2006: 200) defines the intersectionalist analysis as an effort to comprehend how specific positionings and identities interrelate and affect each other in particular contexts. It is widely acknowledged that differential positionings in terms of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, stage in the life cycle and other social divisions deeply affect access to economic, political and cultural

resources. The intersectionalist approach allows one to study how such axes of difference are intermeshed together. The idea of “triple oppression” clearly exemplifies this notion of intermeshed, mutually constitutive differences. It puts forward that black women suffer from three different axes of oppression, i.e., race, class and gender. Being a woman, being black and a member of the working class are all identity aspects demarcating black women’s position in western societies. It is not random that the majority of Black people in contemporary western countries are from the lower socio-economic classes and women would tend to occupy even a lower position in this strata. This points out that certain identity categories that cross-cut each other cannot be dealt with in isolation from each other. (Ibid) The intersections of race, gender and class constitute particular subject positions which cannot be reduced to neither of these constituent identity vectors.

However, the intersectionalist approach should not imply a fixed understanding of social divisions. To stress the dynamic construction of categories, Lloyd (2005: 48) notes the following:

“The metaphor of the intersection works only insofar as we see it not as a static space where paths diverge or get jammed, but as a fluid and multidimensional space of travel that facilitates the mobility of disparate individuals and groups.”

Instead of pinning down points of intersection and fixing them, this constructivist approach to intersectionality treats inequalities as dynamic. Accordingly, the formation of these categories and their mutually constitutive relationships are part of an ongoing historical process from which neither structure nor agency can be erased. This dynamic, constructivist view of intersectionality closely collaborates with the postmodern deconstructionism that points out the artificiality of social categories. Since the certainties of fixed singular locations ignore the multiplicity of voices, to unveil the workings of power and the social inequalities, one should listen to the

interplay of different, multiple voices within groups. To comprehend the interplay of different locations, it is necessary to espouse that the crossing points of differences are not static as differences themselves are subject to constant change.

Scholars who follow a constructionist approach to intersectionality such as Davis (2008), McCall (2005), Ferree (2009) treat social divisions as historical processes, not as possessive properties of individuals or a static list of structural locations. According to this, social divisions such as gender, race or ethnicity take on multiple meanings each time when they crosscut each other in different social locations. In this constructivist approach, social inequalities take on their operational meaning in the complexity of the dynamic interplay between themselves. As inequalities themselves gain different meanings in different social locations, points of intersection constantly change each time when these social inequalities crosscut each other. The notion of narratives of location and positionality are central to this constructivist view of intersectionality. To comprehend the complexity of the interplay of flexible social categories, one has to take into account the narratives that individuals produce about their social location in society as well as the effects of the context that affect their positionings. It is obvious that this understanding goes hand in hand with the stress put on flexible, dynamic aspects of identities and identifications.

3.3.2. Strategic Essentialism/ “Strategic” Identities

As seen in the discussions so far, a great deal of scholars argue that one cannot avoid deploying at least a minimal understanding of a stable identity in social and political analysis. Since politics is organized around interest representation, the

only way to enhance rights and freedoms of individuals in marginalized social groups is to make demands on behalf of them. Therefore, one of the crucial problems in contemporary feminist thought is to reconcile the temptation to make political demands based on stable parts of identities with the idea of social constructionism and anti-essentialism. In this vein, neither can essentialist approaches provide a valid analytical framework today to investigate identity questions; nor can one totally rely on the postmodern accounts and relinquish the idea of agency altogether. Admitting the limitations of both essentialist and strictly deconstructivist approaches to identity and identity politics, a number of scholars have recently advocated the strategic use of identity. This strategic project has been proposed as a remedy for the threats of the anti-essentialist attack on the category of women and the dismissal of a shared identity as a distinct social group.

In this frame, in her seminal book *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, Spivak (1990) proposes to make use of the idea of essentialism without making an overall commitment to it. According to this, we should act *as if* a common identity shared by the members of a specific group can be articulated. As such, the idea of strategic essentialism draws on the anti-essentialist critique that there is no essential identity outside the web of power relations; yet, it puts forward that to be able to achieve political goals, one may need to act as if there were essential identities. To argue for certain social justice demands, one can constitute a politics based on a strategically constructed positionality as commonly shared by group members. In this sense, the category of “woman” may be temporarily used as a stable category in order to mobilize political action. This approach differentiates between essentialisms. While a total commitment to essentialism detaches identities from history and context and regards them as frozen

unities, strategic essentialism uses essentialist claims not as permanently fixed truths but as a part of a strategically formed argumentative position that is thought to be necessary for political purposes. In this sense, those who deploy strategic essentialism expect that this temporary commitment to “essences” will yield political achievements in terms of rights and freedoms. The essentialist framing defines the needs and actions necessary for a particular group of people. It produces truth claims, depending on the positionality of the group members. Given the hegemonic representation of this particular group at a particular time, in a particular context, the strategic essentialist framing counterposes the marginalized, oppressed aspects of the “essential” group identity by developing a politically viable approach. In this sense, unlike essentialism which means bracketing of the context, idea of strategic essentialism entails a critical reading of the context. The question as to what kind of essentialist claims are articulated as a part of a political strategy helps one comprehend the power configuration underlying the historical moment in which these claims are produced.

3.3.3. Coalition Politics

Another concept that mitigates the opposition between social constructivism and essentialism is “coalition politics” which is a way of forming political alliances among different groups of individuals with different political demands. Challenging the idea of essentialist identity politics that draws fixed boundaries by strictly defining what is to be left outside the identity category in question, coalition politics replaces the exclusive nature of essentialist conceptions of identities with flexible, dynamic account of identities and renders the formation of coalitions possible. Phelan (1994) refers to queer politics as an example of coalition politics that

accommodates dynamic boundaries to identity positions. She criticizes identity politics in general and lesbian identity politics in particular on the basis that they tend to essentialize identities, silencing those voices that do not fit into this unitary conception. For Phelan, queer politics, as a broad term that describes a sexual orientation challenging the norm of heteronormative society, can meet the demands of inessential coalitional politics by accommodating the demands of lesbians, gays, bisexuals or transgender individuals. In this sense, queer politics reframes the discourse around sexual orientation and challenges the fixed categories of identity that had previously motivated activism. Reappropriating the word "queer" as a term that contradicts dominant cultural norms, queer activists have attempted to form a multiracial, multigendered movement with diverse sexualities. (Seidman 1993) In this sense, it can be understood as a successful, coalitional strategy that deconstructs categories.

Ferguson (1993: 186) states that coalition politics does not replace identity politics but displaces it. Accordingly, identity positions constituting coalition politics are unstable categories that can engage in dialogue, transform each other and discover common grounds. In this sense, coalition politics does not turn away entirely from the idea of identity; rather, it reconfigures it as mobile and dynamic. As Phelan (1997: 138) argues, it acknowledges that "some social signifiers embody relations of oppression". Thus, coalition politics acknowledges that individuals can have similar experiences, which in return allows them to use the first-person plural pronoun. However, it does not attempt to define strict boundaries designating who and what kind of experiences exactly constitute this "we". One can suggest that coalition politics is another way of indicating that it is possible to come up with an understanding of identity politics that does not erase differences. Regarding this,

Hekman (2004: 144) states that it retains differences while accomplishing commonality.

In this frame, coalition politics sets out to destabilize singularity, challenges dominant models of knowledge formation through singular subjectivity and aims to eliminate systems of domination-subordination arising from historically and socially constructed differences of power and privilege. It takes into account relations of oppression at play and explores limits to and possibilities for collaborative action, thereby enacting a dialogue about how differences can be incorporated into feminist conversations without necessarily leading to agreement or requiring commonality between different identity positions and groups.

Mohanty (1995) notes that the emphasis on shared experiences and commonality presumes unity and homogeneity, which leads to downplaying of important differences among women. Echoing Mohanty's idea, coalition politics as an attempt to turn differences and power imbalances into meaningful dialogue, does not rely on an already available consciousness that needs to be reinvigorated. Rather, it connotes a way of seeing that has to be constructed anew along the lines of lived experiences. (Keating 2005, Fowlkes 1997)

As such, coalition politics can be seen as a resolution to the pitfalls of the essentialist tendencies of identity politics. It displaces the exclusionary character of feminist identity politics without necessarily resorting to a post-identity approach. Acknowledging that identity as an analytical concept is indispensable for making feminist political demands, theorists such as Anzaldúa (2002), Weir (2008) and Mohanty (2003) reclaim the notion of identity by theorizing about coalitional feminist politics. Since a post-identity approach cannot give an account of how

women experience their embodied identities and what these identities and experiences mean for them subjectively, these theorists aim to read political coalitions through the lenses of a dynamic view of identity. Mohanty (2003: 104) contends that feminist solidarity never relies on fixed identity positions and common demands ready at hand, but always comes into being as a result of processes in which one creates meaning in line with one's historically and spatially located identities and experiences. Anzaldua (2002) points out the potential for transformation underlying coalitional politics and opposes the widespread critique of coalitions that attributes fixity and uniformity to coalitional political activities. Stating that coalitions cannot be based on common grounds or permanent agreements, she refers to transformative, relational character of coalitions. By employing the concept "bridge", Anzaldua indicates that coalitions bridge differences without detaching subjects from their individuality; they connote the work of opening the gate to others and the efforts to transform the self through moving to an unfamiliar territory.

On the other hand, Weir (2008, 113-116) redefines coalitional feminist politics by reconstructing identity politics for feminism through the concept of "identification-with". According to her, feminist identification first connotes identification with feminist values and ideas which are never fixed and constantly change over time. Second form of identification that Weir outlines is identification with feminists as "we", while third form of identification is identification with particular others. For Weir, the result of this three-stage identification is collective action culminating in feminist solidarity. One should note that while on the one hand, identifications as such generate collective identities; on the other, they incite considerable change in these identities. Since identification with each other precludes the fixation of the self and the other through constant shaping and reconstituting

feminist collective identity, coalitional feminist politics enables one to travel to the world of the other and be open to change as one sees oneself through the perspective of others. It is this relational character of feminist coalition politics that makes it possible to transform static accounts of identities into dynamic, transformative feminist identity politics.

In sum, as can be seen from above, intersectionality, strategic deployment of essentialist identity claims and coalition politics constitute a crucial part of today's scholarly debates on feminist politics of identity. The need for such strategies indicate that it is not possible to erase the concept of identity altogether. Acknowledging this, some scholars such as Alcoff (2006) and Hekman (2004) argue for an approach that espouses stable aspects of identities, while others such as Spivak (1990) propose temporary stabilization of identities as a political strategy. Both of these approaches suggest that the negation of the idea of identity in the postmodern thought fails to deal with the political implications of already formed identities. As a result, they attempt to come up with a mid-way approach to respond to such challenges.

3.4. Feminist Self-Identification and the post-Habermasian Feminist Critique of Public Sphere

The liberal conception of public sphere, as famously developed by Habermas, rests on the idea that with the growing need for arenas where news and matters of common concern could be freely exchanged and discussed, a separate domain from ruling authorities started to evolve in the modern Western world. (Habermas 1991) For Habermas, the discursive arenas making up the public sphere are organized

around common concerns and are marked by inclusivity regardless of social status. Thus, the public sphere in this sense connotes an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters, which is open and accessible to all. The main focus in the Habermasian model of deliberation is on intersubjective communication. His theory of “communicative action”, in this sense, refers to the communicative processes of reaching understanding. Habermas uses the concept of “communicative rationality” to refer to a non-coercive, unifying consensus-building force of discourse. In such discourse, participants are assumed to have overcome their subjective views and developed a commitment to reaching a rationally motivated agreement. (Habermas 1987: 294, 315) According to Habermas, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech is a “central experience” in the life of a human being. (Habermas 1983: 10) Thus, since it is unavoidable, it may be presumed to be universal.

In the Habermasian model, each and every one in principle takes part freely and equally in public debate. The only “force” which is active in the ideal speech situation and in communicative rationality is the “force of the better argument”. Flyvbjerg (1998:213) identifies the key processual requirements of the Habermasian discourse ethics as the following:

“1. No party affected by what is being discussed should be excluded from the discourse (the requirement of generality); 2. all participants should have equal possibility to present and criticize validity claims in the process of discourse (autonomy); 3. participants must be willing and able to empathize with each other's validity claims (ideal role taking); 4. existing power differences between participants must be neutralized such that these differences have no effect on the creation of

consensus (power neutrality); and 5. participants must openly explain their goals and intentions and in this connection desist from strategic action (transparency)”

In this model as described above, communicative rationality requires ideal role taking and power neutrality. Unlike strategic pursuits and rational-choice models, Habermas’ discourse ethics requires detached participation that is disassociated from private interests and inclined towards reaching the best argument. It is widely argued that his model of communicative rationality is idealistic and thus far from being able to account for the actual functioning of power relations. Flyvbjerg (1998: 216) alleges that the Habermasian model is about distinguishing rationality and power from each other in communication and regards rationality in isolation from power. According to Flyvbjerg (1998: 219), Enlightenment rationalism, which obliterates all differences among subjects, has little to offer in understanding the operating mechanism of power in the social and political world. The recent feminist scholarship raises a similar point, pointing out the power dimension in the communicative processes that arise from differential positions of subjects in the configuration of power in society. It argues for a revised understanding of public sphere that would take into account different needs and demands of marginalized groups.

The feminist critique argues that the problem with the Habermasian model is not limited to its normative character and the discrepancy between this model and the empirical reality but it arises to a great extent from the limited scope of the basic conceptions in this model such as communicative rationality, public deliberation and public sphere. (Benhabib, 2002) While pointing out the limitations of the normative character of the Habermasian framework to reveal the power differentials in society, the feminist critique also puts forward the serious drawbacks characterizing the

Habermasian model with regard to interlocutors' participation into public deliberation. The main criticisms posed against the Habermasian model by feminist scholars are summarized below.

3.4. 1. Feminist Critiques of the Habermasian model

In the last decades, the feminist critique has pointed out that the ideal of inclusivity, which is central to the Habermasian public sphere, has never been realized in terms of gender identities. In this vein, Fraser (1990: 13) questions the rhetoric of publicity and accessibility and alleges that the modern conception of public sphere rests on a number of significant exclusions, among which gender constitutes a main axis. Firstly, Fraser attacks the idea of a single, overarching public sphere, claiming that an all encompassing public sphere overlooks the complexity of individuals' differential social positions and is inimical to the notion of difference. Undoing the idea of an overarching public sphere, she points out the existence of competing publics, which she calls "subaltern counter-publics". For Fraser, these counter-publics are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses in order to articulate their identities, interests, and needs. In Fraser's reconfiguration, the Habermasian single, overarching public where all differences are bracketed to ensure rational deliberation, is undone in favour of plurality of competing publics. She clearly unmasks that bracketing of status differentials is a utopian ideal which cannot capture the actual working of power mechanisms.

In a similar vein, Ryan (1992) documents the variety of ways in which 19th century North American women of various classes and ethnicities constructed access

routes to public political life, even despite their exclusion from the official public sphere. Ryan's study shows that, even in the absence of formal political incorporation through suffrage, there were a variety of ways of accessing public life and a multiplicity of public arenas. In this way, Ryan demonstrates that the bourgeois public was never the public. Relying on Ryan's study, it is possible to suggest that counterpublics have always contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public yet bourgeois publics, in turn, prevented these publics from elaborating alternative norms of public speech.

In addition to the idea of a single, overarching public, feminist critics also question the idea of "common good" deeply embedded in the Habermasian conception of public sphere. The question as to whose interests and needs are represented in the idea of "common good" and whose are left out constitutes the core of this critique. Another main concern here is the line drawn between public issues and issues that are deemed to be private and thus excluded from public deliberation. Feminist scholars contend that in the Habermasian model, the common good is produced as a result of the strict separation of public and private matters. It has been argued that the public sphere based on such a differentiation is ill-equipped to consider the political dimension of relations in the intimate sphere. (Landes, 1998: 142) In this line of thought, the feminist critique exposes that the categories of public and private are not naturally given categories but come into being in political discourse to delegitimize some interests and valorize others. In this sense, feminist scholars defy the rigid separation between the public and private and underline that this separation only serves to the interests of the powerful groups while restricting marginal groups' needs and demands to the private sphere. In this vein, Benhabib (1992: 100) maintains that the boundaries applying to the "public" and "private"

have always been discursively created, and thus constitute a major site of power struggle in the contemporary era. She argues the following:

“All struggles against oppression in the modern world begin by redefining what had previously been considered ‘private,’ non-public and non-political issues as matters of public concern, as issues of justice, as sites of power which need discursive legitimation.”

To point out that the question as to where to put the line between public and private issues is a matter of power struggle for women, Fraser (1990) refers to how the second wave feminist movement as a counter-public turned the issue of violence against women, i.e., an issue that was deemed to be an entirely private matter, into a public concern.

On the other hand, Young opposes the idea of common good in the Habermasian model by pointing out the drawbacks of its universalistic tones. According to her, to be useful to the realities of plural societies, a political theory should be able to encompass difference. Critiquing the idea that difference is something to be transcended because it is partial and divisive, Young (2000: 43) maintains that conflict and disagreement are the usual state of affairs even in a well-structured deliberative democratic setting. In this understanding, since participants in political discussion cannot transcend their particularity, the claims about bracketing differences and adopting a point from nowhere is not realistic. Young (2000: 118) suggests that if they aim to solve their collective problems, then they must listen across their differences to understand how proposals and policies affect others who are differently situated.

To comprehend how the bracketing of differences in the Habermasian model would lead to the domination of the powerful, one can refer to Bourdieu’s understanding of *symbolic power*. For Habermas, the agreements achieved in public

discussions on a rational basis rests on each parties' convictions, meaning that nobody can force the argument to a third party, but rather everyone is convinced that the communicatively achieved argument is the best argument. Sanlı (2011) points out that it is precisely this conviction that presents the symbolic power at work as natural and arbitrary. In Bourdieu's thinking, the powerful possessors of symbolic capital, i.e, prestige, honour, attention, are endowed with the right to speak, recognition and legitimacy. Thus, the question as to where one stands in the power configuration in society affects what one can or cannot say in a certain situation. Permeating deep into the power relations arising from the distribution of different kinds of capital, symbolic power presents itself as natural. Thus, without problematizing the hierarchies which appear as natural, normal and inevitable, it is not possible to understand the working mechanisms of public discussion. This means that common convictions reached as a result of a public discussion in the Habermasian sense are never devoid of power relations. Accordingly, some individuals are always granted with greater right to speak, depending on the symbolic power they have.

Considering the points explained above, the feminist critique asks for reconsideration of the following assumptions of the Habermasian model of the public sphere and public debate:

- “1. the assumption that it is possible for interlocutors in a public sphere to bracket status differentials and to deliberate "as if" they were social equals.
2. the assumption that a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics

3. the assumption that discourse in public spheres should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that the appearance of "private interests" and "private issues" is always undesirable

4. the assumption that a functioning democratic public sphere requires a sharp separation between civil society and the state.” (McLaughlin, 1995:8)

3.4.2. Counter-publicity

One can safely suggest that the feminist critique has been quite helpful to compensate for the idealistic character of the Habermasian model. This revised understanding of public sphere acknowledges the existence of multiple publics and opposes the idea that public sphere is a monolithic bloc, where power flows in a uni-directional way. Especially Fraser’s (1990) and Felski’s (1989) incorporation of the concept of “counter-public” into academic debates has greatly expanded the scope of the Habermasian idea of single, overarching public sphere. According to their explication, counterpublics reveal the differential power relations among diverse publics of a multiple public sphere and articulate alternatives to wider publics that exclude the interests of marginalized groups. In this sense, they signify an expanded communicative flow as a result of which discursive exclusions become crystallized.

Fraser argues that counterpublics can be regarded as a response to the bracketing of differences in the public debate and as an attempt to correct the exclusionary character of the formation of public opinion. In this view, differences should be unbracketed in public discourse and thematized as topics of deliberation. The subjective particularities that interlocutors incorporate into public deliberation reinforce the notion of difference in the deliberative model and work as a precaution

against the drawbacks of the idea of common good. This expanded conception of public sphere, which includes not only reason and speech but also subjective viewpoints and acknowledgement of differential status of individuals in society regards contestation between publics as legitimate in the multiple public sphere. Differences incorporated into public deliberation in this model may turn into sites of contestation, where different publics aim to influence wider publics and shape public discourses. However, one should also note that contestation in this revised model does not connote a binary opposition that situates counterpublics and wider publics as complete opposites.

Although Fraser defines subaltern counter publics in opposition to the unifying, universalist tendencies in the hegemonic public sphere, in her conception, counter publics as parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses should not be thought of in isolation from wider publics. According to Fraser, rather than defining them through a binary opposition, one should try to understand the dialectical relationship between the wider publics and the publicist character of counter publics. To explain this point further, Fraser (1990: 68) notes that counterpublics develop a dual character with the aim to expand their discursive space:

“On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.”

Accordingly, at certain points counterpublics may manifest a publicist orientation and aspire to wider circulation of counter-discourses. Fraser (1990: 14) states that it is precisely this publicist orientation that allows counterpublics to achieve their emancipatory potential. The counter-discursive contestation of hegemonic boundaries through engagement in dialogue with hegemonic discourses indicates that

counterpublics are not monolithic entities but are composed of multiple forms of alliances and relationalities. While at some points they may be geared towards enclaving themselves by putting the emphasis on group identity and solidarity, at other points they may follow a publicist, counter-discursive strategy in wider publics to generate transformative effects on hegemonic public discourses.

Felski acknowledges this dual character of counterpublics as well by pointing out its transformative potential. Referring to the feminist counterpublic sphere, Felski (1989: 167-168) explains this potential as the following:

“The experience of discrimination, oppression and cultural dislocation provides an impetus for the development of a self consciously oppositional identity. Yet insofar as it [feminist counterpublic sphere] is a public sphere, its arguments are also directed outward, toward a dissemination of feminist ideas and values throughout society as a whole... Internally, the feminist counterpublic generates a gender-specific identity grounded in a consciousness of community and solidarity among women; externally, it seeks to convince society as a whole of the validity of feminist claims.”

Having differentiated between the internal and external functions of the feminist sphere, Felski focuses on how the external function is carried out through institutional mechanisms and sites which, in return, serve for the dissemination of feminist goals. She underscores that the outward extension of counter public discourses functions as a catalyst of social and cultural change. (Ibid, 167)

Similar to Fraser (1990) and Felski (1989), Downey and Fenton (2003) maintain that counter-publics are not constituted in a singular, foundational manner but rather should be considered in terms of relationality, conjunctural shifts and alliances, making connections with other publics. In order to acquire visibility in the dominant public, counter-public discourses may intermingle with dominant public discourses in a deliberative setting. Downey and Fenton (2003) allege that the existence of counter publics among multiple publics is always dialogic in that to

challenge the universalist discourse that the dominant public uses to appeal to a general public, counterpublics need to enter into deliberation with dominant publics.

This outward extension of counter publics is especially important because it gives us useful clues as to what “counter” in counterpublic really means. The acknowledgement of the publicist character of counterpublics helps feminist scholars refrain from thinking of counterpublics solely as enclaved clusters and allows them to gain insight of the multiple character of counter hegemonic discourses. The conjunctural alliances that counterpublics may form with hegemonic discourses in a deliberative setting denote that the “counter” in counterpublics does not consist of a singular constellation of counter discourses but should always be thought of through multiplicity. In this sense, Downey and Fenton (2003: 15) argue that counter-publicity is neither based on abstract ideals of universality nor on essentialist notions of community. Accordingly, it is best understood by inquiring complex relationalities between wider publics and counter-publics and their situatedness in local as well as global contexts.

The complexity of counter publics cannot be understood only by employing a nuanced understanding of the relationship between counterpublics and the dominant public. One should also take into account the internal politics as well as the organizational and ideological formations underlying counter publics. When defined as a homogenous entity, the label “subaltern public” does not capture the complex character of the heterogeneity of marginalized groups. Underlining the heterogenous character of the multiple public sphere, Squires (2002) proposes an alternative vocabulary to capture the sophisticated character of the internal politics of counter publics. To distinguish between subaltern public spheres, she uses the following terminology: *enclave publics*, *counter public* and *satellite publics*. Accordingly, a

public can enclave itself, avoiding close contact with the dominant public. It may also assume a publicist character and engage in lively debate with broader publics. Finally, a public can act as a satellite public sphere, differentiating itself from other publics.

In making this differentiation, Squires stresses that the use of vocabulary is a key tool in capturing the multiple meanings that the term “counter” in a subaltern counter public can assume. It enables comparisons across counter publics and offers a nuanced understanding of the variations in a certain public sphere. According to Squires (2002: 447), the vocabulary has to be flexible enough so as to capture what really constitutes the “counter” in the counter public. Differentiating counter publics from the dominant public on the basis of stable, fixed and homogenous identity markers cannot account for the complex constituents of these publics. What Squires suggests instead is a flexible, multi-layered conceptualization of identity markers that also takes into account the heterogeneity of counter publics.

The idea of multiplicity in counter hegemonic discourses is in line with the attempt of counter publics to defy universal validity claims. As oppositional discursive arenas criticizing the homogenizing and universalizing logic of the Habermasian model, counter publics articulate particularities based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and other axes of difference. On the one hand, it is this partial particularity that enables a common identity among participants in a counter public sphere. As for the feminist subaltern counter-public, Felski (1989: 166) notes that the shared experience of gender-based oppression facilitates to unite all participants beyond their specific differences. Yet, it is important to note that counter publics do not claim to provide a representative universality through this common identity. Rather, they offer a critique of cultural values from the standpoint of the

marginalized group in question. (Felski, 1989: 167) In this sense, the issue of common identity in a counter public setting can be best comprehended by taking into account the multiple, dialectical and always in process character of the “counter” in counter publics. Regarding this, Fraser (1990: 14) alleges that public spheres are not arenas where already formed propositional contents are articulated; rather they are discursive sites that enable the dynamic formation and enactment of social identities. This standpoint radically challenges the orthodox liberal narrative assuming that individuals enter into the public sphere to debate their already constituted needs and desires. Accordingly, individuals never participate into public deliberation with already formed needs and desires. On the contrary, the public sphere itself shapes and constitutes subjects who seek recognition in public deliberation. (Dillon, 2007: 6)

In this frame, it would be simplistic to reduce a particular counterpublic to a monolithic, singular reading of identities of participants in that counter public setting. To avoid this simplistic reading, one should always keep in mind that the interrelation between agonistic and consensual moments stands at the core of the dialectical mediation in counter and hegemonic publics. Mediating between group identities and universalistic moral claims, emancipatory counter narratives cast doubt on the exclusionary scope of public deliberation and provide new frameworks in the public sphere to revise prevailing public discourses. (Lara, 1998: 3) In the course of this transformation, the consensual act of reaching an agreement about the content of recognition is constantly deconstructed through the agonistic moments where hegemonic and counter public discourses contest each other. As counterpublics engage in dialectical relationship with wider publics and influence hegemonic public discourses in one way or another and get influenced in return, the “counter” in

counter discourses is constantly renegotiated in response to the dialectical change both in the hegemonic public sphere and the counter public. Therefore, one can never talk about a fixed, stable common identity among individuals in a counter public setting. The conception of common identity that brings individuals together in the counter public sphere is relentlessly subject to dialectical transformation in hegemonic and counter public discourses.

As counterpublics struggle against universal validity claims, they designate that heterogeneity is constitutive of each and every public sphere. The constantly dialectical relationship between hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses in public debates provide a setting where public discourse is always open to change and rearticulation. The dialectical relationship between consensual and agonistic moments in public discourses point out the impossibility of discursive closure in public discourses since any closure would connote stabilization of democratic norms and exclusion of agonistic democratic contestation. (Mouffe 2005) Thus, consensual moments where a rationally founded agreement is achieved through democratic norms is destabilized by agonistic moments, ensuring the dialectical movement of counterpublics amid the multiple publics of the public sphere.

In short, since the dialectical movement of counterpublics entails a striking fluidity of the conception of “counter”, it is not possible to reduce the meanings of the “counter” in counter public discourses to a fixed conception of people’s identities in the counter public setting in question. (Asen, 2000: 429) As Fraser (1990: 15) and Dahlgren (2005: 159) argue, identities in public sphere are never ready at hand but develop in relation to discursive configuration in public spheres. Yet, this cautious approach to the perils of identity-based conceptions of counter-publics does not mean that identity is totally irrelevant in counter public settings. A flexible, dynamic as

well as embedded conception of identity can be very helpful to make sense of the discursive struggle of counter publics with wider publics. The theoretical framework explicated in the previous section complements this critical approach to counter publics based on the dialectical movement of counterpublics between consensual and agonistic moments.

3.4. 3. Mass Media, Counter Publics and Women Columnists

Public discourse is carried out in various forums such as parliaments, courts, social movements, universities, streets and mass media. Ferree et al. (2002: 16) argue that in contemporary world mass media appears as the major site of political contest because participants in other forums also use mass media and acknowledge its pervasive influence. Social actors evaluate the effectiveness of their own discourses by looking at the coverage in mass media. Moreover, mass media is not only a site where public contestation occurs between different discourses but it also produces public discourses by setting the agenda. As a result, coverage in the mass media is key for public discourses to display efficacy in public deliberation.

Ferree et al. (2002) employ various terms to evaluate how successful public discourses are in the mass media. First, in order to reflect on to what extent discourses are given voice, they use the term “standing”. Standing, for them, does not mean any kind of coverage in the media. Rather, it connotes being treated in the media as an influential actor with voice who is directly quoted and considered as capable of shaping the public agenda. Second, Ferree et al. (Ibid) also use the term “framing” to express the importance of the representation of a social actor in the media in a preferred frame. For them, success in the media is achieved if a public

discourse is covered as authentically expressed, not through another frame. In this sense, standing and framing in the mass media corresponds to a social actor's power to incorporate her differential position in society into public discourse as a theme of deliberation.

Mass media as the major site of political contest in contemporary world is located at the center of hegemonic power struggles over meaning and norms of democratic deliberation. Pointing out heterogeneity in mass media, Dahlgren (1996: 155-159) differentiates between "common domain" and "advocacy domain" and the differential status attributed to hegemonic and counter discourses in each of these domains. Accordingly, while the common domain in the mass media implies the arena that strives for universalism by reproducing hegemonic discourses and appealing to a general public, advocacy domain refers to a multiperspective journalism that allows oppositional publics to articulate their group identities. In Dahlgren's formulation, it is the advocacy domain where plurality of perspectives is ensured. As such, advocacy domain allows for a certain type of media that contributes to counter hegemonic projects and contests the boundaries of hegemonic publics. This type of media closely collaborates with counter publics to enable marginalized viewpoints to enter into public deliberation.

At this point, it is necessary to reflect more on the roles that mass media plays amidst hegemonic power struggles in the public sphere. As discussed so far, norms of public deliberation always implicate relations of power. The post-Habermasian feminist critique has indicated that norms regulating discourse in a particular public sphere advantage some participants while disadvantaging others. In this regard, at certain points participatory norms may operate as powerful silencers regulating how topics enter and circulate in public sphere. The idea of counter public in the post-

Habermasian feminist critique clearly discloses that the Habermasian public sphere is a space necessarily constituted by exclusionary power mechanisms. Questioning the boundaries of “legitimate” public spheres and incorporating the idea of contestation and power relations into public deliberation, counterpublics reveal the impossibility of final closure of discourse in public deliberation and in this sense closely collaborate with discourse theory. (Dahlberg, 2011: 45) Acknowledging that public discourses are formed through hegemonic struggles, necessarily involving hierarchies of power and relations of inclusion and exclusion, the idea of counterpublic opens a space for thinking and doing otherwise. (Ibid, p.43) This critique that is geared towards unmasking hegemonic relations is based on the contention that discourse is always political and radically contingent; there is no discourse prior to the political. Bringing to light how hegemonic boundary drawing in public sphere is realized, counterpublics, similar to discourse theory, stress that any hegemonic consensus is radically contingent and point out the possibility of counter hegemonic contestation.

Noting that mass media is one of the public arenas where hegemonic struggles for public deliberation take place, one should ask the following question: What kind of media politics can support the contestation of hegemonic public sphere boundaries? It is obvious that only a type of media, which allows counter hegemonic projects to articulate marginalized needs and demands, can support an effective contestation of hegemonic public boundaries. In this sense, it is the advocacy domain in mass media, as Dahlgren formulates it, that can collaborate with countepublics in introducing the excluded elements into hegemonic public discourses. The advocacy domain points out the heterogeneity and multiplicity in mass media as it operates

alongside with the hegemonic common domain controlled by the mainstream mass media.

Here, the crucial point for the purposes of this study is to figure out where women columnists position themselves in the heterogenous mass media sphere. Can their columns be considered as part of the advocacy domain in mass media that collaborates with counter public discourses? If so, what kind of counter public issues stand out in their writings? How do they frame these issues? In terms of their standing and framing, can counterpublic discourses be effectively represented in their writings? Along with these questions, it is also important to investigate how women columnists think of the formation of public discourses and the negotiation of marginalized identities in public sphere. Do they acknowledge the heterogeneity and multiplicity of public spheres? At what points do they question the hegemonic boundary drawing in dominant publics? Do they acknowledge the flexible and always-in-process character of identities in counter public settings? What are the limits of their approach to counter hegemonic discourses and identities? These questions will constitute a guideline for this study as I scrutinize women columnists' positioning in mass media sphere and their conception of the formation of public discourses and negotiation of marginalized identities.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

4.1. Semi-structured in-depth Interviews

For a study that investigates the feminist self-identification among women intellectuals in Turkey, it is obviously a must to make in-depth interviews with the women intellectuals in question and ask them what they think about feminist identity. Therefore, as the methodological framework I will utilize in depth semi-structured interviews to realize the goals of this study. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 155) suggest that qualitative methods, such as face-to-face interviews, are especially crucial for feminist studies because they provide a ground for the researchers to prioritize women's personal experiences and analyze nuances of meaning. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995:1), qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out how others interpret the world. Interviewing allows researchers to listen to people's subjective interpreting of the world and enables the research participants to tell their own story. The spontaneous exchange within an interview allows for flexibility and freedom. Thanks to repeated questioning, the researcher can gain a comprehensive

understanding of what the interviewees think at a specific moment in time (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 19). In sum, as Patton (2002: 341) says, “the purpose of interviewing is to enter into other person’s perspective”. In this sense, one can say that the use of qualitative in-depth interviews in feminist studies is a quite crucial way to uncover women’s subjective experiences and how they interpret the world.

4.2. Research Participants: Women Columnists

In the post-1990s and especially in 2000’s, with the proliferation of mass media and growing demand for public intellectual figures such as commentators or columnists, the number of intellectual women who are writing for a large audience about general public matters has greatly increased in contemporary Turkey. Women columnists are crucial actors who prolifically contribute to the public debates and shape the public opinion in the Turkish context. For this study, I have talked to 12 women columnists who are quite influential figures in the media field. Moreover, apart from writing articles in newspapers some of them are well-known novelists. The list of the women columnists who generously contributed to this study is as below:

	Born in	Education	Newspaper	Books
Ferai Tınç	1949	(left the Lit. Dept. of Robert College)	Hürriyet	-
Gila Benmayor	1960	BA in English Literature	Hürriyet	-
Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal	1963	Ph.D in Theology	Star, Taraf	-
Mehveş Evin	1970	BA in Psychology	Milliyet	-

Mine Kırıkkanat	1951	BA in Sociology	Cumhuriyet	Novels
Müge İplikçi	1966	MA in Gender Studies	Vatan	Novels, Essays
Nihal Bengisu Karaca	1972	BA in Law	Habertürk	-
Ruhat Mengi	-	BA in Engineering	Vatan	-
Sibel Eraslan	1967	BA in Law	Star	Novels, Essays
Yazgülü Aldoğan	1958	PhD in Sociology	Posta	Novels
Yıldız Ramazanoğlu	1972	BA in Pharmaceutics	Zaman (commentary page)	Novels, Essays
Zeynep Göğüş		BA in I.R.	Hürriyet	Essays

Ferai Tınç wrote for many years for *Hürriyet*, one of the most widely read, mainstream newspapers in Turkey known for its liberal stance. She began her journalistic career as a reporter in the foreign news department and has also worked as a foreign correspondent, editor and editor in chief in this department. Since the beginning of 1990s till 2011 when she resigned from the newspaper because of the rising governmental control on the media in Turkey, she has regularly written columns on the foreign news page. Tınç states that she has always performed her profession by prioritizing women's point of view.

Gila Benmayor has been working for *Hürriyet* for over 30 years. She has a master's degree in journalism from Istanbul University and a certificate in archeology. Since 1981, she has worked in different positions in the foreign news

department in *Hürriyet*. Currently she contributes to the newspaper through her columns.

Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal graduated from the Faculty of Theology of Ankara University. She has earned her doctoral degree in 1998 with a dissertation titled *Kadın Karşıtı Söylemin İslam Geleneğindeki İzdüşümü* (The Trajectory of the Misogynist Discourse in the Islamic Tradition), which investigates the foundations of the Islamic tradition by questioning the real gist of Islamic premises in terms of gender equality. Tuksal has written columns for *Star* and *Taraf* newspapers between 2009-2012 and 2012-2013. In addition, she has been quite active in the Islamist women's movement and taken up a leading role in the foundation of Başkent Kadın Platformu (Capital Women's Platform), a women's organization led by Islamist women. She has been frequently cited as an Islamic feminist in public debates.

Mehveş Evin is a columnist in *Milliyet*. She has been working as a journalist since 1993. Before *Milliyet* she has worked as an executive in different media platforms such as *Akşam* newspaper and *Aktüel*, i.e. a weekly journal. She began writing columns in 2006.

Mine Kırıkkanat has written columns for *Cumhuriyet*, *Radikal*, *Vatan* and *Milliyet* newspapers since mid-1980s. She was also a Paris correspondent for many years. In addition, she has published many novels and collections of essay.

Müge İplikçi is an author and a columnist in *Vatan* newspaper. She has studied English literature in her undergraduate study and has a Master's degree in the same field. She worked as a teacher and journalist in the 1990s. She has written many novels, short story books and collections of essay.

Nihal Bengisu Karaca graduated from the Law Faculty of Istanbul University. She began her journalistic career in 1994 at the journal *Aksiyon*, where she later became an editor for the arts page. She also worked for *Kanal 7* as a copywriter and program director. She wrote columns for *Zaman* newspaper, the weekly journal *Yeni Aktüel* and currently for the daily *Habertürk*.

Ruhat Mengi has a degree in engineering. Before she was made to quit her job by the newspaper administration because of her critical position vis-a-vis the AKP government, she wrote for *Vatan* newspaper. Before *Vatan*, she worked for *Sabah* newspaper for a long time. She also makes news programs for TV.

Sibel Eraslan has begun writing in national newspapers and journals in 1989 when she was a senior university student at the Law Faculty of Istanbul University. Since then, she has written in mainstream national newspapers with a pro-Islamic stance, such as *Yeni Şafak*, *Vakit* and *Star*. In addition to her journalistic career, she has also published novels, collections of short stories, essays and research books.

Yazgülu Aldoğan has a Ph.D in Sociology. After teaching in academia for some time, she has started her journalistic career and has worked for various media institutions such as *Nokta* journal, *Hürriyet* and *Sabah* newspapers. Currently she writes for *Posta*; a mainstream newspaper with a high circulation. She has also published two novels.

Yıldız Ramazanoğlu graduated from the Pharmacy Faculty of Hacettepe University. Since 1996, she has published ten books, including novels, collections of short stories and research books. Moreover, she has also contributed to national newspapers and journals and has participated in international women's summits as representatives of human rights and women's organizations. Her literary works deal

with themes such as womanhood, religiosity, otherness, while her research books cover a broad array of issues ranging from colonial feminism in Iraq and Afghanistan to Turkish politics.

Zeynep Göğüş has written for *Cumhuriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Hürriyet* and *Sabah* newspapers. She specialized in foreign news and has published a book on EU-Turkey relations. She states that she is one of the first women columnists in 1980's Turkey who have written regularly on a wide range of social and political topics.

I have chosen to talk to these women columnists for a number of reasons. First, for a study that investigates women intellectuals' negotiation of feminist identity by focusing on their position in the public sphere, it is significant that research participant women intellectuals are prolific contributors to current public debates and display a certain profeminist stance with regard to gender issues. Women columnists in the list provided above are all established columnists/writers, who actively engage in the recent political discussions and write about gender issues. Apart from the up-to-date coverage of political debates and gender conscious stance in the columns, it is also important that research participants reflect the wide spectrum of ideological positions in contemporary Turkey. Therefore, women columnists from various mainstream newspapers, i.e. *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Vatan*, *Posta*, *Habertürk*, *Zaman*, *Star*, *Taraf*, has been selected and incorporated into the study.

As a result, the most striking differentiation among the selected group of intellectual women has come forward with respect to the religious affiliations. While some women intellectuals under consideration here are secular, unveiled women, others have a stronger religious affiliation. However, such labels, by no means,

should imply that these two groups, i.e, secular and Muslim, constitute two isolated categories. This research acknowledges that it is possible to detect both differences and similarities between Muslim and secular women intellectuals in terms of their approach to feminist identification. The dialogue between these two groups as well as their unique characteristics will be investigated in next chapters.

4.3. About the Interviews and Interview Questions

All women columnists were quite cooperative and wanted to contribute to the aims of the study. It is clear that women columnists who accepted to participate in the study have a certain degree of interest in gender issues in Turkey. Their interest in this realm can also be detected in their writings. Some interviews took place in women columnists' offices in newspaper buildings, some others are conducted in public places such as cafés. The interview duration was approximately one hour, which was enough to ask the questions that I intended to ask.

I have divided the interview questions into two parts. The first part inquires about women columnists' professional lives in the media sector. Here, my main motivation is to investigate to what extent women in question attribute priority to their gender identity in their professional lives. The second part aims to reveal how the women columnists conceptualize feminism and feminist identity, what their main criticism against feminism is and whether or not they call themselves feminist. One of the most helpful aspects of doing interviews is asking interviewees the same questions because in this way the researcher can compare and contrast different responses. However, sometimes it may also be necessary to take into account the differences among participants and adjust the questions accordingly before each

interview. Considering this point, I have updated the interview design before each interview by adding new questions, where necessary, in order to capture the political stance that the writer in question has and the implications of this stance for her approach to feminisms and feminist identity. Yet, the main questions remained the same throughout the interviews.

Firstly, I asked women columnists about the trajectory of their professional lives in the media sector. Here, I mainly aim to uncover the context in which their writing has developed. The question basically inquires about the difficulties that women columnists have encountered throughout their professional lives or the support they have got from their families or colleagues. It is critical whether they elaborate on their experiences in a general manner or from a gender perspective. In addition to this, I have asked women columnists to compare women's position in the media sector with that of male colleagues. The main idea here is to see whether they would touch upon the power differentials stemming from gendered positions. I have also asked about women columnists' attitudes towards the term "woman writer" or "woman columnist". This particular labeling or the refrainment from it can be seen in similar terms with the choice to call oneself "feminist". These labelings reveal the subject's negotiation of gender roles in the construction of her identity. One can suggest that the acknowledgement of the decisiveness of gender roles and the choice to define oneself as a "woman writer" or "woman journalist" may raise the prospects of calling oneself feminist. In addition to these aspects, I also examined how women columnists position themselves in the media and whether they differentiate themselves on the basis of their gender-conscious or profeminist stance. To understand women columnists' peculiar position in the public sphere, it is inevitable to take into account how they themselves define their positioning.

In the second part designed to disclose women columnists' ideas about identity politics and feminist identity, I have tried to find out how they define their relationship to feminism. Here, it is critical whether or not they would label themselves as feminist. Here, it is also important to scrutinize how they position feminist self-identification in the public sphere. Moreover, criticisms that women columnists pose against feminism are investigated in detail in order to obtain hints to comprehend their thoughts on how feminism should (not) be. I also ask women columnists to elaborate on the trajectory of their relationship with feminism. Through this question, I would like to incorporate the time dimension into the interview. In return, I hope to be able to discern whether or not women columnists see identity as a static/dynamic construction. In addition, I have tried to understand women columnists' support for the women's movement in Turkey. Myakovsky and Wittig (1997); Cowan, Mestlin and Masek (1992) argue that there are certain indicators that could help us predict the feminist identity; namely, positive perception of feminists and feminist movement, exposure to feminism, agreement with profeminist attitudes towards gender roles and belief in the significance of collective action. Following this point, I have investigated whether a correlation can be detected between women columnists' support for women's movement and their attitudes towards feminist self-identification. Furthermore, I have scrutinized what women columnists would say if someone would situate them in or close to a counter public fed by feminist ideas. I also try to disclose how women columnists see the position of feminist discourses within power configurations in the public sphere in Turkey. It is crucial to comprehend how they place feminists and feminist discourses vis-a-vis the dominant public discourses because this could give us clues about their choice to refrain from or affirm the feminist label.

4.4. The Questions, Dilemmas and Important Points Regarding the Operationalization of Feminist Self-Identification

Feminist self-identification has been studied widely in the literature from different angles. Cowan et. al (1992) and Zucker (2004) studied the predictors of feminist identity; Aronson (2003), Williams and Wittig (1997) and Misciagno (1997) investigated the multiple dimensions of feminist identity; Peltola et. al (2004) analyzed the role of generation in feminist identification and McCabe (2005) focused on the discrepancy between feminist attitudes and feminist self-labeling. Although the literature on feminist identification is so rich, most of the studies operate in the field of social psychology and treat feminist self-identification solely as a form of social identity which is espoused as a result of the individual judgement of a particular group membership. The treatment of feminist identification exclusively as a matter of individual judgement ignores the power mechanism involved in the process. One does not negotiate feminist identity in a vacuum; rather the negotiation takes place within a social and political context that is closely bounded with discourses operating on feminism. In this sense, the endorsement of the feminist label is, before all, a public statement and thus needs to be carefully investigated with respect to the public discourses about feminist identification and the subject's position in the public sphere.

Some researchers, who conduct research in the field of social psychology, agree with the fact that espousing feminist identity is a public statement. Wittig and Williams (1997:4) argue the following:

“Considering oneself a feminist privately and calling oneself a feminist in social discourse are two such assertions of group membership: the former is a private self-label, while the latter connotes a more public assertion.”

Moreover, they proposed that private feminist self-labeling versus public identification as a feminist may reflect different levels of belief in the social acceptability of the term as well as differential commitment to collective action. However, despite this acknowledgement, their analyses mainly focus on the individual dimension of feminist identification and do not engage into a thorough study of the public aspects of the matter. Williams and Wittig (1997) investigated the nature of the discrepancy between college students who self-identify as feminists and those who support feminist goals, but don't call themselves feminists. Four variables that might differentiate between the first and second group were tested in their study: recognition of discrimination, positive evaluation of feminists, previous exposure to feminism and belief in collective action. Their main goals are to identify which variables may be predictive of pro-feminist orientation versus those which may be predictive of feminist social identity. This kind of analysis, which treats feminist identity as a social identity, focuses on the individual motivation for group membership and leaves out the study of public discourses working on the feminist label, cannot account for why espousal of the feminist label is before all a public statement.

The social identity theory, in this sense, has significant limitations to reflect on the negotiation of the feminist label. Unlike personal identity which consists of traits people use to describe themselves as unique individuals, social identity emphasizes the characteristics people share with others who are members of a particular group based on categories such as gender, ethnicity and so on. Tajfel (1978: 63) claims that social identity deals with “an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the

value and emotional significance attached to that membership”. Similarly, Thoits and Virshup (1997: 106) define social identities as “socially constructed and socially meaningful categories that are accepted by individuals as descriptive of themselves or their group”. This implies that social identity does not emerge until it is personally acknowledged as self-defining in some respect. Thus, research utilizing social identity as a conceptual framework puts the emphasis on individual’s self concept. Referring to this point, Huddy (2001) maintains that social identity theorists’ disinclination to examine the sources of social identity in a real world complicated by history and culture generates serious limitations about the explanatory power of the concept. Huddy criticizes the social identity theory on the basis that it does not elaborate enough on the element of choice in identity development. For her, in social identity theory individuals are assigned to certain identity groups and how they acquired those identities remains an enigma. She states that to compensate for the limitations of social identity theory, it is necessary to neatly elaborate on the individual negotiations of identities. Moreover, she argues that rather than treating a particular identity as a monolithic pattern, different shades of identities, i.e, weak and strong versions of identities, have to be taken into account. (Ibid, 24) Huddy further suggests that to illuminate the power mechanisms involved in the identity development, it is also necessary to explore the meaning of group identity and the connotations of group membership for group identifiers, potential identifiers, and outsiders. Otherwise, group identity appears as a fixed category that is homogenous across the group.

Considering these criticisms posed against social identity theory, it is possible to suggest that the inclination in this theory towards assigning individuals to certain identity categories without questioning the acquisition or negotiation of those

identities and its focusing on the individual motivation without placing the individual in a setting limits the theory's explanatory capacity to reflect on the social and political context. As Hall (1996) argues, precisely because identities are constructed within discourse, it is necessary to treat them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices. Similarly, Lloyd (2005: 14) challenges the idea that identity is prior to politics and stresses that identities are political effects generated on the field of power. For her, production of identities also entails their naturalization in order to make them appear to preexist politics.

Considering the points mentioned above, the concept of social identity cannot provide a useful ground to account for feminist identification among women intellectuals under consideration here. Rather than being a personal matter negotiated merely at the individual level, women intellectuals' negotiation with feminist identity can be better understood when situated in a social and political context. Thus, in this research I depart from the understanding that feminist identification is before all a "public statement".

Furthermore, the emphasis in this study will not be put on feminist identity as "collective identity" either. Taylor and Whittier (1992) define collective identity as the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity. Defining collective identity as a characteristic that is constructed, activated, and sustained through interaction in social movement communities, Taylor and Whittier identify three processes involved in the formation of politicized identities: "The creation of boundaries that mark off a group; the development of a consciousness of the group's distinct and shared disadvantages; and the politicization of everyday life, embodied in symbols and actions that connect the

members of the group and link their everyday experiences to larger social injustices.” (cited in Taylor and Rupp, 1999: 365) From here, it is clear that collective identity is defined within the context of a particular social movement and thus is associated with mobilization and activism.

Even though some of the women columnists declare that they ardently support the women’s movement in Turkey, they are not directly involved in it. Therefore, feminist identification in this case connotes a broader realm than that implied by the concept of collective identity.⁴ Women may develop feminist identity and espouse the feminist label yet they may not be particularly part of the activism and mobilization carried out by the women’s movement. Some scholars suggest that assertion of a particular group identity is to be accompanied by political activism. For them, identity politics cannot be merely limited to the individual life choices but is inevitably intertwined with the political attempts to enhance the social and political rights of the social group in question. For example, Kaufman (1990: 30) argues that “identity politics’ emphasis on self-transformation as a prelude to political change has frequently been replaced by a vision of self-transformation as political change.” She critically maintains that “the tendency to claim political content for changes in the lifestyle encourages the view that politics does not necessarily involve engagement with external structures of power.” (Ibid, 31)

⁴ It is very telling that most of the women columnists regard feminist identity as a collective identity that suppresses different aspects of one’s identity and imposes a fixed, restrictive set of norms and values, which in return requires absolute compliance. The theoretical framework described in the earlier chapter puts forward that collective identities do not necessarily connote a fixed group identity discarding difference and individuality. Narratives reducing feminist collective identity to exclusionary and essentialist forms of identity politics ignore the alternative understanding of political collectives as derivatives deeply located in individuals’ social positions, experiences and meaning making processes. Women columnists’ reduction of feminist collective identity to fixed, restrictive set of norms and values will be later analyzed in detail.

Although I agree with this claim to a certain extent, in the case of women columnists the atomistic individualism does not hold true. It has to be acknowledged that the statements that these women intellectuals make in public reach broad masses and thus are capable of generating wide ranging political effects. Relying on a conceptualization of politics as an activity that goes beyond the political institutions and structures, encompassing each and every realm of life as well as the complex processes of becoming a subject, this study assumes that feminist self-labeling or the reservation to do so is inherently political and is capable of generating political consequences for women's status in society and the public recognition of feminists.

Feminist self-identification as a public statement, first of all, has to be situated against the background of the concept of public sphere because to understand the power mechanisms involved in the feminist self-identification process, one has to be able to delineate the characteristics of the public debate and the formation of the public opinion, all of which in return affect the self-labeling. To do this, I will rely on the theoretical framework regarding the idea of public sphere, which I introduced earlier.

4.5. The Dilemmas of Feminist Self-identification

Current research on feminist self-identification in the field of social psychology has widely elaborated on women who embrace some feminist principles, but do not identify themselves as feminist. (Cowan, Mestlin & Masek 1992; Williams & Wittig, 1997) The question as to why these women, usually labelled as “egalitarians” or “non-labelers”, refrain from the feminist label, even though they are committed to feminist ideals, has puzzled the recent research agenda on the feminist identification.

Considering the fact that attitudes held by feminists and nonfeminists may be quite alike with respect to gender inequalities, McCabe (2005) asks the following question: “What's in a label?” To tackle with this question, researchers have attempted to understand the differences between the feminists and egalitarians in terms of their approach to feminism. Along with McCabe (2005), many other scholars claimed that nonlabelers are similar to feminists in their support for gender equality (Liss et al., 2001; Roy, Weibust, & Miller, 2007). On the other hand, Bay-Cheng and Zucker (2007) found that nonlabelers tended to endorse individualistic values more so than feminists.

First of all, it should be noted that refrainment from the feminist label despite the support for feminist goals may have something to do with social ostracism. The label “feminist” is not a value-neutral term. In the public imagination, it is usually associated with such epithets as "feminazi", “militant”, "man hating", "lesbian". Tyler (2007:176) contends that from the very beginning of the women’s movement, the anti-feminist campaign has distorted the meaning of feminism so much so that feminism is mostly represented as a selfish and anti-family ideology. The way that the anti-feminist discourse discredits feminist ideas and goals by representing them as selfish, immoral and anti-family is clearly revealed in the following quote:

“Feminists... promote a highly personalized sexual politics that is simultaneously depoliticizing, individualistic and potentially pernicious in its implications. Feminism... renders politics hollow, first, by finding politics everywhere; second, by reducing politics to crude relations of force or domination, and third, by stripping politics of its centrality to a shared social identity. It erodes private life by construing it as a power-riddled battleground, thus encouraging a crudely politicized approach toward coitus, marriage, child-rearing, even one’s relationship to one’s own body.” (Elshtain quoted in Tyler 2007:177)

Talking about the U.S. context, Tyler (Ibid, 173, 177) suggests that because of the distorted image of what feminism means and who a feminist is, the label “feminist”

has been widely rejected even among women who have pro-feminist attitudes to gender issues. In this sense, it is very difficult to reverse the cultural definitions of a typical feminist deeply entrenched in the public mind. As a result, such culturally established group prototypes create a powerful source of identity stability.

It is obvious that social ostracism regarding the feminist identity stems from this negative discursive construction of the term “feminist” in the public imagination. Empirical studies suggest that both feminists and non-feminists believe that a typical feminist is far more extreme than they themselves are. (Liss et al., 2000:5) Both feminist and nonfeminist women believe that a typical feminist has stronger radical, socialist, and cultural beliefs than they themselves have.

Scholars also point out the vagueness surrounding the term “feminist” as another possible cause for the refrainment from feminist self-labeling. (Budgeon 2001; Liss, Hoffner, and Crawford 2000; Misciagno 1997) In this frame, hooks (1984: 17) suggests that the feminist discourse has never been able to arrive at a consensus of opinion about what feminism is or accept definitions that could serve as points of unification. Moreover, she argues that the “anything goes” approach to the definition has rendered the term meaningless. (Ibid, 23) To designate the contentious nature of the term, theorists and historians have argued that the word "feminism" is similar to "liberalism" in the range of understandings and distortions it encompasses. (Cott 1987) Noting the fact that the ambiguity surrounding the term “feminist” induces would-be supporters to disclaim the label of feminism even when they support feminist goals, some scholars attempted to reexamine and reconceptualize the public understanding of the word “feminism” and “feminist”. To this end, Offen (1988) traces the trajectory of the development of feminist ideas back to the early phases of the women’s movement in the 20th century and tries to reveal different

modes of feminist thinking specific to time and place. Here, she identifies two conflicting modes of thinking, i.e, relational and individualist. Offen (Ibid, 142) clearly notes how the history of feminism is inextricable from the time-honored concerns of historiography: politics and power. Furthermore, she points out that one of the reasons why so many women today disclaim the label feminist even when they support feminist goals may have something to do with the fact that they associate feminism with the individualist conceptualization of feminism and thus regard it anti-family and selfish. According to Offen, relational feminism, if appropriated in favour of women, could offer an exit for the disidentification between espousal of feminist ideals and feminist self-identification. She notes that in contrast to the individualistic view which posits the individual as the basic unit and is thought to cause competition between the sexes, relational feminism proposes a gender-based but egalitarian vision of social organization and features the primacy of a companionate, non-hierarchical, male-female couple as the basic unit of society.⁵ (Ibid, 135) In this way, she evidently points out the historically situated and differing meanings of feminisms.

Part of the attempt to understand the discursive construction of the term “feminist” in the public imagination is to acknowledge the differentiation between private and public aspects of identification. According to Williams and Wittig (1997), at the private level, avoidance might be due in part to personal (“cognitive”) dissonance, for example, between one’s positive self-concept and a personal negative evaluation of feminists. At the public level, one potentially risks more -e.g., social ostracism. This differentiation between private and public aspects of feminist

⁵ Yet, she also notes that relational feminism may be easily appropriated by patriarchal politics as well and may turn into something that works against women as women’s special nature, physiological and psychological distinctiveness and the centrality of motherhood have been so far frequently coopted by patriarchal actors.

identification is quite useful for this study. Following this distinction, we will be dealing with feminist self-labeling as a public statement.

Another important point regarding the study of feminist identity is to take into account different shades of identity. In order to understand different levels of commitment to feminist identity, Duncan (2010:4) differentiates between strong feminists, weak feminists, and nonfeminists. In a similar way, to tone down the strong associations attributed to feminist identity, hooks (2000) suggests that with the aim to “emphasize that engagement with feminist struggle as political commitment we could avoid using the phrase “I am a feminist”. Instead, she suggest to use the statement “I advocate feminism”:

“Because there has been undue emphasis placed on feminism as an identity or lifestyle, people usually resort to stereotyped perspectives on feminism. Saying “I am a feminist” means I am plugged into pre-conceived notions of identity, role or behavior. When I say “I advocate feminism, the response is “what is feminism? the phrase I advocate does not imply the kind of absolutism that is attached to “I am”. It does not engage us in a dualistic thinking... When asked are you a feminist, it appears that an affirmative answer is translated to mean that one is concerned with no political issues other than feminism.” (2000: 29)

This complex nature of identities makes it impossible to stabilize feminist identity claims. (Budgeon, 2001: 18) The problem of difference within the category ‘woman’ has revealed that there are as many ways of becoming a feminist as there are of becoming a woman. Fragmentation has provided many different ways for women to be feminist. In a similar vein, motivations for the denial of the feminist identity could be as varied as the espousal of this identity. This denial could be strategic, ideological or practical. Griffin (1989) suggests that when a woman says, “I’m not a feminist but...”, this connotes a way of speaking about feminism without making an identification with it. Non-identification may display a refusal to be fixed into place as a feminist, but it may also be a way of avoiding social ostracism or a sign of the

inability to position oneself as feminist because of the confusing and contradictory messages about what feminism really is.

The complexity of the feminist identity claims, different shades of feminist positions (weak, strong, etc.) and different reasonings (strategic, ideological, practical, etc.) involved in the negotiation of feminist identity are to be taken into account while accounting for feminist identity. Recent research has acknowledged this complex nature of feminist identity claims by putting its multidimensional character at the center. For example, McCabe (2005) argues that feminist identity is a multidimensional concept that encompasses feminist self-identification, feminist consciousness, and gender-role attitudes. Rhodebeck (1996) suggested that feminist identity and feminist opinions are distinct, differentiating between “support of feminist positions” and “support of feminism”. On the other hand, Misciagno (1997) draws attention to the fact that traditional accounts of feminist consciousness excluded “de facto” feminists, i.e. women who hold feminist beliefs but do not take on the feminist identity. This line of thinking enables us to avoid reducing the negotiation of the feminist identity to the espousal of the label. It points out the hybrid character that the relationship with the feminist label can display.

Last but not least, I would like to note that in this research, I intentionally avoid from providing a list of predictors for measuring feminist identity and defining what feminism is. The fixation of feminisms’ meanings and the ideological components of feminist identities though operationalizing a list of predictors, would be contrary to the aims of this study. Rather than evaluating women columnists’ negotiation of feminist identity according to a fixed set of predictors, the aim here is to grasp how women columnists themselves operationalize feminist identity.

4.6.Narrative Analysis: Tracing Women Columnists' Approach to Feminism in Narrative

4.6.1.The Narrative Turn in Social Science

Traditionally, the concept of narrative has been a concern for literary and linguistic studies. Sommers and Gibson (1994:37) note that for a very long time, narrative has been cast as the "epistemological other" of the social sciences and there has been a sharp contrast between the particularistic characteristics of narrative and the social science methodologies. However, in recent decades, scholars from a wide spectrum of disciplines have incorporated this concept into the social science research. This can be attributed to the increased interest in subjectivity and in the meanings attached by individuals to their actions. (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997, Sommers 1994, Plummer 1995) The postmodern subversion of grand, universal, totalizing theories through reference to knowledge that is local and specific, can closely collaborate with narrative models of knowing.

In recent years, scholars from various disciplines have come to suggest that we live in a story-shaped world (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sommers, 1994; Taylor, 1989). They argue that humans make sense of the world only through narratives; our lives are storied and identities are narratively constructed. Relying on such premises, Fisher (1984) claims that human communication is largely a story telling process and regards humans as *homo narrans*, i.e, storytelling animals. For Bruner (1986), too, humans are, as a species, *homo narrans*, with an inborn tendency to tell stories.

The narrative turn offers creative possibilities for adopting interdisciplinary approaches, which go beyond the literary study of narrative, psychology or rhetorics

and encompass various disciplines such as political science and sociology. Sommers (1992, 1994) incorporates the concept of narrative into sociology, while Patterson and Monroe (1998) use it for political science research. With the greater acceptance of postmodern research methods, narrative is now seen as a valid means of knowledge production and has become increasingly legitimized. (Riessman, 2008; Skeggs, 2002).

As a result, it has been widely accepted that narratives play a critical role in organizing our perceptions of reality into a coherent and meaningful pattern. Thanks to the social scientists' incorporating the idea of narrative into their work, it has become apparent that the explanatory powers of narratives are by no means limited to personal lives. Humans also need stories to find out how the world progresses and how one fits into it. In this sense, narratives play a critical role in the construction of political behavior as they shape our perceptions of political reality and affect our actions in response to political events. Sommers and Gibson (1994) state that social life is *storied* and narrative is an *ontological condition of social life*. According to them, people make sense of the world by integrating the events around them within one or more narratives, which are derived from a repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives. As such, narratives also serve as analytical tools to interpret the social, political and cultural contexts.

One of the merits of narrative analysis is that by entering into dialogue with marginalized groups, narrative interviewers may unearth hidden or subordinated ideas. Bringing to light the ideas that are excluded from or neglected within dominant political structures and processes, narratives may be used to contest dominant social practices. (Franzosi, 1998; Plummer, 1995. Andrews, 2002)

Therefore, narratives of members of excluded groups are capable of showing how hegemonic accounts are inadequate to account for some experiences.

Another merit of narrative analysis is that narratives enable us to conduct research on multiple levels. (Squire, 2008) First, it helps you to bring *structures* of language into focus. Second, it puts great emphasis on the *content* of texts, ranging from individual phrases to larger bodies of texts. Third, narrative analysis also pays attention to the *context* of storytelling. In this study, we will apply narrative analysis by taking into account both the structure and the content of the narratives in question as well as the context in which the narratives are produced.

4.6.2. Doing Narrative Analysis

Narrative is usually defined as a story “with a clear sequential order that connects events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offers insights about the world and people’s experiences of it.” (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997: xvi) Yet, in more broader terms, it may also refer to the ways in which we weave disparate facts together in order to make sense of our reality. (Patterson 1998) In this sense, the concept of narrative can be thought of as a means of exploring the ways in which social actors interpret the world and their place within it. Regarding this point, Bamberg and McCabe (1998: iii) state the following:

“With narrative, people strive to configure space and time, deploy cohesive devices, reveal identity of actors and relatedness of actions across scenes. They create themes, plots, and drama. In so doing, narrators make sense of themselves, social situations, and history.”

Therefore, for studies attempting to reveal the dynamics involved in negotiations of a particular identity, the concept of identity serves as a fundamental analytical tool.

4.6.3. Identity and narratives

Narratives can provide detailed accounts regarding actors' interpretations and provide a useful ground to closely reflect on the negotiation processes and constitutive parts of identities. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992:1) state that "personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities are fashioned". Similarly, Ricoeur (1984) says that it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand and make sense of the social world. Since the self comes to know itself only through the symbolic mediations in narrative and identities are constructed through narrativity, the study of narrative can be thought of as an attempt to come to terms with how identities are constructed.

Here, it is important to note that in narrative account, identity is not something foundational and essential but something produced through narratives that are constantly reconstituted. Narratives involve reconstruction of stories across times and places as it is not possible to repeat the same story exactly the way it was told before. (Squire 2008) Thus, each and every act of narration involves a different story line. Therefore, narratives tell about experience through reconstituting it, resulting in multiple and changeable storylines. (Ibid, 23) In this sense, narratives would require a constant work on narration of identities. They involve uncertainties of representation and may never reach closure. Thus, narrative analyses must accept that there can be multiple valid interpretations that prevent the hermeneutic circle from closure. (Freeman 2004, Squire 2008) The process of telling stories that constitute the basis of personal identity, is an uncertain and ongoing process. This dynamic nature of identities and the impossibility of closure in identity construction, leads to the fact between the lines, narratives may involve different, even contradicting story lines about identities and selves.

Finally, one should also note that the narrative approach is in line with the mid-way theories that attempt to negotiate between postmodern accounts dismantling the idea of identity and essentially oriented identity politics. On the one hand, narrative analysis requires agency; it depicts human action that entails agency. (Patterson and Monroe, 1998: 315) On the other hand, as argued above, the conception of agency that narrative relies on is quite dynamic and open to change.

4.6.3.1. Characteristic Features of Narratives

Narrative helps us organize our ideas and experiences in terms of their historicity, temporality and relationality. As such, narrators can create plots from disordered experience, by giving reality a unity. (Riessmann 2008) Regarding this point, Mink states the following:

“Life has no beginnings, middles or ends. Thus, if life has any narrative structure, it is one we have put there after the fact.” (cited in Kerby, 1991: 41)

In this frame, narrators organize their tales temporally, spatially, thematically and episodically. By utilizing particular linguistic devices, they make sense of their own identities and the historical, social and political context.

In the field of narratology, scholars identify certain qualities to define and study the concept of narrative. One of the foundational elements of the theory of narrative is the differentiation between “story” and “plot”. According to this differentiation, story connotes what is depicted in narrative, while plot corresponds to the structure of the series of events and the relationship that connects one event to the other. As E. M. Forster put it, “the king died and then the queen died” is a story, but “the king died and then the queen died of grief” is a plot. (cited in Martin, 1986: 81) Stories are the raw material of events, whereas plots, as constructed out of stories, are

the basic means that bring specific events into one meaningful whole. (Polkinghorne, 1987) In this sense, it is thanks to the nature of a plot that narrative parts are synthesized into a meaningful temporal whole where the meaning of each and every part is dependent on the framing of the story. In addition to the “story-plot” differentiation, there are many other narrative qualities that contribute to the formation of a meaningful whole. For example, temporality (the time dimension in narrative), sequencing (the episodic ordering of narrative), causal emplotment (causal ties weaving events together), narrative perspective (narrator’s point of view) and narrative rhythm are some of them. (Bal, 1985)

Sommers (1992: 603) identifies four features of narrativity particularly relevant for social sciences: (1) relationality of parts; (2) causal emplotment; (3) selective appropriation; and (4) temporality, sequence, and place. Before all, narratives are constellations of connected parts embedded in time and space. This relationality of parts or emplotment is quite crucial for narrativity since it is through emplotment that events or thought are brought together and life is given coherence. Sommers underlines that in narrativity we discern the meaning of each and every single event only in temporal and spatial relationship to other events; she argues that the relationality of parts is the chief characteristic of narrative. It is possible to say that the narrative assumes a meaning thanks to the causal emplotment. When independent parts are located in a sequential plot, then their relationship to other parts becomes clear and in this way we can construct a configuration of relationships. The episodes which make up the plot, serve a purpose; their particular configuration, when read as a coherent whole, points out the meaning of the narrative. (Lawler, 2003: 242)

In Sommers' scale, another crucial element of narrativity is its evaluative criteria. According to this, the evaluative capacity of emplotment demands selective appropriation in constructing narratives. In other words, a plot must be thematic:

“We do not narrate all the details of any circumstance; what we choose to narrate is generally noteworthy because it stands out by posing a problem or exception.” (Patterson and Moore, 1998:7)

The primacy of the narrative theme or competing themes determines how events are processed and what criteria will be used to prioritize events and render them meaningful. Lastly, temporality and sequence also play an important role in the construction of narrative. We mentioned that the connected parts in narrative are brought together in such a way that the narrative as a whole has a coherent meaning. Here, it is important to observe in what sequence the parts are brought together. Following the sequence can give us clues about the meanings of narrative.

Having mentioned the components that form a narrative, for the purposes of this research it is quite crucial to distinguish between personal or *ontological* narratives and *public narratives*. Sommers (1994) suggest that the idea of narrative links the individual and the collective in two ways: 1. Narratives of individual lives must always contain other life narratives 2. Narratives are not only produced by individuals but also circulate socially. Sommers calls the second form of narratives as “public narratives., i.e., narratives which are attached to social and political formations rather than the single individual. According to this account, personal/ontological narratives are produced only within the limits of the repertoire of public narratives. This means that the question as to what kind of narratives will socially predominate depends at large on the distribution of power. Sommers alleges that ontological narratives never occur in vacuums but are interpersonal. Thus, agents may adjust narratives to fit them into their own identities and in return they may also

adjust their identities to fit into the narratives. Accordingly, people construct their identities by locating themselves within a repertoire of emplotted public narratives; they make sense of their identities in line with the multiplicity of available social, public and cultural narratives. Narratives' dependence on a stock of plots or on a canon reveals that each and every narrative is a product of the relationship between the hegemonic and subversive features of the public sphere. Therefore, narrative analysis enables us to investigate, not just the ways in which stories are structured, but also the power mechanisms embedded in the social and political context that allow for the production of certain kind of stories while silencing others.

In line with Sommers' differentiation between *ontological* and *public* narratives, in this research the term "narrative" does not simply correspond to a story that simply carries a set of facts or events. Rather, it is operationalized as a social product produced by people within specific social, historical and political context. In this vein, it is important to take into account that narratives do not originate with the individual; rather, individuals produce narratives within the context of public narratives which limit what can be said, what stories can be told and what will count as meaningful.

4.6.3.2. Narrative Structures, Themes and Context

The concept of narrative is an elaborate means to thoroughly reflect on the constitutive parts of women columnists' responses. As explained above, the main idea in narrativity is the causal emplotment of different parts into a coherent whole in such a way that the end product has a tangible meaning in itself. Keeping this in mind, I will try to analyze how women columnists bring different ideas together to

produce a coherent narrative on feminist identity. Moreover, I will also investigate the role that the idea of narrative plays in identity formation processes and the possibilities it offers for the negotiation of identities.

One can suggest three different axis along which narrative analysis can be made. Accordingly, the interpretive schemes in narrative analysis can focus on narrative structures, narrative content or the context in which the narrative is produced. (Squire, 2008: 9) As Barthes (1975) says, one cannot reduce narratives to the sum of sentences in the text. It is the unique narrative structure, i.e, the order of events, temporal distortions, flashbacks and flashforwards or the narrative rythm, that carries the narrative beyond the story or the sum of sentences in the text. Drawing on this, in order the analyze the meanings underlying the narrative, one can focus on the narrative structure. In addition to this, one can also study the narrative content, i.e. “what is said in the narrative”. Thirdly, the context in which the narrative is produced constitutes another research axis that allows on to trace the power mechanisms surrounding the formation and telling of narratives.

In this research, I will try to follow all three of these research paths and try to explore the narrative structure, the content and the contextual elements in women columnists’ responses. I will outline the constitutive themes in women columnists’ responses by making a thematic analysis. On the other hand, I will make a structural analysis and elaborate on the relationality of parts, casual emplotment, selective appropriation and temporality in columnists’ narratives. I will also analyze the contextual factors that affect the formation of narratives in question. As a result, relying on both thematic, structural and contextual narrative analysis, I will try to locate women’s narratives on a web of power configurations vis-a-vis hegemonic public narratives in the public sphere in contemporary Turkey.

CHAPTER V

HEGEMONIC DISCOURSES ON FEMINISM IN TURKEY UNDER AKP YEARS

5.1. The AKP Rule, Gender Politics and the Field of Discursivity

Since this study focuses on women columnists' narratives in the post-2000's, i.e., a time period that witnessed a considerable increase in the number of women columnists contributing to the mass circulation newspapers, it is necessary to portray the social and political context in which these narratives are produced. In the last decade, the main characteristics of Turkish politics has been subject to a radical change as a result of the rise of the pro-Islamic Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi [Justice and Development Party] (AKP). For the first time in Turkish politics, a pro-Islamic party could get the majority of the votes in three successive elections, i.e, in 2002, 2007 and 2011 and rules the country with a new Islamist thinking marked by pragmatism rather than religious principles. (Çavdar, 2006) This remarkable rise of the AKP and Islamist politics was unprecedented because of the sui generis characteristics of Turkish modernization. The mentality of the Turkish experience of modernity was set in line with the Enlightenment tenets of materialism and positivism, which necessitated secularization and rationalization. Thus, the place of Islam in the new, modern country was revised and a very peculiar relationship was

established between the state and Islam in Turkey following the Kemalist revolution. (Toprak 1981) In this new period, religion was conceived as the chief obstacle blocking the way towards a modern society. Henceforth, the Republican elite, by adopting a teleological secularism, endeavored to prompt a radical rupture with the Islamic past. However, with the emergence of the pro-Islamic AKP on the political scene, the old premises of the Turkish experience of modernity had to be revisited and definitions of Islam as the “other” of the modern Turkey have become passé.

On the other hand, as a part of this Islamic resurgence, conservatisation in socio-cultural and political matters has come to the foreground. (Çarkoğlu & Toprak 2006; Toprak 2009) Party’s approach to women’s issues can be seen as a litmus paper through which this conservatisation crystallizes. In the AKP’s conservative politics, being a woman is first and foremost defined within the familial sphere through traditional gender codes. In the party program, it is clearly stated that the party prioritizes family centered policies and is determined to protect family unity.⁶ For PM Erdoğan, family constitutes the backbone of a powerful nation. He states the following: “If the family unit in a nation dissolves, that nation is doomed to dissolve, too.”⁷ Relying on this pro-family politics, AKP government aims to reinforce a strong commitment among citizens to the moral and political importance of family ideal and attempts to implement policies to consolidate this ideal as a regulative principle in the social and moral imagination. The idea of family in the AKP discourse is not only utilized as a regulative principle but also used as a strong political metaphor that applies the paternalistic familial logic to the political realm. Accordingly, citizens are seen as family members and politicians as heads of household, which paves the way to the reproduction of the patriarchal character of

⁶ See http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/akparti/parti-programi#bolum_

⁷ See <http://www.aile.gov.tr/tr/24264/Aile-Olmak-Projesinin-tanitimi-yapildi>.

the household in the political realm. On different occasions, PM Erdoğan utilized this metaphor of family to make a reference to the solidarity and common fate of the nation. For example, in a public speech he stated:

“East is ours, so is West. Turk is ours, so is Kurd... As 76 million people, we are together. Together we are a big family. We are Turkey.”⁸

While introducing the AKP candidates before 2011 elections, he had used the same expression with the aim to appease those who could not enter into the candidate list and to stress the solidarity and the ‘familial’ ties within the AKP:

“We are a big family. Those friends who do not see political activities as restricted to being an MP, will continue to be active in different positions.”⁹

In line with the central role attributed to the notion of family in the social and political imagination, various policy attempts have been made by the AKP to take measures to prevent the disintegration of the family. Recently, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies initiated a project called “Being a Family”, which provides certain advantages to families in various policy areas ranging from health and housing to postal services.¹⁰ If one aim of this policy attempt is to give families advantages in certain policy areas, the other aim is to encourage young people to get married and urge them to have children. In this sense, pronatalist policies constitute another main pillar of AKP’s pro-family politics. Stressing the need for a young population, PM Erdoğan advises to married couples to have at least three children in many of his speeches. This pronatalist vision frequently articulated by Erdoğan is based on religious, nationalistic, patriotic and economic motifs. To back this vision up, Erdoğan makes religious references to the prophet’s advice to get married,

⁸ “Erdoğan: Bedelini ağır öderler”, *Star Gazete*, <http://haber.stargazete.com/politika/erdogan-bedelini-agir-oderler/haber-813477#ixzz2oV8XkQwc>.

⁹ www.zaman.com.tr/politika_basbakan-erdogan-mevcut-167-milletvekili-listede-bulunmuyor_1120234.html.

¹⁰ <http://www.aile.gov.tr/tr/24264/Aile-Olmak-Projesinin-tanitimi-yapildi>.

addresses the nationalist sentiments or frames the issue of pronatalism as a matter of patriotism.¹¹ Yet, one can suggest that the ultimate motif in his pronatalist argument is the economic success of the country. For him, the future population of the country will definitely affect the competitiveness of the country on the economic market. Regarding this point, he makes the following statement:

“One or two children mean bankruptcy. Three children mean we are not improving but not receding either. At least three children are necessary in each family, because our population risks aging.”¹²

In this frame, pronatalist AKP discourses urging couples to have at least three children, are prevalent discourses in contemporary public debates in Turkey, which are frequently quoted in newspapers, appear in parliamentary discussions and underpin certain policy initiatives. For Akşit (2010), this call for three children, which operates through the utilization of women's bodies for pronatalist political projects, points out the beginning of a new period for demographic policies in Turkey. In this new pronatalist period, women's bodies are seen as subservient to political aims. Regarding the utilization of women's bodies, Delaney (1991) claims that with respect to the cultural meanings of reproduction in Turkey, women's bodies are always perceived as “the soil” and men's sperm as “the seed”, i.e., the essential element in reproduction. Accordingly, one can safely argue that pronatalist political projects in the contemporary era in Turkey regard women's bodies as “the carrier of

¹¹ For example, he quotes the prophet's following remark: “Get married and have children. I will praise your crowd”. See his speech on <http://www.aile.gov.tr/tr/24264/Aile-Olmak-Projesinin-tanitimi-yapildi>. In the same speech, he also identifies the importance attributed to family as a constitutive element of the national identity and frames the stress put on family as a patriotic sentiment.

¹² “Turkish PM Reiterates His Call for Three Children”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, January 3, 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-pm-erdogan-reiterates-his-call-for-threechildren.aspx?pageID=238&nid=38235>.

the seed”, make it vulnerable to societal control and render women’s womb subject to regulation by the modern administrative power.

In addition to the recent pronatalist discourses defining the ideal number of children, the recent anti-abortion policy initiative could be identified as another reflection of this pronatalist vision. Upon Erdoğan remarks in a public meeting in 2012, stating that abortion is murder¹³, a policy initiative appeared on the political agenda, which is designed to considerably reduce the time limit defined in law for the use of the right to abortion. Moreover, following this policy initiative, certain legal arrangements has been made, introducing limitations on c-sections and rendering this birth method restricted to medical emergencies. The government’s recent attempt to limit the terms of the right to abortion and the recent legal arrangements rendering the c-sections only possible under certain medical conditions are policy steps that contribute to AKP’s pronatalist aims and lead to the biopolitical control of population. As argued above, through regulating women’s reproductive capacities and their rights on their bodies, such discourses and policy initiatives see women’s womb as a policy area that can be easily be utilized for political purposes.¹⁴ These patriarchal discourses attempt not only to regulate reproductive capacities but they also produce regulatory discourses on sexualities, especially on women’s sexualities in the name of protecting the unity of family. Discourses controlling women’s bodies and sexualities have always been prevalent in the social, cultural and political fields in Turkey. However, what is alerting in the contemporary era is to witness political steps that strive to transform these discourses into law through

¹³“Başbakan: Her Kürtaj bir Uluderedir” [PM: Every Abortion is an Uludere], *Radikal*, May 27, 2012, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalEklerDeta3&ArticleID=1089235&CategoryID=77>.

¹⁴ For further discussion on recent abortion debates in Turkey, see Unal and Cindoğlu (2013).

certain legal arrangements. Calling these attempts as “masculinist restoration”, Kandiyoti (2010: 175) argues that such attempts are geared towards restoring the privileged status men enjoyed under Sharia legislation in the pre-Republican era, not only de facto but also de jure. Following this argument, one could suggest that the differentiating trait of the patriarchal gender regime under the AKP era lies in the political attempts to codify male domination over women’s lives through certain legal arrangements.

Another example indicating the patriarchal motifs in the legal arrangements proposed by the AKP with regard to the realm of sexuality is the law proposal in 2004 that is designed to render adultery subject to punishment. It has been suggested by the party that this proposal is intended to be put into force in response to the demands of Anatolian women who want adulterous husbands to be punished. (Onar and Müftüler-Baç, 2011) Since polygamy is an acceptable practice in Islam, some men may tend to use religious ceremonies to justify their infidelities, while most of the time it is women who suffer most from these polygamous relationships both as wives and as “second wives”. Yet, as women’s groups have poignantly articulated during the public debates on adultery, the legal punishment of adultery as a remedy to the problem of polygamous marriages, can be very prone to turn into a potential infringement of women’s rights and private life. It can serve as a tool to scrutinize women’s private lives and regulate their sexualities. In the end, thanks to the protests of women’s groups and the reactions from the European Union, the government did not attempt to put this proposal into force.

As seen from above, the disintegration of the family and factors damaging the institution of family including infidelity are perceived by the AKP government as the most threatening aspects of the modern era. Thus, in recent years various measures

have been taken or proposed to protect family as a fundamental value in the social and political imaginary. In this conservative political model, the relentless stress put on the familial unity constitutes a discursive ground where traditional gender roles are reproduced over and over again. As a result, women are rendered subservient to the unity of family through the traditional familial roles assigned to them as mothers and wives.

In fact, despite this ongoing conservatization in social, cultural and political fields and the reproduction of traditional gender roles, one should also acknowledge that during the initial stages of its rule the AKP has passed important legislative reforms that have improved women's public and private status. For example, In 2003, superiority of international legislation was accepted by making an addition to Article 90 of the Constitution, which made the CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), signed in 1985 in Turkey, operational in law. With respect to the labour law, it was explicitly stated that there is no place for discrimination on gender in the relationship between employee and employer. Moreover, the duration of paid leave for working women after giving birth was extended to 18 weeks. In 2004 an additional statement was incorporated into the 10th clause of the Constitution, which renders the state the guarantor of gender equality. Another change was made in the new Penal Code stating that marriage would not nullify criminal responsibility in the cases of rape. Also, sexual offences such as harassment in the workplace were criminalized. In the regulation of sexual crimes the discrimination between virgins and non-virgins was abolished. In addition to these, for all municipalities that have more than 50,000 residents it was made mandatory to establish shelter houses for women and children.

At first glance, one may find it contradictory to reconcile these limited but promising legal enhancements regarding women's status in society and the conservative and at times overtly anti-feminist tones in the party discourse. Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2011) suggest that these seemingly contradictory facets of the conservative AKP politics feed each other in the sense that while women are expected to be active participants of the economic market in the neoliberal order envisioned by the party, the reproduction of the patriarchal familial roles assigned to women in the conservative party politics puts serious limitations on their choices to get involved in the public sphere. In other words, although the AKP signed significant legal amendments during its administration, the party's reluctance to challenge the traditional gender roles in the familial sphere precludes the possibility of establishing a new gender regime that would comprehensively improve women's status in public and private spheres.

In this frame, Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2011: 561) define AKP's gender politics as a peculiar form of neoliberal-conservative patriarchy, borrowing from Islamic patriarchy as well as establishing an intricate alliance between neoliberal and conservative frameworks, which asks women to adapt to global market conditions, yet at the same time to perform normative wife and motherhood roles. They define AKP's gender discourse as "partial improvement at the legal level but gradual retreat of women from the economic sphere, mainstreaming of conservative discourse on women's rights and a distaste towards feminist demands". (Ibid) Accordingly, this new mode of patriarchy may approve of women's participation in economy but at the same time, through the stress on traditional gender roles at home it burdens women with a double set of responsibilities. In this model, the subordination of women in the neoliberal economic frame does not necessarily originate from their exclusion from

the labor market but the terms of employment make them vulnerable to the exploitation in the job market. When this is added to the conservative emphasis on women's roles as mothers and wives, the result is that the familial roles assigned to them in the private sphere turn out to be the decisive element for women's life choices.

Majority of women in Turkey at working age are either economically inactive or engage in informal market activities such as domestic service work, unpaid family work or traditional handicraft activities. (Dedeoğlu 2013) Their absence or marginalized presence in the employment sector makes them dependent on male family members' income and fixes their position in the family as care providers. Dedeoğlu (2013) and Buğra (2012) argue that the limited scope of the social security system in Turkey marked by a synthesis of neoliberalism, Islamic notions of solidarity and a strong emphasis on familialism identifies the household as the main provider of social security and positions women as primary figures who are supposed to provide care for the household and ensure the continuity of the "familial security system". It is obvious that the lack of child care facilities and the discursive reproduction of women's roles as wives and mothers, when added to the low female employment and the gendered inequalities underlying the current social security system, render women even more vulnerable vis-a-vis the public and private patriarchy in Turkey.

5.1.1. The Neoliberal-Conservative Alliance, the Authoritarian Political Culture under the AKP Rule and Politics of Gender

The convergence of neoliberal and conservative approaches in contemporary Turkey and its implications in the realm of gender relations connote a particular political mindset in which women's bodies and sexualities appear as a discursive tool

whereby the hegemony of the current political rule is further reinforced. As such, this intricate patchwork operates hand in hand with a biopolitics that relies on a peculiar relationship between the neoliberal-neoconservative agenda and regulation of women's embodiment. The neoliberal-conservative governmentality governs women's bodies through a ubiquitous concern with their health, sexuality and reproduction. As a result, it shapes the contours and the substance of women's physical bodies and embodiment. What follows this agenda is the proliferation of schemes of surveillance of women's bodies and sexualities.

Considering that traditional gender roles in the familial realm put the greatest burden on women's shoulders, it would not be far-fetched to note that the neoliberal character of the era and the neoliberal restructuring of the social security system in last years has further increased women's familial responsibilities such as elderly care or child care. The limited scope of the social security system in Turkey marked by a synthesis of neoliberalism, Islamic notions of solidarity and a strong emphasis on familialism identifies the household as the main provider of social security. (Dedoğlu 2013, Buğra 2012, Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2009, 2012) Moreover, it positions women as primary figures who are supposed to provide care for the household and ensure the continuity of the "familial security system". It is obvious that the gendered inequalities underlying the current social security system, together with the discursive reproduction of women's roles as wives and mothers, render women even more vulnerable vis-a-vis the public and private faces of patriarchy in Turkey.

In this sense, the strong stress on family operates not only as an ideological tool to perpetuate the conservative values of Islamic life styles in contemporary Turkey but it also plays an important role in alleviating the destructive effects of the neoliberal restructuring of the economy. Regarding this, Yazıcı (2012) maintains that

AKP's ideological promotion of the slogan "strong family, strong society" mainly operates as a ground for concealing government's attempts to shift social care from state to familial sources.

As suggested by various scholars, the hegemony of the AKP rule relies on an intricate patchwork politics composed of various elements such as populism, pro-Islamism, nationalism and neoliberalism. (Bozkurt 2013, Coşar 2004, Hale and Ozbudun 2010) The neoliberal-conservative alliances in the AKP politics plays a highly critical role in contributing to the perpetuation of the hegemonic character of the AKP rule. It constitutes one of the main narrative lines in the AKP's hegemonic rule. As the hegemonic character of the AKP rule becomes more entrenched, the party takes a drift towards an authoritarian stance which in return leads to a more assertive discourse promoting the neoliberal and conservative values. This vicious cycle constantly reproduces the traditional gender roles in contemporary Turkey, defining women's position in society over familial roles. Consequently, along with the perpetuation of the hegemony of the AKP rule over the years, the patriarchal discourse on women's bodies and sexualities proliferates in the social and political realm in an unprecedented way.

5.1.2. The Antifeminist Ethos of the Era

In this new form of patriarchy in the AKP era, the other major component is the rejection of feminist ideas and the reframing of women's rights advocacy as "equality of opportunity". The contradiction between the commitment to make legal improvements regarding women's status, which we witnessed in the first period of AKP, and the constant reproduction of patriarchal gender discourses in party officials' speeches or policy proposals, characterize AKP's stance vis-a-vis women's

organizations. Attempts have been made by the government officials to foster the dialogue between the government and women's organizations. Yet, these attempts in the end turned into articulation of distaste for feminist ideas and resulted in disappointment for feminists.

For example, in 2010, as a part of the ongoing democratization process initiated to deal with the Kurdish issue, PM Erdoğan organized a series of meetings with different segments of society to listen to their opinions about the ongoing democratization steps. One of these meetings was organized at the Dolmabahçe Palace to bring the PM and women organizations together in a platform where they can enter into a dialogue on the subject topic. However, despite the initial openness to dialogue, during the course of the meeting PM's position shifted towards a patriarchal language so much so that in the end he even rejected the idea of gender equality. Upon the question as to why he always frames the position of women within the confines of motherhood, PM Erdoğan took the initiative to elaborate on his views on gender equality and made the following statement:

“After all, I don't believe in the equality of men and women. Therefore, I prefer to say equality of opportunity. Women and men are different, they are complementary [*mütemmim*] to each other.”¹⁵

This remark has attracted various criticisms both from the secular and Islamist circles and continues to be a reference point for the criticisms questioning AKP's approach to gender issues. Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, a pious scholar and columnist, argued that PM's subject statement belongs to the canon of narratives utilized by men to stress their dominance while talking to women.¹⁶ For Tuksal, this statement is a clear reflection of the hegemonic codes of manhood in Turkey, which always situates men in a superior position and thus inhibits any possibility of dialogue. On the other hand,

¹⁵ <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/kadinla-erkek-esit-olamaz/318006/9/siyaset>.

¹⁶ “Kadın Erkek Eşit Değil mi?” [Are Women and Men Not Equal], *Star*, 21 October 2010.

Fatma Bostan Ünsal, a founder member of the AKP, very recently pointed out the importance of reading AKP's approach to gender issues through a retrospective and reminded the public of Erdoğan's public denial of gender equality. While criticizing AKP's recent attempt in October, 2013 to take measures against the cohabitation of male and female university students, Ünsal also stated that the public should have more seriously questioned Erdoğan's denial of gender equality in 2010:

“When the PM said that men and women are not equal, this has affected society so deeply that after such a statement there is no use of talking about gendered inequalities that women suffer from at home or in politics. When he made that statement, we should have asked the PM what exactly he meant... Because those words still have a powerful effect on the mindset of people in the rural area. When he said ‘men and women are not equal’ everybody should have opposed to this.”¹⁷

Ünsal's analysis is quite significant in the sense that she sees discursive or legal attempts marked by patriarchal values in a continuum. In this sense, she suggests that each patriarchal statement that is not truly criticized in the public debates contributes to the patriarchal discursive regime in the country and prepares the ground for future attempts to make such statements. This point makes even more sense when the proliferation of misogynist discourses in public debates in contemporary era in Turkey are taken into account. Since patriarchal speech acts of the AKP politicians constitute critical nodal points in the anti-feminist tone of gender politics in contemporary Turkey, one should not treat such statements in isolation or as expressions of individual opinion. Rather, it is necessary to situate them within the existing discursive regime, identify their relation with statements having similar tones and evaluate their effects on the public debates.

As a matter of fact, the contention that each uncontested patriarchal speech act prepares the ground for further discursive attempts reinforcing the patriarchal

¹⁷ See <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/avrupa/25062899.asp>.

mindset, proves to be true when Erdoğan's remarks regarding gender equality are taken into account. Recently, Erdoğan's antifeminist claim that "women and men cannot be equal" entered the public agenda once again as Erdoğan reiterated this claim in another public occasion. He stated the following:

"Sometimes, here they say 'men and women are equal'. But 'equality among women' and 'equality among men' is more correct. However, what is particularly essential is women's equality before justice... Equality is turning the victim into an oppressor by force or vice versa. What women need is to be able to be equivalent, rather than equal... You cannot bring women and men into equal positions; that is against nature because their nature is different... For example, in work life, you cannot impose the same conditions on a pregnant woman as a man..."¹⁸

Considering the persistent character of Erdoğan's denial of gender equality, one can safely suggest that the cultivation of the anti-feminist discourse through distancing of feminism from gender debates is one of the main constitutive pillars in AKP's political project aiming for a civilizational turn in Turkey. In this sense, antifeminist discourses frequently come forward in various speech acts of AKP politicians and serve to AKP's appeal to authenticity in its claim for spiritual uniqueness of norms and values in Turkish society and their distinctiveness from the Western civilization.

In 2008 in a meeting organized by the party's women's branches, Dengir Mir Fırat, the then-Vice President of the AKP, stated that women from AKP cannot be slaves to feminism:

"Our view as AKP on women is very different from other parties and other segments of society. We do not support the clash between men and women as envisioned in the philosophical ideas in feminist thought. Women from AKP have never been slaves to feminism and never will be. Because we believe that men and women are inseparable and they compliment each other."¹⁹

¹⁸ Turkish President Erdoğan Says Gender Equality Against Nature", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 24 November, 2014, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogan-says-womens-equality-with-men-against-nature.aspx?pageID=238&nID=74726&NewsCatID=338>.

¹⁹ See <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=254895>.

Similar to Erdoğan's statement that "men and women are not equal", Fırat's remark departs from the idea of complementarity between genders as envisaged in Islam. Defining feminism as a discourse promoting the clash between genders, he justifies the distinctiveness of AKP's gender discourse through resorting to the idea of complementarity between genders.

As Erdoğan's and Fırat's remarks exemplify, gender equality in the conservative AKP discourse is interpreted as an alien concept to the Islamic values and principles in society. The replacement of the idea of gender equality with "equality of opportunity" is a consequence of this approach to gender issues in which not the rights language but the religious concept "fitrat" overweighs. The idea of "fitrat" [disposition] suggests that each and every being has its peculiar existence and is equipped with unique capabilities. Accordingly, women's *fitrat* is believed to be different from men's in that women are usually associated with motherhood, care providing and compassion. This concept of *fitrat* in Islamic thought results in the replacement of the idea of equality with "equity" that is based on an understanding of equality of genders as humanbeings. (Bardan, 2009) Accordingly, the statement that men and women are equal is seen as contradictory to the Islamic understanding of *fitrat* and equity. As a result, rather than talking about the equality of men and women, the stress in the Islamic thought is put on the complementarity of genders, which intrinsically differentiates between male and female dispositions by seeing them as a part of the whole. In this model, the idea of equity and the order of social justice can only be realized on the condition that men and women perform their roles in line with their dispositions.

As seen from above, the replacement of the idea of gender equality with complementarity between genders derives its momentum from the claim that the Islamic civilization and feminism are incompatible with each other. Erdoğan's recent statement is clearly reflective of this understanding. While talking about the brutal rape and murder of a young woman, Özgecan Aslan²⁰, he stated the following:

“I say that women are consigned by God to men and those feminists... they say, ‘what do you mean women are consigned, this is an insult.’ You [feminists] have no link to our religion and our civilization. We look to the address of the ever-loved one. He says ‘Women are consigned by God to men; endorse [protect] that which is consigned.’ He says ‘Don’t hurt her.’”²¹

In another public speech, Erdoğan made a similar discursive manoeuvre stressing the alleged distance between feminism and Islam by reducing womanhood to the orthodox Islamic conception of motherhood and framing feminism as an ideology that categorically opposes motherhood:

“Our religion [Islam] has defined a position for women [in society]: Motherhood. Some people can understand this, while others can’t. You cannot explain this to feminists because they don’t accept the concept of motherhood...”²²

It is interesting to note that president Erdoğan's rhetorical moves replacing the idea of gender equality with complementarity between genders and the support for this political position in the conservative community clearly reveal how antifeminism in a pro-Islamist, conservative context and postfeminist discourses fed by patriarchy and conservatism reproduce each other in a cyclical way. Stating that “men and women are not equal”, President Erdoğan aims to eradicate the feminist gist of the idea of

²⁰ See <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/20-year-old-turkish-woman-brutally-murdered-body-burned.aspx?PageID=238&NID=78354&NewsCatID=509>.

²¹ Barçın Yinanç, “Erdoğan Targets Feminists To Prevent The Unity of Conservative and Liberal Women”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 19, 2015, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-targets-feminists-to-prevent-unity-of-conservative-and-liberal-women.aspx?PageID=238&NID=78532&NewsCatID=412>

²² Turkish President Erdoğan Says Gender Equality Against Nature”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 24 November, 2014, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogan-says-womens-equality-with-men-against-nature.aspx?pageID=238&nID=74726&NewsCatID=338>.

gender equality and introduces a new terminology with pro-Islamist, conservative motives that displaces the feminist interpretive framework through an emphasis on concepts such as “complementarity” and “equity”. Some pro-Islamist women’s organizations have attempted to justify this political attempt by appropriating postfeminist arguments. For instance, the public statement of the head of the pro-Islamist women’s organization KADEM (Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği) [The Association of Women and Democracy], Sare Aydın Yılmaz, is quite telling in that it clearly discloses the convergence of conservative gender discourses and postfeminist claims. Aydın Yılmaz states the following:

“Recently, a new approach has been developed known as postfeminism or third wave women’s movement which relies on the idea of difference. This new approach has clearly challenged the idea of equality because the principle of equality takes the male norms and values as the ideal model and attempts to define women accordingly. In this regard, postfeminism replaces the idea of equality that connotes sameness with the idea of justice informed by differences.”²³

Yılmaz appropriates the idea of postfeminism in order to replace the idea of equality with the idea of “fitrat”, i.e., disposition, which enables her to stress that women have a different disposition by nature as envisaged in Islam. The same interpretation has also resonated in the media sphere through the newspaper articles of some columnists.²⁴ This appropriation of postfeminism as “the time after equality” and replacement of the idea of equality with “justice” and “difference” can be regarded as a rhetorical move to disqualify feminist frames of reference from being a major line of narrative in dealing with gender issues. It modifies the postfeminist moment as a linear narrative of progress that connotes a new stage in the history of gender struggles where the idea of equality is no longer in tune with contemporary

²³ See <http://kadem.org.tr/star-gazetesi-acik-goruste-yayinlanan-esitlik-ustu-adalet-baslikli-yazi/>

²⁴ See Gülay Göktürk, “The Issue of Fitrat” [The Question of Disposition], *Akşam*, November 29, 2014, <http://www.aksam.com.tr/yazarlar/gulay-gokturk/fitrat-meselesi/haber-358492>.

challenges. The traps of this interpretation of postfeminism are quite alarming in that the casting of the idea of equality as passé is a form of concept-stretching that appropriates contemporary feminist debates in such a way as to utilize them for pro-Islamist, conservative goals. The concepts of equality and difference in this interpretation are cast as mutually exclusive as if equality means sameness and the idea of difference does not encapsulate the idea of equal rights. Hence, one should be wary of the possible forms of collaboration between conservative discourses and the contemporary postfeminist moment since the postfeminist revision of feminism may easily be appropriated by conservative discourses as a justificatory mechanism for arguments displacing some basic feminist ideas.

The antifeminist tones in AKP's gender politics are further fortified through the reproduction of the stereotypical understandings of feminism. As in other prevalent stereotypical accounts, feminism in AKP's discourses is closely associated with man-hating, extremism or clash between men and women. The former vice president Mengi states that feminist ideas foster the opposition between sexes. On the other hand, PM Erdoğan labels women activists protesting against the draft bill regarding the punishment of adultery as “marginal women who cannot represent the ideal Turkish women”²⁵. When her opinion about feminism is asked in an interview, the former Minister of Family Affairs, Fatma Şahin states that she could support feminism as long as it is not about imagining sexes in opposition:

“Imagining sexes in opposition results in clash... I may say that I am a feminist to the extent that it is about protecting women's rights but if it is the name of turning it into a conflict, then I am not a feminist.”²⁶

²⁵ “Türk Kadını, Marjinal Bir Kesim Temsil Edemez” [A marginal group cannot represent the Turkish woman]. *Zaman*, September 25, 2003.

²⁶ <http://taraf.com.tr/haber/feministim-ama-erkek-dusmani-asla.htm>

This belief that feminism is inherently prone to result in clash between sexes is cultivated so much so that feminism becomes the “other” of the Islamic belief of complementarity of men and women and is distanced from the party ideology altogether.

In addition to the replacement of gender equality with complementarity between genders, the disassociation of feminism and Islam and the stereotypical conception of feminism, the recent debates on the quota system in Turkey point out another prominent aspect of AKP’s peculiar interpretation of gender equality. These debates disclose the interlocking of antifeminist and neoliberal discourses in the AKP’s gender discourses. In this mindset, it is alleged that gender mainstreaming is contrary to the gist of the merit based society where competitiveness is defined as a key value.

When constitutional changes appeared on the agenda in 2004 as a part of the accession negotiations with the European Union, various women’s groups and the CHP as the main opposition party proposed the inclusion of a clause in the 10th article of the Constitution to make it possible to provide a legal ground for the employment of the quota system. However, majority of the AKP parliamentarians voted ‘no’ for this clause and only agreed to add the revised clause that “men and women are equal. The state has the duty to ensure the implementation of these rights.” It is obvious that one of the main reason for this rejection of the quota system is related to the reinterpretation of gender equality as equality of opportunity in the party ideology. As explained before, by relying on the Islamic framework, PM Erdoğan prefers to frame gender equality as a matter of access to resources, not in terms of inequalities in the existing gender regime. Therefore, in this mindset, the quota system is regarded as preferential treatment, which harms merit-based

competition and inherently discriminates against men. In 2008, as a response to a women's rights activist who defends the quota system, Erdoğan stated the following:

“I don't see the quota system as equality. Equal participation already exists in Turkey. Go, run for the elections and win. If you cannot win on your own, this means that you are taking shelter in men's charity...”²⁷

It is quite clear that gender quotas are seen here as violation of liberal principles. The same interpretation is also quite prevalent in the public debates in Islamist circles. For example, during the quota debates in 2004 the pro-Islamist newspapers *Zaman* and *Yenişafak* covered the quota proposal within the frame of “preferential treatment”, reduced this issue to the clash between the AKP and CHP and largely ignored the demands of women's organizations. (Aldıkaçtı-Marshall, 2010)

The proponents of the quota system usually point out that quotas aim at “equality of result, rather than equality of opportunity” (Bacchi 2006: 33) However, the neoliberal logic in the AKP's patriarchal discourse ignores this idea of equality of electoral results, argues for a gender blind political recruitment and limits the focus only the to merit-based entry into electoral competition. Equality of opportunity is a concept that has already become passé in today's feminist thought because it fails to capture the invisible forms of patriarchy such as glass ceiling that prevents women from climbing the career ladder up. Hence, one can safely argue that AKP's gender discourse with its limited focus on equality of opportunity excludes any possibility of gender mainstreaming and looking through gendered lenses. The fact that even the parliamentary commission working on gender equality is named as “Commission for Equality of Opportunity” clearly reveals the dominance of the gender-blind neoliberal logic in the party ideology.

²⁷ <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=234565>.

In short, one could allege that the rise of this anti-feminist discourse in government officials' speeches and the attempts to solidify it de jure through legal arrangements expands the boundaries of this discourse in many other realms of the public sphere in contemporary Turkey. Relying on this expansion of the conservative, anti-feminist discourse, columnists writing in pro-Islamic newspapers, Islamist scholars or prayer leaders find an opening to articulate their patriarchal standpoints more aloud and make their points heard in public debates.

5.1.3. The Operating Mechanisms of Discourse, Discursive Opportunity Structures and the AKP Rule

The Foucauldian concept of discourse suggests that rules and practices that produce meaningful statements govern the ways in which a particular topic can be talked about at a certain time in a certain context. Reflecting on the Foucauldian concept of discourse, Hall (2001: 73) states that discourse never consists of one statement, one text or one action; the same discourse appears across a range of texts. Accordingly, it is possible to say that discursive statements that share similar motifs, style and narrative are products of the same discursive regime. They are not single speech acts but belong to the same set of governing rules and draw on a similar set of discursive opportunity structures. Ferree (2002, 2003) defines discursive opportunity structures as ways of thinking that provide political acceptability of specific ideas. They explain the interactive relationship between the discursive context and the speaker's strategic choice to formulate certain discourses. In this sense, certain discourses that used to remain hidden or unnoticed, may become highly visible in another discursive regime. Drawing on the opportunity structures provided by this change in the governing rules

of discourse, certain speakers can articulate certain ideas more boldly or effectively. The proliferation of the discourses that are in line with the hegemonic discursive regime can be also clearly noticed in the enhancement of their “standing” in public debates. Ferree et al. (2002) define the idea of “standing” as a criteria to measure the effect of certain discourses particularly in the public debates in the mass media forum, a major site of political contest with pervasive influence over other forums of public debate. For them, “standing” points out to the fact that certain discourses are extensively covered in the mass media forum and are recognized as relevant and significant in shaping the trajectory of public debates.

In this frame, in the contemporary era, in which an anti-feminist, conservative gender discourse is in rise in government officials’ discourses in Turkey, the discursive opportunity structures allow certain actors to articulate their patriarchal standpoint in a more overt manner. As a result, what we see in the mass media forum is that such discourses are extensively featured, have gained a widespread circulation in public debates and thus are quite influential in shaping the trajectory of public debates on gender issues. On the other hand, one should acknowledge that the extensive coverage of such discourses in the mass media forum is also related to the contemporary political atmosphere shaped by the secular-Islamist cleavage in Turkey. In other words, although these conservative, patriarchal discourses have a high standing in the mass media forum and in other arenas of public debates on gender issues today, their framing, i.e., the interpretive framework attributed to them changes depending on the character of the arena in which they are dealt with. While in pro-Islamist arenas, they could encounter less criticism and enjoy more support, it is more likely that in secular arenas they are covered through a negative frame. For example, during the quota debates in 2004 the pro-Islamic public debates mainly

interpreted the quota system as preferential treatment and ardently supported the government's rejection of the pro-quota proposals. (Aldıkaçtı-Marshall, 2010) On the other hand, the debates in secular arenas criticized the anti-quota approach and presented it as another indicator of the Islamic upsurge in the country. (Ibid) Similarly, when a well-known Islamist scholar recently stated that pregnant women should not wander around in tight clothing because it is immoral, the pro-Islamic public debates chose to cover this debate within the frame of freedom of expression and refrained from making news about the scholar's first controversial statement but only featured his defence.²⁸ The secular mass media forums covered his remarks in a critical frame.

In short, even though the conservative, patriarchal discourses are widely covered in the mass media forum today and shape the political agenda, their framing shifts depending on whether the forum in question is pro-Islamic or secular. However, despite this variability in their interpretation, it is obvious that patriarchal statements have a critical standing in public debates in the current era. As a result, the discursive regime has become increasingly conservative and anti-feminist, which can be easily felt in recent public debates.

In July 2013, a reputable Islamist scholar told in a TV show that pregnant women should not wander around in tight cloths because it is contrary to aesthetic standards.²⁹ In August 2013, a provincial education director stated that he is very

²⁸ For the framing with a stress on freedom of expression, see <http://yenisafak.com.tr/yazarlar/SalihTuna/butun-turkler-yalancidir-diyen-unlu-gezici/38760>. For the coverage limited to the scholar's defence speech, see <http://haberler.stargazete.com/guncel/omer-tugrul-inancer-hamile-kadinlarla-ilgili-sozleri-hakkinda-konustu/haber-775816>.

²⁹ "Girls Who See Pregnant Women Became Afraid Of Giving Birth", *Radikal*, 25 July 2013, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/omer_tugrul_inancer_hamileleri_goren_genc_kizlar_dogurmaktan_korkuyor-1143380.

concerned about girls using the same stairs with boys.³⁰ The same position about gender segregation was once again articulated by an AKP parliamentarian and entered into public discussion in November 2013. Sadık Yakut, MP from AKP and deputy parliamentary speaker stated the following:

“Having girls and boys educated at the same schools in the name of a pro-West approach is unfortunately a mistake that has been continually made from the past up until now”.³¹

Another influential emblematic example revealing the patriarchal tone of today’s discursive regime could be found in the remarks of President of the Directorate General for Religious Affairs, Mehmet Görmez, who declares that the United Nations should care about crimes against humanity before violence against women.³² Here, Görmez overtly trivializes the problem of violence against women in Turkey in order to criticize UN’s ignorance vis-a-vis the civil war in Syria. Moreover, quite recently an important Islamist intellectual made several misogynist declarations openly opposing women’s participation into workforce. In a series of columns he argued that women’s employment harms the unity of family, results in male unemployment and thus is a deviation from women’s original disposition.³³ Although he was severely criticized by many pious women writers, as a reputable

³⁰ “Turkish Education Official Riles Public with Comment on co-ed Stairs in Dorms”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, August 2, 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-education-official-riles-public-with-comment-on-co-ed-stairs-in-dorms.aspx?pageID=238&nID=51897&NewsCatID=341>.

³¹ “Turkish Deputy Paliament Speaker Vows To Correct Co-Education Fault”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, November 20, 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-deputy-parliament-speaker-vows-to-correct-coeducation-fault.aspx?pageID=238&NID=58257&NewsCatID=338>.

³² “Turkey’s religious head refuses UN fund for violence against women Project”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, August 23, 2013. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-religious-head-refuses-un-fund-for-violence-against-women-project.aspx?pageID=238&NID=53062&NewsCatID=341>.

³³ Ali Bulaç, “Kadın İstihdamı” [Women’s Employment], *Zaman*, 1 May 2010, http://www.zaman.com.tr/ali-bulac/kadin-istihdami_979060.html. Also see Ali Bulaç, “Eşitlikten Pozitif Ayrımcılığa” [From Equality to Positive Discriminaion], *Zaman*, 28 April 2010, http://www.zaman.com.tr/ali-bulac/esitlikten-pozitif-ayrimciliga_1058234.html.

intellectual in Islamist circles his remarks have obviously contributed to the reproduction of the patriarchal discursive regime in the country.

The above examples may help us gain an insight of the high circulation of patriarchal discourses in public debates nowadays. As stated earlier, such discourses have always been prevalent in the social, cultural and political imagination. However, it is possible to say that the recent discursive opportunity structures have made it possible for social and political actors to articulate these discourses in a more overt manner. On the other hand, the mass media forum grants high levels of “standing” to these discourses in a variety of ways. While secular media platforms cover such discourses in a negative frame and present them as nodal points in the Islamist/secular conflict, the pro-Islamic platforms employ a reverse logic by defending these discourses on the basis of freedom of expression or blaming the secular circles for distorting the discourses in question for political aims. Consequently, this proliferation of patriarchal discourses largely shape today’s public debates about gender issues in Turkey.

Having noted this, one should ask the following questions: How does this conservative, anti-feminist discursive regime affect feminist discourses in the public sphere? Do feminist discourses lose ground vis-a-vis AKP’s conservative politics? Or is it vice versa? Does the current conservative regime make feminist discourses even more alert and cautious about patriarchal politics? If so, what kind of discursive opportunity structures come into being as a result of this effect? How do the women columnists integrate into the changing discursive structures with regard to articulating feminist discourses?

In the next chapters, I will discuss women columnists' approach to gender issues in Turkey, drawing on their articles in newspapers and their responses in the interviews that I have conducted with them. Before making this analysis, at this point I should note that all women columnists who participated in this study engage in gender debates actively. For them, gender issues in contemporary Turkey constitute a critical field in the public sphere. Even though they employ quite different tools and perspectives to account for these patriarchal structures, in one way or another they unanimously react against them. Their writings on gender debates are usually in the form of a critique against the overt articulations of patriarchal discourses in the public sphere. In this sense, it is possible to argue that their writings constitute a unique discursive space in the mass media sphere, which is characterized by a pro-feminist tone and collaborates with the feminist subaltern publics on certain issues. Taking into account this unique discursive space, one can allege that there are multiple platforms today in Turkey where actors produce a counter discourse that is highly critical of the contemporary patriarchal discursive regime.

Drawing largely on the Foucauldian understandings of power, subject and discourse, Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 111) suggest that society is impossible; it does not exist. By this statement, they mean that society is never a completed or total entity in which parts have a stable position. For them, only a partial structuring is possible. At certain moments some discourses may seem to be relatively uncontested but the possibilities for the new ascriptions of meaning and new articulations always prevent the closure of meaning making. (Jorgensen and Philips, 2002: 47) Discourse, in their thought, is only a temporary and partial fixation of meaning and thus can easily be undermined by new meaning making processes. Since meaning can never be ultimately fixed, the discursive terrain is characterized by constant social

struggles. For Laclau and Mouffe, discourse, i.e., the temporary fixation of meaning, takes place by excluding all other possible meanings that signs in a discourse can take in relation to each other. In other words, the unified system of meaning in a discourse is generated through a set of exclusions. In Laclau and Mouffe's theory, the surplus meaning generated by meanings excluded from discourse constitutes the field of discursivity. Accordingly, the polysemy of meanings in the field of discursivity make it possible that temporal discursive fixation at a certain historical moment can be challenged from the outside surplus of meanings and in this way meaning can be rearranged. (Ibid, p.27) In this frame, the discursive field is marked by constant struggles among antagonistic discourses that strive for hegemonic fixation of meaning. In Laclau and Mouffe's analysis, although hegemonic interventions fix the meaning at a certain historical moment by excluding and suppressing all other possible discourses, their contingency makes them prone to be challenged by outside discourses.

In addition to the impossibility of permanent fixation of meaning and the constant struggle for meaning making, one should also take into account the multiplicity of discourses underlying the undecidability of the discursive terrain. In her critique of the Habermasian public sphere, Fraser (1990) argues that the public sphere is not a single, overarching entity but encompasses multiple discursive arenas. She points out the existence of parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses in order to articulate their identities, interests, and needs. Keeping in mind Fraser's critique, it is possible to note that even a hegemonic discourse attempts to suppress all other discourses and possibilities of meaning, there are other spheres where subjugated forms of discourse can be articulated. In this frame, it would be too simplistic to

suggest that AKP's conservative, anti-feminist gender discourse exhaust all possibilities of meaning making about gender issues in the contemporary public debates in Turkey. Although the current conservative government engages in a hegemonic struggle to fix the meaning in the realm of gender relations, this hegemonic attempt makes the existing conservative discursive regime subject to outside attempts to restructure meaning. With each conservative, anti-feminist attempt to reinforce the meaning in the discursive field, other possibilities for meaning strive to be more visible and influential. Hence, I think that women columnists' narratives that are discussed in this study can be better understood when read in terms of their position in these struggles characterizing the discursive terrain. Their writings constitute a critical position that challenges the anti-feminist attempts to fix the meaning with regard to gender issues. In this sense, their position entails a possibility to closely collaborate with the feminist subaltern public. In the next chapters, I will try to investigate in detail how women columnists in question attempt to challenge the proliferation of anti-feminist discourses in contemporary public debates.

5.2. The Feminist Subaltern Publics in Contemporary Turkey

In order to analyze how women columnists situate themselves vis-a-vis the feminist subaltern public, one should also delve into counter-hegemonic discourses making up the feminist subaltern public in contemporary Turkey. It is important to note that the feminist subaltern public does not represent a monolithic entity but is composed of various discourses, groups and identity claims that do not necessarily overlap. (Fraser 1990, Felski 1989) In this sense, any attempt to study counter

publics should take into consideration the multiplicities underlying them. It is also useful to keep in mind that each counter public may encompass further differences in itself, depending on its reformist and orthodox tendencies. (Aldıkaçtı-Marshall, 2005) Counter publics with reformist tendencies may be open for dialogue, cooperation and change, whereas those with an orthodox character may rely on a relatively more rigid set of identity claims and demands. Moreover, a subaltern public may adopt a publicist or an enclave tendency in relation to its goals in the public sphere. (Fraser, 1990: 14) While at some points it may enclave itself by putting the emphasis on group identity and solidarity, at other points it may follow a publicist strategy in wider publics to generate transformative effects on hegemonic public discourses.

In Turkey, profeminist counter publics are composed of various groups that may share commonalities on some issues as well as radically differ from each other with regard to certain concerns and demands. The secular/pro-Islamist divide appears as one of the main fault lines that differentiates profeminist concerns, demands and ideas. Yet, one should note that this differentiation does not operate as a binary opposition, precluding collaboration and transitivity among secular and pro-Islamist groups' demands and concerns.

The 1990s in Turkey witnessed the emergence of new cleavages in feminism that have come forward as a result of the rise in Islamist, Kurdish and LGBT movements. (Diner and Toktaş, 2010) This diversification of demands in the field of gender relations, in return, has led to a considerable dismantling of the exclusionary tones in the secular feminist definition of the subject of feminist activism as secular, Turkish, middle class and urban. The transformation of the women's movement in the post-1990s along with the rising poststructural and postcolonial critique, has

rendered the secular feminist counter publics more open to the demands of Islamist women and gave way to close collaboration between secular feminists and Islamist publics. Cooperation, dialogue and mutual empathy between secular feminists and pious women came to flourish in different profeminist environments such as feminist publications and collaborative attempts to enforce women's activism. Arat (2004) identifies *Pazartesi*, a feminist monthly published between 1995 and 2002, as a precursor example that is emblematic of the changing character of the relationship between secular feminists and Islamist women and known for its reformist approach to veiling and its coverage of Islamist women's demands. Other feminist publications such as *Amargi*, a quarterly feminist journal published since 2006, followed an approach similar to that of *Pazartesi*, opposing headscarf bans and extensively covering the headscarf issue beginning with the very first issue. (Çaha, 2011: 11)

Moreover, collaborative activist platforms such as CEDAW meetings, the *Woman Platform for Perpetual Peace*, a platform committed to oppose war and reinforce peace in Turkey as well as in broader Middle Eastern geography; *We Are Looking After Each Other initiative*, an attempt to bring together women from secular and Islamist backgrounds, and the *Turkish Penalty Code Women's Platform*, were other examples revealing the multiplication of sites in women's movement where dialogue and mutual understanding can be enhanced. (Fisher Onar and Paker 2012: 387)

In the post-1990 period, the Islamist women's organizations have also achieved a dialogic moment marked by a dialectical, collaborative will to foster cooperation. Even though the majority of these organizations have reservations about adopting an explicitly feminist position, it is possible to suggest that profeminist values play a significant role in the reasonings of the organizations that display a

reformist stance. Aldıkaçtı-Marshall (2005) notes that even when these organizations disassociate themselves from an explicitly feminist position, they explain their standpoint through profeminist principles.³⁴ Especially the women's groups that tend to negotiate gender issues through an Islamic feminist perspective display a promising potential for reconciling Islam and feminism.³⁵

In a nutshell, both secular and pious women's commitment to dialogue and mutual recognition and their participation in collaborative profeminist platforms makes it possible for them to relate to different womanhood positionalities without necessarily subsuming differences under forced agreements and unified categories. Thus, it is clear that despite the differences inbetween, both secular and pro-Islamist publics bear a certain potential to collaborate on certain issues in order to achieve political demands.

In addition to the political urgency of certain gender issues, Turkey's participation in the international human rights regimes in the post-1980 period and the cultivation of feminist language in gender discourses has also generated a positive impact on collaborative attempts initiated by women with different convictions.³⁶ In return, this prospect of cultivating women's status in society through a reference to the universal human rights discourse has nurtured

³⁴ According to Aldıkaçtı-Marshall (2005), some Islamist women active in women's organizations deny the conception of veiling as covering womanhood; rather they see it as a way of underlining womanhood. Drawing on this, she argues that this attempt to underline womanhood instead of hiding it, connotes a useful ground where feminist arguments can be reinterpreted from within Islamist ideology.

³⁵ Capital Women's Platform [Başkent Kadın Platformu] can be cited here as an example of Islamic women's organizations that adopt a reformist approach. Founded in 1995, it has adopted a critical approach to the patriarchal readings of Islam and utilized a women's rights discourse in dealing with contemporary gender issues. For a more detailed account of the narratives of members of the CWP, see Aldıkaçtı-Marshall (2005), Aldıkaçtı-Marshall and Shablok (2009), Coşar and Gençoğlu (2008).

³⁶ In 1985 Turkey signed CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of All Types of Discrimination Against Women); in 1987 it applied for the European Union membership; in 1992 it signed the Helsinki Summit Declaration on Human Rights and in 1999 became a candidate country to the EU. (Arat and Altınay, 2015: 13)

collaborative platforms that enabled women to cooperate beyond divergences, clash of interest and differences in persuasions and commitments. (Arat and Altınay 2015, Aldıkaçtı-Marshall 2009) Initiating various collaborative platforms, women came to mobilize over issues such as violence against women, education, employment and empowerment by leaving “thick” identities behind and relying on “thin” universal values. (Nora Fisher and Paker 2012) The cultivation of universal human rights discourse in gender politics, in return, has contributed to the flourishing of transformative encounters between different womanhood experiences. (Ibid)

Turkish Penalty Code (TPC) Women’s Platform, founded in 2003 with the aim to urge the government to enhance gender equality in new legal arrangements, is one of these collaborative platforms that has actively worked during the negotiations on the legal changes concerning the Penalty Code. Another striking example in this regard is the *Platform We Stand By One Another*, (*Birbirimize Sahip Çıkıyoruz Platformu*), founded in 2008 with the aim to bring together both veiled and unveiled women around the common cause of protesting against headscarf bans. The members of this platform declare that they “stand by one another” irrespective of their differences as believers and non-believers, veiled and non-veiled women.³⁷ Rejecting the state control over women’s bodies in the name of modernism, secularism, religion, tradition, morality or honor, they ask for an all-inclusive public sphere that is not characterized by oppression and exploitation of women. As it can be seen from here, such platforms signify the potential for coalitional feminist politics in women’s movement in contemporary Turkey.

Having noted this, below, I will outline the prominent themes, concerns and demands in profeminist subaltern discourses in contemporary Turkey. In doing so, I

³⁷ See <http://birbirimizsahipcikyoruz.blogspot.com/>

will try to disclose the main narrative lines in contemporary feminist struggles in Turkey. Moreover, I will point out the fields of struggle where feminist coalitional politics can flourish. I will also touch upon the differences between secular feminist and Islamic subaltern publics that are difficult to reconcile and preclude close cooperation.

Here, it is useful to outline some of the main themes in contemporary profeminist struggles in Turkey as the following:

- 1.) Bodily Issues, Embodied Protests: Abortion, c-section and women's morality
- 2.) Violence Against Women
- 3.) Veiling
- 4.) Resistance Against the Rise of Patriarchal Discourses and Sustained Feminist Pressure on Government

5.2.1. Bodily Issues, Embodied Protests

The AKP rule marked by increasing authoritarianism and conservatization has witnessed significant political contestations over women's bodies and sexualities in Turkey. Through various policy initiatives and public statements, it has attempted to regulate women's bodies and sexualities, reinforced schemes of self-regulation and in return, shaped the contours of women's bodies. (Unal and Cindoglu 2013, Acar and Altunok 2013) AKP's preoccupation with women's bodies crystallizes most visibly in its anti- abortion stance, pronatalist policies, urge for marriage at an early age and constant reproduction of conservative codes on women's sexualities. Given that AKP's biopolitics shape the materiality of women's bodies in a performative sense and urge women to adopt certain forms of embodiment and self surveillance

techniques, “woman’s body” as a narrative theme and a field of protest stands at the very center of contemporary feminist struggles in Turkey. In this sense, one can argue that subaltern profeminist publics today are characterized by embodied protests so much so that women’s bodies have become a main locus of profeminist opposition.

The fact that bodies are powerful sites of resistance (Butler 1990), implies that subaltern publics seeking change through bodies have to confront the challenge of how to locate the body in profeminist struggles. Women’s bodies do not represent identical physicalities and are further differentiated along ethnic, socio-economic and/or religious factors. In this sense, bodily differences have a considerable effect on how women can be involved in embodied protests. (O’Keefe, 2014:3) The challenge of how to include bodily differences in embodied protests points out the intricacies underlying the use of body in feminist activism.

There are various ways through which bodies can be involved in protests. First, activists can make protests possible through utilizing their bodies as political arguments. (Sutton, 2007: 140-141) They can performatively present their bodies as a site of protest and as symbols that convey political meaning. (Ibid) Second, to articulate their demands and claims, activists may also make use of the material characteristics, needs or vulnerabilities of their bodies. (Ibid) Defining bodily needs and risks as part of activist practices, they may situate the materiality of the body, the needs and vulnerabilities arising from it at the very center of the protest. The recent protests in Turkey organized by pregnant women as a reaction to the misogynist remarks of Tuğrul İnançer, a well-known religious scholar, who stated that pregnancy should not be displayed in public, provide a clear example of the utilization of bodily vulnerabilities for activist practices.

Women activists protesting against the rise in patriarchal discourses in contemporary Turkey regard their bodies as a site of resistance. They convey their demands and arguments through their bodies by presenting their bodies as “text” or political argument”. They also make use of their bodily vulnerabilities in order to underline that women’s embodiment is a main locus for profeminist activism. Below are some examples from recent profeminist protests which clearly disclose that women’s embodiment is central to contemporary feminist struggles in Turkey.

In 2013, in a TV program, Tuğrul İnançer, a religious intellectual, well-known in conservative circles stated that pregnant women should not wander around in tight clothing because it is immoral. For him, presence of pregnant women in public is disgraceful:

“Announcing pregnancy with a flourish of trumpets is against our civility. [They] should not wander on the streets with such bellies. First of all, it is not aesthetic... After seven or eight months of pregnancy, future mothers go out their husbands by car to get some fresh air. And they go out in the evening hours. But now, they are all on television. It’s disgraceful. It is not realism, it is immorality.”

Upon this statement, pregnant women gathered in Istanbul in Taksim Square and in Kadıköy to protest İnançer’s misogynist mindset suggesting segregation. They defied İnançer’s remarks by chanting slogans such as “our bodies are ours”. Their husbands and boyfriends also supported the demonstration by wearing pillows under their t-shirts.

A similar example of embodied protest had taken place earlier in 2013, when the AKP proposed an anti-abortion initiative that attempted to introduce a new law restricting the right to abortion. Following this, thousands of women marched to the streets with colorful banners and flags protesting the AKP’s anti abortion stance. The protesters chanted slogans such as: “Keep your hands off women’s bodies”; “it is my

body, so who are you?"; "abortion is my choice, murder is men's method".³⁸ The abortion debate also sparked an online photo campaign initiated by bianet, a feminist news portal, which invited users to submit a photo of themselves protesting government officials' anti-abortion stance.³⁹ The campaign rapidly became a widespread protest movement with the motto "my body, my decision".

Another embodied profeminist protest took place as a reaction to the deputy PM Bülent Arınç's remarks criticizing women's laughter in public. During an Eid El-Fitr meeting on July 28, 2014, he complained about moral corruption in Turkey and suggested that women's trespassing norms is a concerning component of the current moral decline. In his speech, he clearly situated men's and women's sexual selves hierarchically vis-a-vis each other, identified women as the party "culpable" for the current "moral decline" and highlighted them as a target. His provocative statement in question is as below:

"Chastity is so important... It is an ornament for both women and men. [She] will have chasteness. Man will have it, too... He will be bound to his wife. He will love his children. [The woman] will know what is haram and not haram. She will not laugh in public. She will not be inviting in her attitudes and will protect her chasteness... Where are our girls, who slightly blush, lower their heads and turn their eyes away when we look at their face, becoming the symbol of chastity?"⁴⁰

Arınç's remarks gave way to a social media protest with thousands of women posting smiling selfies under the Turkish hashtag "kahkaha" (laugh) and "diren kahkaha" (resist laugh). This protest rapidly became widespread, urging concerned women to voice their reactions against misogynist discourses via their bodies.

³⁸ See <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-women-protest-abortion-ban-with-music-and-dance-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=22308&NewsCatID=339>.

³⁹ "Abortion debate sparks online visual protest campaign", June 1, 2012, *Hurriyet Daily News*, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/abortion-debate-sparks-online-visual-protest-campaign-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=22142&NewsCatID=339>.

⁴⁰ "Women should not laugh in public, Turkish deputy PM says", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 29 July 2014, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/women-should-not-laugh-in-public-turkish-deputy-pm-says-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=69732&NewsCatID=338>.

As seen in the examples above, misogynist gender discourses in contemporary Turkey that subject women's bodies to ubiquitous surveillance and control mechanisms, are heavily criticized in embodied protests organized by profeminist counter publics. Given the discursive utilization of women's bodies in the contemporary political regime, the issue of embodiment and embodied protests come to the forefront as the keystone of today's profeminist struggles. In this frame, the use of body in profeminist struggles as the site and medium of resistance leads to the question as to how bodily differences would be accommodated in embodied protests today.

One can suggest that in the Turkish context, this challenge crystallizes most visibly in different conceptualizations of embodiment by secular and Islamic selves. The anti-abortion initiative in 2012 and the profeminist struggles against it have disclosed that although secular and Islamic profeminist women collaborate against the prohibitionist stance on abortion, their approach to embodied protests in this regard differ radically from each other. The majority of recent profeminist protests against the anti-abortion political discourses in contemporary Turkey have been organized around mottos such as "it is my body, so who are you?", "my body, my decision". These slogans clearly put the emphasis on women's bodily autonomy and suggest to discuss the issue of abortion as a fundamental women's right. While this stress on women's bodily autonomy is crucial to protest against patriarchal discourses on a feminist basis, irrespective of other narrative lines that may tone down the feminist cause, such as "abortion as an economic imperative" or as a "health issue", it may also hamper the emergence of a profeminist coalition politics at a time when it is needed most.

The Islamic profeminist actors agree with secular feminists on the idea that the prohibitionist stance on abortion would serve nothing but put women's lives in danger. In this sense, it is important to note that a leading pro-Islamist women's NGO, the Capital Women's Platform was part of public declarations signed by different women's organizations in order to oppose the AKP's anti-abortion initiative. Commenting on the ongoing public debates, Berrin Sönmez, the head of the Capital Women's Platform, stated the following:

“To abolish abortion would be wrong in many aspects. A possible prohibition would endanger women's health. Moreover, prohibiting abortion would mean that it is not dealt with as a women's issue, which is a great mistake.”⁴¹

On the other hand, Sönmez underlined the pro-Islamic motives in her critique of the prohibitionist stance on abortion by referring to the religious interpretation of abortion:

“Even though it is not born yet, the fetus is a living entity with rights. It is necessary to take into account the rights of the fetus but the religious, social repercussions of this issue have to be always framed as a woman's issue. As a Muslim, I believe that God entrusts the fetus to the woman. Thus, the woman has responsibility here. Responsibility is given because she has a will. Of course, abortion should not be encouraged; it can only be the last resort when the circumstances render it necessary. Yet, I find it quite harmful that future legal arrangements may deny women this last resort...”⁴²

Here, it is clear that Sönmez's approach to the issue of abortion relies on an Islamic conception of body that refrains from acknowledging the subject's bodily autonomy and stresses the divine authority upon the body. Although this conception per se does not preclude the profeminist opposition against the prohibitionist stance on abortion, it clashes with the idea of an embodied protest relying on such a slogan as “my body, my decision”. The slogan in question derives its momentum from women's bodily

⁴¹ See <http://arsiv.taraf.com.tr/haber-allah-cenini-kadina-emanet-etti-94707/>

⁴² See <http://arsiv.taraf.com.tr/haber-allah-cenini-kadina-emanet-etti-94707/>

autonomy, which makes it difficult at some points to reconcile it with the Islamic feminist framework.

Regarding this point, Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, columnist and member of the Capital Women's Platform, states that it is not easy for religious circles to accept the slogan "my body, my decision" since it connotes an ownership over the body.⁴³ Tuksal stresses that in Islamist thinking, body is not a property of individuals; only bodily capacities belong to them. (Ibid) Therefore, she suggests that in order to ensure the broadest feminist coalition against the patriarchal policies utilizing women's bodies for political purposes, profeminist publics should refrain from elitist discourses and try to encompass multiplicities in women's demands and positionalities.

Against this background, one can conclude that the hegemonic codes of the gender politics in Turkey attempt to reinforce the patriarchal gender regime through pervasive control over women's bodies, which in return, renders embodied protests highly vital for profeminist publics. The pervasive character of the patriarchal discourses on women's bodies also enhances the possibility for feminist coalitional politics. Yet, the scope of this coalitional politics depends on the question as to how women's bodies will be incorporated into feminist protests as a site of resistance. As seen above, acknowledgement of differences in the conceptualization of embodiment could ensure a broader scope for future embodied feminist protests.

⁴³ See <http://www.ucansupurge.org/turkce/index2.php?Hbr=899>.

5.2.2. Violence Against Women

Violence against women as a symptom of a society in which women are excluded from social, economic and political life, is a pressing issue in contemporary Turkey. According to recent nationwide survey studies, thirty five percent of women declare that they have been subject to violence by their male partners at least once. (Altınay and Arat 2009) Another striking point in recent studies is women's solitude when faced with violence. Survey results suggest that most of the women in Turkey who had been subject to violence had never shared this experience with anyone before sharing it during interviews. (Ibid) Given women's solitude when faced with violence, it is of great importance that violence against women is vocalized in public debates in a gender conscious tone.

The prevalence of violence against women is the utmost indicator of how men exert power over women's lives, sexism is maintained and women's subordinate position is ensured in contemporary Turkey. It has been reported that the rate of violence cases has increased by fourteen-fold in recent years.⁴⁴ Moreover, Altınay and Arat's nationwide survey (2009) drawing on 9000 interviews reveals that violence against women in Turkey as everywhere else crosscuts social class, geographical region or ethnicity. Accordingly, not only women in the rural East who are economically dependent on their families but also women enjoying economic independence in the urban West declare that they have been physically abused by their male partners.

The entrenched character of violence against women in Turkey crystallizes in the patriarchal codes of women's sexuality and in the oppression that women

⁴⁴ See <http://bianet.org/bianet/kadin/132742>.

experience in the form of legal discrimination or economic/ social inequality. A ubiquitous discourse calling for extensive control over women's sexuality lies at the heart of gender relations in Turkey, which in return perpetuates male violence. In this frame, it is obvious that the efficacy of counter-hegemonic profeminist discourses in public debates needs to be enhanced in order to contest the pervasive character of the patriarchal gender regime leading to violence against women.

Since the 1980s, when it first emerged as an autonomous organization, the women's movement in Turkey has been quite active in struggling against violence against women. (Sirman 1989, İlkkaracan and Berktaş 2002, Kardam 2005, Aldıkaçtı-Marshall 2009, Diner and Toktaş, 2010) Given the increasing rates of male violence in contemporary Turkey, women's organizations that receive their momentum from the legacy of decades-long struggle against male violence, attribute top priority to profeminist activism against the murdering of women. Utilizing pressure politics such as lobbying and advocacy through media and internet, organizing demonstrations, protests, meetings and offering services such as telephone lines or consciousness raising/ skill training workshops, women's movements engage in disruptive feminist acts that challenge the hegemonic gender codes in society and aim to end male violence.

It would not be far-fetched to suggest that despite the differences in their agendas, women's movements regard violence against women as a unifying theme for collaborative profeminist politics. Yet, one should also note that their conception of violence against women and its causes may radically differ from each other, depending on their political positioning. While some organizations may underline its structural repercussions deeply entrenched in the patriarchal social norms and values, others may prefer to refer to its ties with the violence culture that crystallizes in the

ethnic terror that the Turkish state imposes on Kurds in Turkey. (Diner and Toktaş, 2010: 53) Moreover, an Islamic standpoint could also be decisive in the conceptualization of violence against women as it may tend to refrain from acknowledging that “family” as the utmost social institution in the Islamist mindset is in fact the main locus of violence.⁴⁵

Overall, despite the differences in women NGO’s political positionings, violence against women as a social endemic in contemporary Turkey has given way to collaborative profeminist struggles under various organizational roofs. For instance, *Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu* (The Platform for Stopping the Murder of Women) and *Şiddete Son Platformu* (The Platform for Stopping Violence) are collaborative initiatives that bring women from different organizations together with the common aim to combat against male violence. These platforms can be regarded as disruptive public acts that organize protests, utilize media for publicist purposes and put sustained pressure on government authorities. They were quite active in 2012, during the public negotiations of the new legal changes in the law no. 4320 regarding the prevention of violence against women. Moreover, they closely follow the judicial cases against men who murdered women, intervene in the media representations of these cases and inform the public of the trajectory of the judicial processes.⁴⁶

Not only secular feminist organizations but also Islamist profeminist women’s NGO’s have engaged in collaborative initiatives to struggle against violence against women in contemporary Turkey. For instance, the Capital Women’s Platform can be cited here as an active pro-Islamist women’s NGO that has taken

⁴⁵ See Sibel Eraslan, 2013, Fatma Şahin BM’de: İstanbul Sözleşmesi”, *Star*, 6 Mart, <http://haber.stargazete.com/yazar/fatma-sahin-birlesmis-milletlerde/yazi-733308>.

⁴⁶ See <http://kadincinayetleriniurduracagiz.net>

part in various meetings organized to bring women's NGO's and the government together to take action against male violence. It has closely monitored the inclusion of women's organizations in the policy making processes regarding the prevention of violence against women.⁴⁷ It has also engaged in collaborative activities with other civil societal organizations to incite change in the patriarchal codes giving way to male violence.⁴⁸

Putting sustained pressure on the government authorities has been one of the most effective activist tools that the women's movement utilized in recent years in its struggles against violence against women. In fact, this activist strategy has been productively used by women's NGO's since the beginning of 2000s to initiate positive change in women's rights and freedoms. Lobbying and advocacy efforts of profeminist groups and their intervention into the legal changes in the Civil and Penal Codes at the beginning of 2000s have been highly effective in keeping feminist demands on the public agenda. When the draft Civil Code came to parliament in 2001, feminist groups came together to push for the amendment of the Civil Code, urging the parliamentarians for the enforcement of the equal division of the property obtained during marriage by man and woman after divorce. (Aldıkaçtı-Marshall, 2009) In a similar vein, thanks to their sustained efforts in 2004, feminist groups have also been quite effective in pushing for the amendment of the Penal Code that would ensure that violence against women is treated as a crime against the individual rather than society; virginity exams of girls are restricted to court order, the definition

⁴⁷ The Capital Women's Platform closely followed the inclusion of women's organizations as watchdog in the implementation of the the Istanbul Convention ratified by Turkey in 2011. It has swiftly reacted to the recent bureaucratic attempts in December, 2014 to exclude the majority of well-established and experienced women's organizations from the control mechanisms available to ensure the proper implementation of the Convention. See http://www.baskentkadin.org/tr/?page_id=784.

⁴⁸ See <http://www.baskentkadin.org/tr/?p=689>.

of rape is extended so as to include rape in marriage and the penalty for honor killings is increased. Reaching out the supranational bodies such as the European Union or the United Nations, meeting the MPs in the parliament, preparing draft laws, issuing press statements and organizing street protests to ensure publicity in the media, women's groups have exerted a considerable public force on the government authorities, urging them to recognize their demands. Along with Turkey's drift to authoritarianism and its divergence from international human rights regimes in the second decade of 2000's, feminists have also utilized different social media tools such as twitter and facebook to appeal to international actors such as the EU, mobilize women over contemporary gender issues and reach out broader masses. (Eslen-Ziya 2013) New terrains of political struggle generated by social media have in return expanded the efficacy of activist tools in women's movement in contemporary Turkey.

A publicist, highly effective strategy marked by various activist tools has been utilized by the women's movement in its efforts to combat against the increasing violence against women in contemporary Turkey. For instance, in 2011 when the prospect of legal change that would enhance the struggle against male violence, appeared on the political agenda, women's organizations engaged in close collaboration with state authorities to articulate their demands regarding the prevention of violence against women. The Platform for Stopping Violence prepared a draft law that points out the critical importance of framing the law on the basis of protecting women, not the family, i.e., the main locus of male violence.⁴⁹ When their demands were not met, women's organizations aimed for media publicity to voice their cause. Releasing press statements, addressing profeminist women columnists to

⁴⁹ See <http://bianet.org/bianet/bianet/136657-siddete-son-platformu-basin-aciklamasi>.

get their support and organizing street protests, women's organizations attempted to exert sustained pressure on government authorities to ensure that the law be framed on the basis of women's rights and liberties. Eventually, contrary to what feminists suggested, the law was passed under the name "Law for the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women". Yet, despite this shortcoming, it has brought about significant acquisitions such as the extension of the scope of the law so as to include all women irrespective of their marital status.⁵⁰

In a nutshell, one can suggest that women's organizations' sustained efforts to exert pressure on the government and their attempts to generate media publicity constitute significant axes in contemporary feminist struggles against male violence, which greatly enhances the visibility of feminist demands in the public sphere.

5.2.3. Veiling and Prospects for Collaborative Feminist Politics

As noted above, following its emergence in the 1980s, the autonomous women's movement in Turkey has for a very long time relied on a monolithic conception of womanhood, limiting its scope to the concerns and demands of urban, secular, middle class women. Yet, this exclusionary stance has turned out to be futile in dealing with the rising demands of veiled women in society. As a result, the reformist components of the secular women's movement have gradually adopted an intersectionalist approach that is inclusive of religious, ethnic and socio-economic differences among women.

⁵⁰ For an evaluation of Nazan Moroğlu, an activist lawyer, about the positive aspects of the new law, see "Female activists make history with the new law", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 10 March, 2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/female-activists-make-history-with-new-law-to-protect-women.aspx?pageID=238&nID=15649&NewsCatID=339>.

Having noted that the secular feminist subaltern public's positioning vis-a-vis veiling cannot be subsumed under a unified and monolithic category, one should differentiate between reformist and orthodox camps of the secular feminist public to unearth its multiplicities. Drawing on in-depth interviews with women activists from different women's NGO's, Aldıkaçtı-Marshall (2005) notes that orthodox secular women activists unanimously reproduce the conception of headscarf as a symbol of women's exploitation, backwardness and threat to gender equality, positioning it in binary opposition with feminism. As for reformist secular feminists, Aldıkaçtı-Marshall (Ibid) indicates that even though they do not approve of veiling per se, they acknowledge pious women's will to veil and oppose the legal and discursive marginalization of veiling. This differentiation between orthodox and reformist camps also resonates in pious women's narratives on feminism. Accordingly, while women activists with an orthodox Islamist standpoint refrain from utilizing a feminist perspective, reformist women are more open to reconcile feminism and Islam in that they interpret key gender issues through the dialectical relationship between feminism and Islam. (Aldıkaçtı-Marshall 2005, Coşar and Gençoğlu 2008)

Yet, one should note that the reformist components of women's groups, marked by unstable, shifting characteristics, may not be sufficient for generating an alternative feminist politics. At times, these grey areas may shift towards a stable, orthodox positioning, toning down the dialectical, reformist elements. Coşar and Gençoğlu (2008: 340) argue that the reformist character of women's groups may pave the way to contingent, issue-based coalitions that does not necessarily correspond to an all-inclusive, anti-essentialist feminist politics. In this sense, strategic, issue-based cooperation that does not evolve into an all-inclusive, anti-essentialist feminist political disposition may easily become prone to shift towards an

orthodox standpoint, precluding dialogue, cooperation and prospects for feminist politics. On the other hand, it is this issue-based, contingent cooperation that serves as the first step for a feminist platform that bears the possibility of bringing women in coalitional feminist politics.

In short, veiling and the relationship between Islam and feminism as significant themes on the feminist political agenda in contemporary Turkey serve as a litmus test that exposes the multiplicity in women's organizations and profeminist activism. They also point out a promising zone of collaboration that can lead the way to coalitional feminist politics on the condition that strategic, issue-based cooperation can evolve into a feminist political disposition beyond ideological cleavages.

5.2.4. Profeminist Intervention into Patriarchal Discourses

The Foucauldian idea of discourse clearly puts forward that the patriarchal gender regime is not only secured through misogynist legal arrangements but is further reinforced through patriarchal public discourses that achieve widespread efficacy in the public sphere. In this sense, the high circulation of patriarchal discourses generate "political opportunities" for women's movements to contest the patriarchal tones in public debates. (McAdam et. al, 1996) One can safely argue that the contemporary AKP rule marked by increasing circulation of patriarchal gender discourses render women's movements' activism critical in Turkey. It is possible to suggest that by utilizing a diverse repertoire of action, women's movements today raise their voice to keep profeminist ideas in circulation so as to counterweigh the ubiquitous effects of patriarchal discourses. Thus, their intervention into patriarchal public discourses constitute a critical field of resistance today. Below are some recent examples that

clearly identify discourse as a main area of contestation where controversies in the gender regime in contemporary Turkey between hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses come to the forefront.

During a visit to the first baby born in 2015, Health Minister Mehmet Müezzinoğlu stated that mothers' only career should be motherhood:

“Mothers have the career of motherhood, which cannot be possessed by anyone else in the world. Mothers should not put another career other than motherhood at the center of their lives. They should put raising good generations at the center of their attention...”⁵¹

Upon this remark, women's organizations have fiercely criticized Müezzinoğlu for his openly patriarchal gender discourse. Gönül Karahanoğlu, head of the Association of Women Candidates (KADER) underlined that “government cannot assign motherhood to women as a directive”, while Gülden Türktan, head of the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey (KAGİDER) denoted that intervention into women's choices regarding motherhood is against human rights:

“Motherhood is a situation. Women and men jointly make a decision on women's motherhood situation and work situation. For a minister to make such a decision is against human rights.”⁵²

In a similar vein, Platform for Stopping the Murder of Women declared that Müezzinoğlu's intervention into women's life choices further perpetuates male violence that targets women when they attempt to make free choices as they wish.⁵³ Women's organizations' fierce opposition to Müezzinoğlu's misogynist discourse through various press statements and their attempts to make space for profeminist ideas in the public deliberation, clearly point out that struggle for enhancing the efficacy of feminist ideas is a main area of contestation for feminist activism today.

⁵¹ See <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/mothers-only-career-should-be-motherhood-turkish-health-minister-says.aspx?PageID=238&NID=76360&NewsCatID=341>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See <http://kadincinayetlerinidurduracagiz.net/haber/1894/kadin-mucadelesine-golge-etmeyin-baska-ihsan-istemez>.

A similar case of contestation can be detected in public debates regarding the Minister for Family and Social Policies, Ayşenur İslam's recent statements on violence against women. In a public speech, İslam claimed that no women were killed under state protection, implying that all necessary precautions have been taken by the state to prevent male violence. Upon this statement, the profeminist news portal, Bianet refuted İslam's claim by publishing a list of women who were killed in 2014 despite the state protection.⁵⁴ Bianet's opposition to İslam's statement can be seen as a corrective intervention into public debates, opening a space for a profeminist perspective. Similarly, the press conference organized in the parliament together with profeminist women MPs and women's organizations including the Platform for Stopping the Murder of Women, Flying Broom and KADER, was another intervention into İslam's misleading account of violence against women. In this conference, women's organizations and women MPs informed the public of the recent statistics regarding the murdering of women and heavily criticized the Minister İslam's negligent approach to violence cases.⁵⁵

In addition to the examples above, President Erdoğan's recent statement on gender equality can be identified as another case where the contestation between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses come to the forefront. In a speech at an international gathering in November, 2014, on women's rights and freedoms, Erdoğan made the following statement:

“Sometimes, they say ‘men and women are equal’. But ‘equality among women’ and ‘equality among men’ is more correct. However, what is particularly essential is women's equality before justice... Equality is turning the victim into an oppressor by force or vice versa. What women need is to be

⁵⁴ See <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/kadin/156970-bakan-18-ayda-koruma-altinda-oldurulen-21-kadindan-habersiz>.

⁵⁵ See <http://www.kadincinayetlerinidurduracagiz.net/basinda/1394/kadinlar-mecliste--aysenur-islam-yok-bakan-hukmunde>.

able to be equivalent, rather than equal... You cannot bring women and men into equal positions; that is against nature because their nature is different... Our religion [Islam] has defined a position for women [in society]: Motherhood. Some people can understand this, while others can't. You cannot explain this to feminists because they don't accept the concept of motherhood."⁵⁶

The president's statements underlining the unique character of women's disposition has led to fury among women's organizations, generating another line of discursive struggle. Upon this, Istanbul Feminist Collective made a public statement, declaring that they do not consent to traditional gender roles imposed on women.⁵⁷ Another public statement was declared by 59 women's and LGBT organizations, which boldly underlines that gender equality is not a matter of bargain, but a universal human right:

"President Erdoğan's remarks are in conflict with the principle of gender equality in various international agreements ratified by Turkey... The 10th article of the constitution clearly states that men and women have equal rights... Thus, Erdoğan's remarks also violates the Constitution... Erdoğan's remarks aim to annul the achievements of the women's movement that has been struggling for gender equality in Turkey for decades... We declare that we will never make a concession at the sacrifice of gender equality and remind the public that equality is not a matter of bargain but a universal human right..."⁵⁸

The examples above do not portray the whole terrain of discursivity where contestation between hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses takes place. Rather, they provide us a useful glimpse to notice the critical importance of discursivity as a main area of struggle for feminist activism today.

⁵⁶ "Turkish President Erdoğan says 'gender equality against nature", November 24, 2014, *Hürriyet Daily News*, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogan-says-womens-equality-with-men-against-nature.aspx?pageID=238&nID=74726&NewsCatID=338>.

⁵⁷ For Istanbul Feminist Collective's public statement, see <http://www.sosyalistfeministkolektif.org/guencel/haberler-duyurular-basin-aciklamalari/916-erdogan-hakl-biz-f-trattan-anlam-yoruz.html>.

⁵⁸ See <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/kadin/160287-fitrat-degil-anayasa-kadinlar-ve-erkekler-esit-haklara-sahiptir>, fitrat değil anayasa, bianet.

Having portrayed the main repertoires of action, the areas of struggle, the promising aspects as well as the limitations of the profeminist struggle in contemporary Turkey, it is possible to reach the following conclusions: First, in an age marked by increasing conservatization and high circulation of patriarchal discourses, feminist activism needs to ensure the broadest collaboration possible in order to contest the hegemonic attempts to stabilize meaning in the field of gender relations. When analyzed in detail, one can detect promising components in the feminist subaltern public that can give way to an all-inclusive, anti-essentialist feminist coalition politics. Despite differences inbetween on issues such as embodiment or veiling, some women's groups and feminist organizations can incorporate an intersectionalist approach into their reasoning that makes room for extensive collaboration. Furthermore, the political urgency of certain issues such as violence against women further facilitates the emergence of collaborative initiatives.

However, one should not ignore that this promising potential for collaboration has serious limitations with respect to ensuring a sustained feminist coalition politics. The fixation of others' identity positions through essentialist conceptualizations hinders transformative qualities of feminist coalitional politics. As seen above, at some points secular feminist activism may speak from a point where differences between women are regarded as fixed identity positions precluding collaborative action or they are simply not taken into account while forming activist strategies. In a similar vein, Islamist women's approach to secular feminist activism may sometimes be prone to stress the irreconcilable character of differences inbetween, rather than opting for a dialogic reconciliation of differences to enhance feminist activism.

According to theorists like Anzaldúa (2002) and Weir (2008), the idea of coalition politics derives its momentum from the transformative, relational character of coalitions. In this perspective, coalitions bridge differences without detaching subjects from their individuality; they transform the self through the encounter with others. (Anzaldúa, 2002: 3) In this sense, adopting a truly relational, transformative conception of coalitional feminist politics makes it possible for profeminist subjects to move to a new territory where they can always revise their standpoint as they see themselves through the perspective of others. This relational form of coalitional feminist politics goes far beyond the strategic, issue-based cooperation and has the potential to evolve into sustained feminist activism. Having said this, one can argue that although feminist activism in contemporary Turkey displays a striking potential for collaborative action, it needs to develop a relational, transformative conception of coalition that will ensure a broader alliance between different voices of the profeminist counter public.

Second, the need for collaboration in profeminist activism today does not only connote collaborative initiatives in the profeminist counter public, but reaches far beyond it, requiring extensive publicity to keep feminist ideas on the agenda. In this sense, it is necessary to investigate how publicist aims of the profeminist counter public can be best realized and the efficacy of feminist ideas in public deliberation can be enhanced. As seen above, in its struggle against patriarchal discourses, the profeminist counter public frequently addresses the media through press statements. In this sense, one can suggest that unearthing the potential in the media for enhancing the publicist goals of collaborative feminist politics is key for women's and feminist organizations' activism today. It is obvious that profeminist women columnists' newspaper articles, which I am going to analyze in detail in the next chapter,

constitute a unique domain in the media that can substantially contribute to publicist aims of the profeminist counter public in contemporary Turkey.

CHAPTER VI

WOMEN COLUMNISTS' WRITINGS ABOUT GENDER ISSUES: PUBLIC SPHERE AND THE LIMITS OF DISCOURSE

The Habermasian idea that the public sphere is an arena where everybody can enter into debate without any limitation has already become outdated thanks to the recent feminist, postcolonial and postmodern readings. Power differentials position subjects in the public sphere in such a way that the limits of what they can say heavily depend on this positioning. Since this study investigates the position of women columnists in the public sphere in contemporary Turkey, not only the interviews conducted with them but also their writings in newspapers could give us useful clues about the limits of what they can say about prominent gender issues. Their columns can be thought of as a stage from which they address the general public and share their standpoint on a particular subject which they regard as relevant to contemporary public debates in Turkey. It is not difficult to guess that women columnists are not the most powerful figures in the media sector. Media, as in many other places all around the world, is a sphere that is highly dominated by patriarchal values in Turkey. Therefore, to analyze women columnists' writings, one has to ask the following questions: What kind of consequences does the power configuration in the media generate in terms of

the discursive limits of women columnists's writings? How do women columnists prefer to challenge the patriarchal discourses when they themselves are in a vulnerable position? What are the main aims, motives and the limits of their critique?

Since the place of a woman writer has always been a marginal place in the intellectual history, women writers generally tend to refrain from underlining their authentic voice as a woman. One of the most well-known examples in this regard is Simone de Beauvoir, who presented her work in an ungendered form and claimed that she wrote only as a human being. (Moi 1994) To display an overt consciousness about gender identity renders the persona of the woman intellectual even more vulnerable. It is obvious that feminist position has been usually loaded with negative connotations in public debates. (Schaffer 1998, Sheridan et al, 2006) Thus, the vulnerability of the feminist position inevitably makes it difficult for some women to talk about gender issues in a feminist tone. In this frame, it is important to observe at what juncture in public debates women columnists raise their voice in their columns to oppose the patriarchal discourses in Turkey. Below are some observations on women columnists' articles about recent gender debates in Turkey.

6.1. Some Critical Points and Prominent Themes in Women Columnists' Writings

6.1.1. Violence against women

From the late 1980s until today, feminists have relentlessly struggled to end violence against women in Turkey. Recently positive legal steps have been taken to prevent male violence yet still this is one of the most acute problems in contemporary Turkey with respect to gender relations. It has been reported that the rate of violence cases

has increased by fourteen-fold in recent years.⁵⁹ Altınay and Arat's study (2009) drawing on 9000 interviews revealed that one out of every three women in Turkey is subject to physical violence and violence against women crosscuts across different classes. As the rate of violence against women has reached such extreme levels, the media coverage of this violence has also increased. However, this does not mean that the representation of cases of violence against women in the media always involve a feminist tone that clearly condemns male violence. Rather, a great proportion of the news coverage in this regard may in fact legitimize violence against women, suggesting that by violating social norms, women may have triggered male anger. (Alat 2006) Keeping this in mind, one can note that the feminist tones in women columnists' critique of violence against women constitute an alternative domain in the patriarchal media context. This indicates that women columnists can collaborate with feminists as potential allies to combat against violence against women in contemporary Turkey.

Women columnists frequently write about women who have been exposed to physical violence, closely follow the judicial processes in this regard and urge the judicial authorities not to give the perpetrators reduced sentences. There have been some rape cases recently that have turned out to be quite emblematic of the patriarchal mindset of judges and have caused fury and despair among feminists. For example, in the recent rape case in Mardin, 26 men including government officials raped a 13-year-old girl but the court reduced the sentences of the perpetrators, concluding that the child victim was willing.⁶⁰ In the Sakarya case, 34 men raped a

⁵⁹ See <http://bianet.org/bianet/kadin/132742>.

⁶⁰ "N.Ç. Davası Utançla Bitti" [The N.Ç. Case Ended With Shame], <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25300196/>, 25 October 2011.

14-year old girl but were released immediately after being taken into custody.⁶¹ Women columnists' articles about these cases and many others clearly condemn the male violence and the misogynist court decisions. They explicitly target at the patriarchal norms and values underlying the judicial system and problematize the tendency to reduce the perpetrators' sentence based on the idea of the "will" of the victim.⁶² In this sense, it would not be far-fetched to say that women columnists have played a key role in generating public awareness about violence against women in recent years.

Apart from this, women columnists have also urged the government authorities by directly addressing them to take immediate action to end violence against women. For example, Mengü titled one of her columns as "the Minister for Women's Affairs Should Report This Prosecutor"⁶³, while Mehveş Evin has written an article titled "Ms. Minister, Keep Your Word"⁶⁴ in order to make Fatma Şahin, i.e., the minister for family and social policies, hear her criticism of the new law on violence against women in 2012, which puts the emphasis on family, rather than on women as individuals. On the other hand, İplikçi urged Fatma Şahin to call the parliament to convene exceptionally in order to pass the necessary laws to protect women from male violence.⁶⁵ In a similar vein, Tuksal called the officials of the

⁶¹ "Ö.C. Yine İncitildi" [Ö.C. Was Hurt Again], *Radikal*, 30 August 2012, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/oc_yine_incitildi-1098629.

⁶² For some examples in this regard, see, Ruhat Mengü, "N.Ç. Davası Hakimleri Konuştukça Batıyor" [The Judges of the N. Ç. Case Fail Whenever They Speak], *Vatan*, 7 November, 2011, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/nc-davasi-hakimleri-konustukca-batiyor/409497/4/yazarlar>; Müge İplikçi "Hukukun Cinsiyeti" [The Gender of Law], *Vatan*, 7 November 2011, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/hukukun-cinsiyeti/409460/4/yazarlar>; Mehveş Evin, "Adil Yargı ve Ö.Ç. Davası" [Fair Judiciary and Ö.Ç. Case], *Milliyet*, 6 September 2012.

⁶³ "Kadın Bakanı Bu Savcıyı Şikâyet Etmeli", *Vatan*, 10 Aralık 2011, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/kadin-bakani-bu-savciyi-sikayet-etmeli/416750/4/yazarlar>.

⁶⁴ "Bakan Hanım Sözüünüzü Tutun", *Milliyet*, 4 March, 2012, http://cadde.milliyet.com.tr/2012/03/04/YazarDetay/1510883/Bakan_Hanim_sozunuzu_tutun_

⁶⁵ "Kadın Cinayetlerine Dur Demek", *Vatan*, 25 July 2011, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/kadin-cinayetlerine-dur-demek/390364/4/yazarlar>.

Ministry of National Education to investigate a case of sexual abuse in one of the primary schools, about which she has been informed by one of her readers.⁶⁶ From here, one can suggest that women columnists utilize their columns to convince government authorities to attribute top priority to violence against women and take action in this regard.

Moreover, women columnists frequently refer to the declarations of feminist groups and women's organizations both with regard to violence against women and other gender debates. It is possible to say that by introducing the ideas and criticisms of the "feminist subaltern public" into the public debates, they act as mediators between the hegemonic public and feminists. The feminist groups that can be identified in women columnists' articles are as follows: Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu (The Platform for Stopping the Murder of Women), Haklı Kadın Platformu (Right Women's Platform), İstanbul Feminist Kolektifi (İstanbul Feminist Collective), KA-DER (The Association for the Support and Training of Women Candidates), KAGİDER (The Association of Women Entrepreneurs), Şiddete Son Platformu (The Platform for Stopping Violence). Concerning violence against women, they announce the protests organized by these groups.⁶⁷ They also announce their declarations both by quoting them or by interviewing the members of these organizations.⁶⁸ Besides this, they refer to the declarations of the feminist

⁶⁶ "Okulda Cinsel Taciz", *Taraf*, 18 Ekim 2012, <http://www.taraf.com.tr/hidayet-sefkatli-tuksal/makale-okulda-cinsel-taciz.htm>.

⁶⁷ See Ruhat Mengi, "Fatmagülleri Kim Kurtaracak?" [Who Would Save Fatmagüls?], *Vatan*, 13 April 2011, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/fatmagulleri-kim-kurtaracak/370803/4/yazarlar>.

⁶⁸ See Müge İplikçi, "Kadınlar Öldürülürken" [While Women Are Murdered], *Vatan*, 8 August 2011, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/kadinlar-oldurulurken/392926/4/yazarlar>

groups as a reliable source and reference point to form their arguments on gender debates.⁶⁹

Another critical point to note here is women columnists' awareness about the use of language. While talking about violence against women, they choose a terminology that refrains from victimizing women and shifts the focus to the perpetrator's culpability.⁷⁰ In addition to this, they are highly concerned about the patriarchal language used in the media and see the deconstruction of this language as complementary to the struggle against violence against women.⁷¹

Finally, women columnists also try to explain in their columns why male violence has increased in recent years in such extreme proportions. This attempt to account for the underlying causes of male violence in fact reveals the entrenched bifurcations in their approach to gender debates. Secular writers who represent a Kemalist standpoint relate violence against women to the increasing conservatism in society. For example, Kırıkkanat argues that male violence is intrinsic to Islam and violence against women is going to increase in near future because of the ongoing conservatism in contemporary Turkey.⁷² As for the pious writers, one can note that there are different shades of emphasis in their writings with respect to violence against women. On the one hand, they struggle against the patriarchal male figures

⁶⁹ See Mehveş Evin, "Uçtu Uçtu Kadın Katilleri Uçtu" [Where Are the Women Murderers?], *Milliyet*, 18 September 2012, <http://cadde.milliyet.com.tr/2012/09/18/YazarDetay/1597869/uctu-uctu-kadin-katilleri-uctu->

⁷⁰ See Nihal Bengisu Karaca, "Tr İman ve İkna Kuvvetleri" [Turkey's Persuasive Forces], *Habertürk*, 8 Mart 2013, 825834-kadina-siddete-karsi-tr-iman-ve-ikna-kuvvetleri; Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, "Kadın Sorunundan Rahatsız Erkeklerle" [To Men Who Are Uncomfortable About Women's Question], *Taraf*, 31 January 2013, <http://www.taraf.com.tr/hidayet-sefkatli-tuksal/makale-kadin-sorunundan-rahatsiz-erkekler-e.htm>

⁷¹ See Müge İplikçi "Kadınlar Öldürülüyor" [Women Are Being Murdered], *Vatan*, 3 March 2011, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/kadinlar-olduruluyor/362811/4/yazarlar>; Mehveş Evin, "Medya Ne Kadar Suçlu" [How Guilty is the Media], *Milliyet*, 14 October 2012, http://cadde.milliyet.com.tr/2012/10/14/YazarDetay/1611336/Medya_ne_kadar_suclu_.

⁷² "Kan, Kadın ve Kurban", *Cumhuriyet*, 2 November, 2011, <http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/?hn=290076>; "Hepimiz Kadınız, Hepimiz Kurban", *Cumhuriyet*, 7 March 2012, <http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/?hn=320312>

in the Islamist community, who associate male violence with women's excessive empowerment and regard women's economic freedom as a threat to family unity. For example, Karaca argues that it is not women's employment but the male violence that constitutes the utmost threat to the unity of the family.⁷³ In this sense, she reverses the patriarchal logic by clearly stressing the perpetrator's culpability. Yet, on the other hand, since the idea of family is quite crucial for pious women writers, they are also concerned about the attempts to question the family itself on accounts of domestic violence. Regarding this point, Eraslan writes the following: "Of course we are fiercely opposing violence yet family cannot be held accountable for this violence."⁷⁴

To conclude, drawing on the analysis provided above, one can allege that women writers unanimously condemn violence against women, try to generate public support to put pressure on government officials and end male violence and also collaborate with feminist groups in this regard. They constitute an "advocacy domain" in the media sphere, where the standing and efficacy of the feminist struggle against male violence in public debates can be enhanced. In this sense, violence against women appears as a unifying theme in secular and pious women columnists' narratives and constitutes a useful ground for cultivating feminist coalitional politics.

Coalition politics is a way of forming political alliances among different groups of individuals with different political demands. It allows individuals to use the first-person plural pronoun without defining strict boundaries designating who

⁷³ "Kadına Şiddet Aileyi Bitirecek", *Habertürk*, 7 Ağustos 2011, <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/nihal-bengisu-karaca/656191-kadina-siddet-aileyi-bitirecek>.

⁷⁴ "Fatma Şahin BM'de: İstanbul Sözleşmesi", *Star*, 6 Mart 2013, <http://haber.stargazete.com/yazar/fatma-sahin-birlesmis-milletlerde/yazi-733308>.

and what kind of experiences exactly constitutes this “we”. (Ferguson 1993: 186, Hekman 2004: 144) Considering this anti-essentialist, dynamic character of coalition politics, one can suggest that the issue of violence against women as one of the most pressing gender problems in contemporary Turkey has the potential of reconciling different viewpoints in order to generate an effective, broad-scale struggle against male violence. As seen above, women columnists’ writings are a testament to this potential.

Yet, despite the priority that women columnists unanimously attribute to the struggle against male violence, it is not possible to treat them all under the unified category of “women columnists who oppose male violence”. The positioning vis-a-vis Islam appears to be the main factor that differentiates their approach to violence against women. While some secular-Kemalist writers identify religion as the main cause of male violence, Islamist writers adopt a cautious stance in order not to depreciate the idea of family in their critique of male violence. In this sense, essentialist tendencies and discursive limits in women columnists’ profeminist alliance with the feminist subaltern public constitute a major obstacle to the prospects for forming an all inclusive coalition with regard to the combat against male violence.

6.1.2. Women in Politics

The political realm in Turkey, which is mainly reserved for men, is dominated by patriarchal norms and values. Since the enfranchisement of women in 1934, women’s presence in politics has always been marginal and quite symbolic so much so that the highest rate of women MPs in the parliament so far (based on the election

results in 2011) was fourteen percent. Women columnists unanimously challenge this marginal position of women parliamentarians in Turkey by introducing them to the public, stressing their presence in politics, criticizing the patriarchal norms and regulations in party politics and announcing women's organizations' attempts to increase the number of women in politics.

For example, in her article written on the eve of 2007 elections, Gögüş quotes the spokeswoman of Uçan Süpürge (Flying Broom), one of the main women's organization in Turkey, and argues that the party administrations only let women participate in politics when they do not attempt to bring about their own agenda and are highly submissive to the party and the party leader.⁷⁵ She identifies this patriarchal tendency in party politics as a major obstacle, which hampers the election of women who could challenge patriarchal politics by introducing a gender conscious way of doing politics. A similar emphasis on the difference that women could generate in politics is stressed by Karaca in an article where she suggests that women are capable of changing the way that politics is done. She formulates her argument not on an essentialist basis but on women's peculiar experiences as mothers and their accumulations about such values as empathy and conscience.⁷⁶ Another similar account could be detected in İplikçi's articles where she addresses women parliamentarians, reminding them that they are capable of changing the way that politics is done in the male-dominated parliament.⁷⁷ This stress on women's presence in politics is combined with a particular attention paid to the activities, projects and

⁷⁵ "Kadınların Seçimi", *Hürriyet*, 19 May 2007, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/6541818.asp?m=1>.

⁷⁶ "Siyasette Annenin Yeri ve Önemi", *Habertürk*, 10 Mart 2010, <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/nihal-bengisu-karaca/226122-siyasette-annenin-yeri-ve-onemi>.

⁷⁷ "Türkiye'nin Ka-der'i", *Vatan*, 10 March 2011, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/turkiyeninkaderi/364228/4/yazarlar>.

plans of women politicians.⁷⁸ Women columnists interview women MPs or inform the public about their accomplishments. In addition to the articles written before elections, women columnists have also written about the election results and made evaluations through gendered lenses. Usually this cohort of articles points out the missed opportunity with regard to increasing the number of women MPs in the parliament.⁷⁹

Yet, despite this unanimous emphasis on women's presence in politics, women columnists differ from each other when it comes to the question of "which women" they would like to see in the parliament. Most of the secular writers formulate their arguments in quite broad terms without referring to the differences among women. In this regard, the violation of veiled women's rights to be elected to the parliament remains as a debate restricted to the columns of pious women writers.

The recent decision of four women parliamentarians from the AKP to start veiling in the parliament⁸⁰ has been met with great optimism by veiled women columnists, while some Kemalist secular women writers have harshly criticized it. For example, Eraslan and Karaca celebrated this step as a turning point with respect to veiled women's rights and the democratic regime in the country, while Kemalist secular women writers such as Mengi argued that veiling in the parliament has

⁷⁸ Gila Benmayor, "CHP'de Kadın Devrimi", *Hürriyet*, 24 July 2012, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/21052608.asp>; "CHP'li Kadınlar Sahada", *Hürriyet*, 7 January 2011, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=16705046&yazarid=20>.

⁷⁹ Gila Benmayor, "Kadınlar Kaybetti", *Hürriyet*, 14 June 2011, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/18024876_p.asp; "Hem Demokrasi Kaybetti Hem Kadınlar", *Hürriyet*, 15 December 2009, www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/13201834.asp; Zeynep Göğüş, "Türkiye'yi Beş Yıl Daha Erkekler Yönetecek", *Hürriyet*, 4 April 2009, www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/11361494.asp.

⁸⁰ On 31 October 2013, Nurcan Dalbudak, Sevde Beyazıt Kaçar, Gülay Samancı ve Gönül Şahkulubey have participated in the parliamentary meetings with their headscarves. This decision has at first generated some controversies among other MPs from the Republican People's Party but later the controversy has been resolved before it turned into a crisis as it did in the Merve Kavakçı incident in 1999.

nothing to do with rights and liberties because it signifies the project of Islamization and thus may be accompanied by further attempts to eradicate the secular regime. On the other hand, some other writers in the secular camp such as Evin evaluated the veil in the parliament as a positive step towards enhancing religious freedoms in Turkey. According to her, the fact that veiled women MP's entry into the parliament has not led to turmoil among opposition parties is a sign of the maturation of democratic perspectives in the country. Yet, she is also concerned that the presence of veiled MPs in the parliament may be utilized by their parties for political purposes. Thus, she declares that she expects the veiled MPs, who have not been active in the public debates until then, to be more concerned about the rights and liberties of those groups other than their own and show that they are not just symbolic pawns of Islamist politics but influential actors promoting a wide array of rights and liberties for all groups.

In sum, even though the secular-Islamist divide seems to be as the main bifurcation line among women columnists with respect to their attitude towards women in politics, these two groups are not monolithic and unified but rather display a wide array of different standpoints on the subject matter.

6.1.3. Abortion Debates

Another prominent theme in women columnists' writings is the abortion debate that has emerged on the political agenda in 2012 as a result of PM Erdoğan's remarks on women's reproductive rights, abortion and c-section. On May 25, 2012, in his speech at the Fifth International Parliamentarians' Conference on the Implementation of the

ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development) Programme of Action organized in Istanbul, Erdoğan stated the following:

“I see abortion as murder... There is no difference between killing the child in mother’s womb and killing her after the birth.”⁸¹

This statement has been followed by a pronatalist policy initiative that put on the agenda the possibility of limiting the terms of abortion. This initiative has triggered severe criticisms from different segments of society and in the end the terms of abortion has not been restricted yet another law has been codified recently, stipulating that c-sections would only be possible if there is a serious medical obstacle for vaginal birth. Against this background, an intense public debate has emerged in the country between the “anti-abortion” camp represented by the patriarchal political cadres and the feminist pro-abortion camps. Women columnists have taken part in these discussions quite actively. All of them opposed the restrictions that the government planned to impose on the terms of abortion and women’s reproductive capacities, even though they had different reasons for this critique.

First of all, some of the women columnists strongly stressed women’s autonomy on their bodies and clearly stated that the ultimate authority as to whether maintain the pregnancy is the woman herself, not the state. They also underlined that the authority to decide about the birth method should be vested in medical experts and women themselves and that state regulation would only endanger women’s lives and annul their authority in this respect. In this regard, for example Mengi strongly argued for women’s autonomy and deemed the current attempts to control women’s reproductive capacities as unacceptable:

⁸¹ “Erdoğan: Kürtaj Bir Cinayettir”, *Milliyet*, 26 May 2012, <http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/erdogan-kurtaj-bir-cinayettir/siyaset/siyasetdetay/26.05.2012/1545254/default.htm>.

“If a woman thinks that she cannot endure the vaginal birth and it would be easier for her to have a c-section, this decision is ultimately to be made by the woman herself and nobody else has the right to intervene into this.”⁸²

In a similar vein, Evin regarded abortion as a topic to be prevented from any kind of male intervention and evaluated the recent public debate on abortion as another direct form of male domination to control women’s bodies.⁸³ On the other hand, İplikçi articulated the very same idea by quoting at length the critique of feminist groups in her column.⁸⁴ In another article, she clearly articulated the feminist slogans used in feminist circles to oppose this recent anti-abortion initiative: “Our body belongs to us, not to the state.”⁸⁵

This emphasis on women’s bodily autonomy was peculiar to secular writers and did not emerge as a main argumentation line in pious women writers’ articles. One can suggest that the recent abortion debate has clearly pointed out the peculiarities of dealing with gender issues through an Islamic feminist framework. Pious women writers’ views on abortion have turned out to be very emblematic of their understanding of Islamic feminism. Since the body in the Islamic thought is just a transitory reflection in this worldly life that will eventually evade, the Islamic belief does not easily endorse the liberal view of the bodily autonomy. Moreover, in the Islamic belief system, the right of the fetus to live begins at the moment of conception for it is granted by God. Committed to these precepts, pious women

⁸² “Sezeryan ve Kürtaj Özel Yaşamdır” [C-section and Abortion is Part of Private Life], *Vatan*, 27 May 2012, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/Haber/453408/4/Yazarlar>.

⁸³ “O Masaya hiç Yattın mı?” [Did you ever lie on that table?], *Milliyet*, 6 June 2012, <http://gundem.milliyet.com.tr/o-masaya-hic-yattin-mi/gundem/gundemyazardetay/06.06.2012/1549839/default.htm>

⁸⁴ “Kapıdaki Kürtaj Yasağı” [The Ban On Abortion Approaching], *Vatan*, 10 Ocak 2013, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/kapidaki-kurtaj-yasagi/505114/4/yazarlar>.

⁸⁵ “İnsan fetüsü” [The Human Fetus], *Vatan*, 28 May 2012, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/muge-iplikci-453511-yazar-yazisi-insan-fetusu/>

writers explicitly stated that in principle they are against abortion. However, they also stressed that the government's recent policy initiative to restrict the terms of abortion and c-sections is unacceptable. Their critique is not based on the idea of women's bodily autonomy. Rather, they oppose the restriction of abortion by referring to factors that would jeopardize women's lives such as sexual violence. In this sense, for them, women's bodily autonomy enters into the picture only when women's lives are under serious threat. Their stance in this regard has been quite different from that of the feminist groups that protested against anti-abortion initiative by shouting slogans such as "it's my body, it's my decision". They themselves touch upon this difference and differentiate their critique from feminist pro-abortion protests. For example, Tuksal wrote the following:

"Unfortunately, I did not approve of the cliché slogans that feminist friends used in their protests. They would like to engage in feminist politics and challenge the government. Okay, but they use such a discourse which makes it impossible in Turkey to move forward. Conservative women in Turkey also have concerns about abortion and birth control."⁸⁶

In short, although women columnists could agree on the critique of the anti-abortion initiative that the government put on the agenda, their argumentation lines and motivation for this critique have been quite different from each other. Secular writers exclusively formulated their arguments on the basis of women's autonomy. Since the Islamic feminist framework is not in line with the idea of prioritizing women's bodily autonomy vis a vis the fetus, pious women writers opposed the possible abortion restrictions by limiting the right to abortion mainly to the case of sexual violence.

⁸⁶ "Uludere'de Kürtaj Yok, Çocuk Cesetleri Var" [Not Abortion But Children's Dead Bodies in Uludere], *Ntvmsnbc*, 6 June 2012, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25355706/>

6.1.4. The Issue of Headscarf

All women writers underline that rather than being a subject matter in the “secularism versus Islam” debate, the headscarf issue is first and foremost a matter of women’s liberation. Yet, the terms of women’s liberation in their imagination differ greatly, depending on their position vis-a-vis the Republican understanding of women’s rights and liberties. In this sense, writers with the Republican conviction that veiling is nothing but submission to Islamic patriarchy, formulate headscarf as the most overt form of patriarchal imposition and as totally antithetical to women’s liberation. In other words, they do not acknowledge the free will involved in the decision to veil. For instance, Göğüş argues that veiling is not a matter of choice, but a patriarchal imperative for women that they have to submit to in order to be able to go out of the confines of the private sphere.⁸⁷ In a similar vein, Kırıkkanat writes the following:

“I would like my veiled readers to think for a moment why Islam requires veiling not for men but only for women. The answer to this is the supremacy of men and the humiliation of women. Veiling in fact is not about to veil but it means “being veiled”. Once the mechanism starts to function, the woman becomes someone who endorses inequality and even humiliation, i.e, a victim who feels attachment to the torturer. This is no different from the Stockholm Syndrome. This is how young girls veil ‘on their own will’. What is beneath the veil is not only the body but also the mind.”⁸⁸

Aldoğan’s views on veiling is not different from the position above. She maintains that veiling is the most obvious embodiment of gender inequality in Islam.⁸⁹ Taking this argumentation line into account, one could allege that the Kemalist-secular women columnists oppose veiling in the name of gender equality. They themselves

⁸⁷ “Başörtüsü Takma Zulmü” [To Veil], *Hürriyet*, 18 February 2006, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/3951962_p.asp.

⁸⁸ “Tesettürle Niçin Uğraşıyorum?” [Why Do I Deal With Turban], *Radikal*, 29 April 2004, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=151200>.

⁸⁹ “Türban Mutluluğu ve Karşıtları” [Happiness With Turban and Its Opponents], *Posta*, 12 October 2013, <http://www.posta.com.tr/yasam/yazarhaberdetay/turban-mutlulugu-ve-karsitlari.htm?articleid=200273>

explicitly express this: “At the last instance, what I am opposing is not the veiled women themselves, but the men who use every means to make those women veil.”⁹⁰ Here, the opposition against veiling is justified through a discourse that defines a universal model for women’s liberation and ignores all other possibilities for becoming a “liberated” woman. The emancipatory rhetoric, which has been emblematic of the Republican project, functions here as a mechanism that attempts to incorporate different needs, demands and desires of different women into a monolithic whole.

The other interesting point is that the explanatory categories that women columnists use to reflect on the headscarf debate have changed as the AKP rule has become more and more entrenched in Turkish politics. For example, in the first period of the AKP rule, some of the writers perceived headscarf as a problem of economic and cultural underdevelopment and maintained that as soon as the per capita income reaches a certain level, gender relations in Turkey would undergo a huge transformation and women will not need to veil any more. The conceptualization of headscarf as imposition and imperative, rather than as a matter of choice and free will, is also the underlying idea here. Moreover, headscarf in this account is regarded as a practice that is peculiar to rural, uneducated and traditional masses. This kind of an analysis obviously fails to grasp the complexity of the headscarf issue as an urban phenomenon and ignores the existence of urban, educated and veiled women. Yet, in the second term of the AKP rule (2007-2011), we can see the acknowledgement of the urban character of the headscarf phenomenon. In some of her articles written in this period, Gögüş touches upon the fashion styles adopted by urban veiled women and how their fashion choices reflect

⁹⁰ Ibid.

their will to appear as modern. However, Göğüş's analysis is not accompanied by a change in her conception of headscarf as submission to Islamic patriarchy.

The proliferation of discourse on headscarf in the second period of the AKP rule, especially the debates on the freedom to wear headscarf at universities and AKP's first failed attempt to change the constitution to guarantee veiled women's right to university education in 2008 and then the abolishment of the ban in practice in 2010, has caused a further resistance among Kemalist women columnists towards the expansion of veiled women's rights and triggered concerns about the freedoms of secular, uncovered women. During the hot public debates on headscarf in 2008, which were initiated by AKP's attempts to let the headscarf into universities, Göğüş defined the ongoing discussion on headscarf as quite discomfoting in that it leads to deep controversies in the country and causes disorder and chaos.⁹¹ Around the same time when the debate was going on, Mengi expressed her concerns about the freedoms of unveiled women in the country and wrote that the secular regime is the only guarantee that one can hold on to in order to ensure that unveiled women will not be forced to veil.⁹² In a similar vein, after the new legal changes in 2013 that legalized headscarf for public officials, Aldoğan remarked that the expansion of headscarf in public life makes her worry about the oppression that unveiled women may be subject to.⁹³ Apart from this, in an earlier debate in 2010, she had stated that veiled women protest and complain without grounds because they are the powerful

⁹¹ "Kucağımızdaki Bomba Türban" [Turban as a Bomb], *Hürriyet*, 16 February 2008, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/8243355.asp?m=1>

⁹² "Nenemin Başörtüsü ve Militan Laiklik" [My Grandma's Headscarf and Militarist Secularism], *Vatan*, 21 July 2008, http://haber.gazetevatan.com/Nenemin_basortusu_ve_militan_laiklik_189982_4/189982/4/yazarlar

⁹³ Türban Mutluluğu ve Karşıtları [Happiness With Turban and Its Opponents], *Posta*, 12 October 2013, <http://www.posta.com.tr/yasam/yazarhaberdetay/turban-mutlulugu-ve-karsitlari.htm?articleid=200273>

now and unveiled women represent a vulnerable position.⁹⁴ In short, one can say that Kemalist women columnists have approached to the public debates on the expansion of veiled women's rights and liberties with deep concerns about the secular regime and ignored or underestimated the violations regarding the right to veil.

A second group of secular writers have refrained from framing the issue of headscarf exclusively in terms of submission to patriarchy but rather tried to deal with it by problematizing male politicians' approach towards it. For instance, Tınç questions the instrumentalization of headscarf by the male political elite for further goals. In this sense, she criticizes the AKP for not being sincere about its political moves with regard to headscarf.⁹⁵ Yet, one can say that even though Tınç does not associate veiling directly with submission and humiliation, her framing of veiling solely as an instrument utilized by the male elite reminds one of the approach that discards women's will to veil.

On the other hand, her remarks about encouraging dialogue and cooperation between veiled and unveiled women are quite promising:

“In the past, we used to talk more about rights and equality with veiled women... In the aftermath of the AKP rule, they (Islamist women) have become silent. In our talks, we realized that women have experienced similar treatment both in the Islamist and leftist movements. As it is the case everywhere else, women were assigned secondary roles in these movements. At the time when we were about to develop our dialogue by focusing on women's condition, the AKP rule and the political calculations ruined our sincerity.”⁹⁶

Tınç's narrative is quite ambivalent; she herself puts this ambivalent position into words as follows: “On the one hand, I am quite concerned about the discrimination

⁹⁴ “Çarşaf Giy Desen Giymezler” [They Would Never Wear Chador], 17 October 2010, *Posta*, <http://www.posta.com.tr/siyaset/YazarHaberDetay/%E2%80%9CCarsaf-giy%E2%80%9D-desen-giymezler-.htm?ArticleID=46936>

⁹⁵ “Türban Bahanesi” [The Turban Excuse], 11 October, 2010, *Hürriyet*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/16009276.asp>.

⁹⁶ “Türban ve Kadın” [Turban and Woman], *Hürriyet*, 31 December 2014, <http://webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/2004/12/31/577597.asp>.

against veiled women but on the other hand, I am also very much alert about the rising conservatism.”⁹⁷ Her position resonates between an ardent support for establishing dialogue with veiled women and suspicions about women’s veiling and conservatism of society. Her critique of the instrumentalization of the headscarf by the male political elite serves as a useful ground to challenge the patriarchal character of Islamist politics but it may also mask her reluctance to regard veiling as women’s personal choice.

There are also other secular writers such as İplikçi, who put the emphasis on the discrimination against veiled women in society and refrain from engaging in the controversial debate on whether veiling is submission to patriarchy. In this sense, İplikçi clearly states that veiled women in Turkey have never been able to enjoy the same opportunities that unveiled women had.⁹⁸ She also points out the limitations of the categorization of women as “veiled” and “unveiled”. Instead of this fixed coding, she proposes dialogue among women and underlines that patriarchal politics should never attempt to unveil women or veil them.

The recent patriarchal discourses of some conservative politicians who attempted to interfere in non-conservative clothing styles of secular women, has further crystallized these writers’ approach in this regard.⁹⁹ For example, in response to the recent patriarchal discourses, İplikçi interpreted the right to veil and the right to wear décolleté dresses as two sides of a whole in which one cannot be realized

⁹⁷ “Türban Çelişkim” [My Conflict With Turban], *Hürriyet*, 26 August 2007, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/7156156.asp?m=1>.

⁹⁸ “Eşit mi?” [Equal?], Available at: <http://mugeiplikci.net/makaledetay.aspx?id=92>.

⁹⁹ In one of his public speeches in 2013, Hüseyin Çelik, the then-spokesperson of the JDP, criticized a female TV presenter for her décolleté dress. Following Çelik’s statement, the TV presenter was fired by the production company. For further details, see <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-tv-presenter-fired-over-low-cut-dress-after-criticism-from-akp-spokesman.aspx?pageID=238&nID=55896&NewsCatID=341>.

without the other.¹⁰⁰ Drawing on the idea of women's autonomy, she opposes against all patriarchal interventions into women's bodies by stating that "women are not beings who can be veiled or unveiled by those in power." Similarly, Evin warned against the limits of the freedom of clothing in the mindsets of Islamist politicians in Turkey who limit this freedom to the freedom to veil.¹⁰¹ From here, it is clear that while talking about the positioning of veiled and unveiled women vis-a-vis each other, these writers, in one way or another, try to underscore the complementarity of rights and liberties of each group, rather than presenting the relation inbetween as opposition.

On the other hand, pious women writers' articles on headscarf are mainly shaped by feelings of resentment, stories of victimhood, discrimination, critique of Islamist politicians' inertia with regard to the bans on the right to veil and celebration of recent reforms concerning the right to veil. For instance, Eraslan frequently writes about the individual stories of veiled lawyers who could not perform their profession due to the bans and the discrimination they faced in their profession. As a law faculty graduate, she also talks about her own experiences and blames the undemocratic regime for violating her basic rights and liberties. When the right to veil in public service was guaranteed in laws through a democratization package announced on 30 September 2013, Eraslan wrote about her deep resentment for her wasted 25 years that she lived after she decided to veil as a senior law faculty student and expressed her deep gratitude for the PM and the government for abolishing the bans. She interpreted this recent legal arrangement not only as restoration of basic rights but also as a turning point in the democratization process in the country. In this sense,

¹⁰⁰ "Dekolte ve ifade Özgürlüğü" [Decolté and the Freedom of Speech], *Vatan*, 12 October 2013, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/dekolte-ve-ifade-ozgurlugu/575830/4/yazarlar>.

¹⁰¹ "Kafa Dekoltesi" [Decolté of the Mind], *Milliyet*, 9 October 2013, <http://gundem.milliyet.com.tr/kafa-dekoltesi/gundem/ydetay/1774742/default.htm>.

she touched upon the complementarity between the rights of veiled and unveiled women:

“I do not think that this issue only concerns veiled women... Because the society lives this punishment, alienation and distancing all together over the mothers and daughters...”¹⁰²

In response to the criticisms that the AKP allowed this move to be made with the expectation to achieve electoral gains, Eraslan stressed that this is not a strategic, utilitarian move but a sincere step that originates from a long history of right violations.

In a similar vein, Karaca regards the recent developments about the right to veil as the beginning of a new period. Like Eraslan, she puts great emphasis on the idea of complementarity. In this regard, she writes the following:

“From now on there will be a better future not only for veiled women but also unveiled women... In a country where a certain group is subject to such an evident form of discrimination, how can the other group be equal... The idea of women’s rights has become a common value, as the gap between the rights of veiled and unveiled women has narrowed.”¹⁰³

Karaca is quite critical of the claims that women MPs in the AKP are symbolic pawns utilized for the party for political goals. On the other hand, Tuksal also articulates the same critique by stating that you cannot question somebody’s decision

¹⁰² “Kıyamet Kopmuyormuş İşte”, *Star*, 1 Kasım 2013, <http://haber.stargazete.com/yazar/kiyamet-kopmuyormus-iste/yazi-802241>.

¹⁰³ “Demokrasinin Tadı”, *Habertürk*, 1 Kasım, 2013, <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/nihal-bengisu-karaca/890331-demokrasinin-tadi>. Yet, one should also note here that the idea of complementarity in their mindsets sometimes remains as an ideal. This has been particularly the case when it comes to some of the recent patriarchal statements of the conservative male politicians. They have remained silent in their columns when the government party officials attempted to interfere in unveiled women’s clothing by stating that it is “extreme”. (<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/24869597.asp>) Since the enhancement of the right to veil is a recent phenomenon and the process of normalization regarding headscarf has not been completed yet, one could say that veiled women columnists’ perception is more apt to see the right violations concerning veiling and thus may sometimes fail to detect the patriarchal discourses threatening unveiled women’s rights and liberties.

to veil and accuse her of being a pawn in politics.¹⁰⁴ However, Tuksal's stance on the recent developments regarding the right to veil is a bit different from the optimism portrayed above. She reminds that veiled women have been asking for the right to be elected for so long. For her, the fact that the government party has ignored all these public demands so far is also quite reflective of its desire to control the timing of the change process and turn it into electoral gains.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, she is also critical of the recent enhancement of veiled women's rights in public service. She criticizes the prohibition of the right to veil from certain professions such as military, police and judicial professions because, for her, this logic still regards headscarf as a political symbol, rather than a freely chosen religious attire and imperils the normalization process it can undergo.¹⁰⁶

6.1.5. Critique of Patriarchal Statements of Male Elite

As stated earlier, women columnists have written many articles criticizing patriarchal norms, values, practices and legal arrangements. It is quite interesting that they usually engage in these gender debates as a response to the rise of patriarchal discourses in the public sphere. This means that their "pro-feminist" position in the media becomes evident when they sense a threat perception. Before, we have mentioned that the position of women columnists in the public sphere is quite peculiar in the sense that they take a position inbetween the hegemonic patriarchal

¹⁰⁴See <http://tv.cnnturk.com/video/2013/10/31/programlar/tarafsiz-bolge/siyasetin-dili-ozgurlukler-ve-basortulu-vekil-polemigi-ahmet-hakan-sordu-konuklari-tartisti-tarafsiz-bolge-30-10-2013/2013-10-30T2130/index.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ She expressed these views in a news program in IMC TV on 9 October 2013. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHliu27bqVg>.

public sphere and the subaltern feminist public like mediatory figures informing the public of the arguments of the feminist public. At certain junctures in public debates, they feel the need to stress their alliance with the feminist subaltern public. In this sense, the formation of this alliance is quite contextual; it comes into being as a response to the rising sexist discourses. Below are some examples of the patriarchal discourses that women columnists challenged in their columns.

6.1.6. Critique of Sexist Discourses Targeting at Female Public Figures such as Aylin Nazlıaka, Güldal Mumcu and Nuray Mert

In recent years, some male politicians have reproduced the misogynist thinking in their personal statements by openly attacking well-known female public figures on accounts of their moral values. For example, targeting MP Aylin Nazlıaka, who harshly criticized the recent anti-abortion initiative by stating that “PM ought to stop standing guard over women’s vaginas”, Bülent Arınç, the spokesperson for the government, made the following statement: “How can a married lady with a child can talk about her sexual organ so comfortably?” He also accused Nazlıaka of being flirtatious in the parliament: “I am a shy person. I may feel embarrassed if a nice lady constantly looks at me.” Upon this, Karaca wrote an article titled “The Lost Honor of Aylin Nazlıaka”, where she states that she does not agree with Nazlıaka’s critique of the anti-abortion initiative yet she finds Arınç’s sexist statement as unacceptable:

“It is not possible to accept this kind of political stance which utilizes woman’s marriage, motherhood and honor for political purposes.”

In a similar vein, Evin criticizes another patriarchal statement of Arınç, where he tries to solve a debate that he had with Güldal Mumcu, MP from the CHP, by

uttering that “she is a nice lady... she is entrusted us”¹⁰⁷. As a response to this, Evin stated that this protective patriarchal attitude annuls a woman MP’s free agency.¹⁰⁸

Another criticism comes from İplikçi in an article titled “Hussy”, where she deeply criticizes the general manager of the state television TRT who labeled a well-known Kurdish singer, as “aşüfte” [hussy] in a meeting.¹⁰⁹ Upon this, in her article, İplikçi questions how sexist discourses can become so entrenched in the top bureaucratic positions in state.

Ferai Tınç wrote an article titled “You Are Supposed to be a Lady...”, where she criticizes PM Erdoğan for his remarks about Nuray Mert, a well-known columnist and academician.¹¹⁰ In a speech, implying Nuray Mert, Erdoğan stated the following: “You are supposed to be a lady... Why do you give such an ardent support to the BDP and the PKK?” In her article, Tınç points out the problematic character of Erdoğan’s addressing to Mert as a “lady”. She argues that without acknowledging the problems underlying such political moves that strategically utilize women’s gender identities, other problems concerning the democratic regime in Turkey cannot be solved.

6.1.7. Other Patriarchal Public Declarations and Women Columnists’ Criticisms

So far, with respect to the debates about women’s reproductive capacities or the right to abortion, we have seen that some articles of women columnists echo the ideas of

¹⁰⁷ Since Güldal Mumcu was the wife of the assassinated journalist, Uğur Mumcu, Arınç makes a paternalistic reference to this and displays a supposedly protective attitude towards Mumcu.

¹⁰⁸ “Bayan Mumcu Emanet Değil” [Lady Mumcu Can not Be Entrusted], *Milliyet*, 5 Şubat 2010, http://cadde.milliyet.com.tr/2010/02/05/YazarDetay/1195019/_Bayan__Mumcu_emanet_degil

¹⁰⁹ “Aşüfte” [Hussy], *Vatan*, 26 December 2011, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/asufte/420022/4/yazarlar>.

¹¹⁰ “You Are Supposed to be a Lady...”, *Hurriyet*, 6 June 2011, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/17963231_p.asp.

the feminist subaltern public. In fact, there are many other debates generated by patriarchal discourses to which women columnists reacted by affirming their alliance with the feminist subaltern public. Below is a brief summary of these examples in chronological order.

PM Erdoğan's remarks about a feminist protest organized in 2004 as a reaction to the draft bill criminalizing adultery has been severely criticized in the columns of some women columnists. To protest this bill, feminist women marched to the Grand Assembly with the slogan, "our body and our sexuality is ours". Erdoğan denounced the slogans and the protest by stating that these "marginal" women, who do not comply with the traditional values of society, cannot represent the ideal Turkish woman.¹¹¹ Upon these statements, Tınç wrote that it is not possible to label these feminist women as "marginal" because women from all over the country and from 80 women's organization participated in this protest, which points out the representative character of the protest.¹¹² Moreover, she also reminded that it is thanks to the feminist movement in Turkey that many promising developments have been achieved in terms of women's rights.

PM Erdoğan's highly provocative statement that "men and women are not equal"¹¹³ has also caused fury among women columnists. In response to this statement, Tuksal openly wrote that it is a political contradiction to struggle for Turkey's EU accession and declare support for human rights on the one hand and dispute with feminist activists on gender equality on the other.¹¹⁴ For her, PM's

¹¹¹ "Türk Kadını, Marjinal Bir Kesim Temsil Edemez" [A marginal group cannot represent the Turkish woman]. *Zaman*, September 25, 2003.

¹¹² "Marjinal Kadınlar" [Marginal Women], *Hürriyet*, 26 September 2004, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=260317>

¹¹³ See <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/kadinla-erkek-esit-olamaz/318006/9/siyaset>.

¹¹⁴ "Kadın Erkek Eşit Değil mi?" [Are Women and Men Not Equal], *Star*, 21 October 2010.

remarks in question are an attempt to restrain women and bring them into line, which is in fact deeply embedded in the patriarchal codes of manhood in Turkey.

The recent remark of a well-known religious intellectual criticizing the public presence of pregnant women and implying segregation for them¹¹⁵, has come to the forefront as another salient example that made explicit the profeminist tones in women columnists' line of thinking. Opposing this misogynist statement in a sarcastic tone, Mengi stated that this Islamic intellectual suggests pregnant women to play hide-and-seek.¹¹⁶ She underlines that not such patriarchal discourses but awareness for violence against women should dominate the agenda. Similarly, Karaca wrote that it is totally incomprehensible that such an intellectual figure having significant knowledge on Islam can make such misogynist statements.¹¹⁷ Yet, one should also note that she distances herself from some feminist demonstrations that argue against the misogynist remarks in question by prioritizing pregnant women's agencies on their bodies.

To sum up, as clearly seen from above, women columnists' writings cannot be subsumed under a unified category but display multiplicity, which renders fixed categorizations and labels impossible. In addition to the divide between secular and Islamist writers, which appears as a major fault line characterizing the multiplicity in women columnists' writings, both secular and Islamist writers are further divided into reformist and orthodox sub-clusters, depending on their receptivity to others'

¹¹⁵ See "Girls Who See Pregnant Women Became Afraid Of Giving Birth", *Radikal*, 25 July 2013, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/omer_tugrul_inancer_hamileleri_goren_genc_kizlar_dogurmaktan_korkuyor-1143380.

¹¹⁶ "Son Numara: Hamileleri Saklayın!" [The Last Trick: Hide Pregnant Women!], *Vatan*, 26 July 2013, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/son-numara%3B-hamileleri-saklayin/557115/4/yazarlar>.

¹¹⁷ "Hamile Kadınlar and Tuğrul İnançer" [Pregnant Women and Tuğrul İnançer], 2 August 2013, *Habertürk*, <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/nihal-bengisu-karaca/865825-hamile-kadinlar-ve-tugrul-inancer>

differences and openness to change through dialogue. Yet, despite the lack of an all-inclusive, anti-essentialist, dialogic approach to public gender debates in some women columnists' writings, one can suggest that their alignment and collaboration with the feminist subaltern public, however limited in scope, makes a significant contribution to the publicist aims of the feminist subaltern public. In this sense, women columnists' positionality in the public sphere is quite unique in terms of their relation to the feminist subaltern public. While they may act in cohort with the feminist counter public to a certain extent, their position may shift towards a hegemonic standpoint when the orthodox tones in their position overweigh. This constantly shifting narrative in their approach to current gender debates positions women columnists somewhere between the hegemonic public and the feminist subaltern public.

Another important point to take into account here is that women columnists' contribution to the publicist aims of the feminist counter public points out the significance of forming a broad collaboration vis-a-vis the rise of patriarchal discourses in contemporary Turkey. For such a collaboration to take place, a dialogic, self-reflexive, transformative communicative action is needed so that common aims can be achieved without disregarding differences. Yet, one should always bear in mind that while evaluating the implications of profeminist women columnists' collaboration with the feminist counter public, it is always necessary to closely look into the gist of the profeminist ideas at stake. In other words, collaboration with the feminist subaltern public per se does not ensure transformative coalitional politics since neither the feminist counter public nor profeminist women columnists have fully adopted the relational, anti-essentialist qualities of transformative coalition politics. Thus, one should always acknowledge the

multiplicity in both profeminist women columnists' writings and the profeminist counter public and ask which components of this multiplicity can contribute to transformative coalition politics. This nuanced analysis can help us detect the promising aspects of both profeminist women columnists' writings and the feminist subaltern public for the enhancement of an all-inclusive, anti-essentialist feminist activism in contemporary Turkey.

CHAPTER VII

NARRATIVES ON FEMINIST IDENTITIES IN SECULAR WOMEN COLUMNISTS' INTERVIEWS

Interviews in feminist methodology provide a useful ground for researchers to reveal women's experiences and narratives as well as their positionings vis-a-vis public narratives. In-depth interviewing allows one to enter into other people's perspectives and comprehend how they interpret the social world through their unique lenses. In this sense, the in-depth interviews that I have conducted with twelve well-known women columnists in Turkey were very useful to gain a thorough insight into how intellectual women in contemporary Turkey narrate their positions vis-a-vis feminist identity.

With the recent rise in narrative studies in scholarship, it has been widely acknowledged that identities are formed in and through narratives. (Sommers 1994, Ricoeur 1984) Individuals negotiate identity categories by constructing narratives about them and positioning themselves vis-a-vis public narratives as well as others' narratives. In this sense, identities and identifications are narrations that one tells about oneself, others and the prevalent norms and values encoded in public

narratives. Following this narrative approach, below I will demonstrate what kind of claims women columnists bring forward to make sense of feminist identity.

In the previous chapter, it has come into the open that one of the most striking differentiations among women columnists in this study is the secular/religious divide and their views on the compatibility of Islam and feminism. Considering this point, for practical reasons, women columnists' narratives are grouped here according to their proximity to secular and Islamic feminisms. While the analysis below deals with the narratives of secular writers, the next chapter will cover pious women writers' narratives on feminism and feminist identity. Yet, it is important to note that this grouping in this study does not mean that the boundaries between these two groups are impermeable. In other words, one should acknowledge that there may be many commonalities between these groups. It is also possible to find out that a writer presented as a secular columnist may share more commonalities with a pious columnist than she has with secular writers.

7.1. Main Themes in Secular Women Columnists' Narratives on Feminist Identity

7.1.1. Gender Awareness in Profession

To learn about the trajectory of their professional career and figure out their gender awareness, I asked women columnists the following questions: "How did you start writing columns? ; What would you say about being a woman in the media sector? ; What do you think about the discrimination against women in the media?" All women columnists stated that being a woman in a male-dominated media sector means facing many difficulties. In general, they pointed out that women journalists

are ghettoized to certain issues and are not promoted to executive positions. Although all women columnists produced a gendered analysis of women's position in the sector, when analyzed carefully, one can detect striking differences among them and some waverings and reservations in their narratives.

Before I asked her about her experience of being a woman in the media, Göğüş, columnist in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, began her narrative by talking about the difficulties for a woman journalist to write a column in a male-dominated newspaper. This shows that in her mindset, being a woman and being a journalist are not two separate forms of experience; they are to a great extent intermeshed with one another. The fact that from the very beginning she prefers to tell her story in gendered terms indicates that she does not believe in non-gendered existence in professional life. This particular narration allows her to construct a gendered subjectivity and challenge the male-dominated character of the media sector.

Göğüş recounted that her generation of women columnists and journalists had a pioneering role in the media sector because there were not any role models in front of them. According to Göğüş's account, this pioneering role rendered their position even more vulnerable. Göğüş expressed her resentment towards male writers who tried to ignore or devalue her professional achievements by saying that she should be grateful to them because they made it possible for her to become a columnist.

“A former columnist in *Hürriyet* and the editor-in-chief in *Sabah* newspaper made statements like ‘I made you a columnist’. It didn't happen that way. Here I would like to stress that it is crucial for women to make demands in their profession.” (September 25, 2012)

As a reaction to the paternalistic attitude of her male colleagues, Göğüş describes her journey in the media sector quite in detail, underlines her willingness and the efforts she made to achieve success in her profession and clearly refutes the attempts to

depreciate her qualifications. One can suggest that gendered subjectivity stands out as the heart of the matter in her narrative. At a later point, she also acknowledges that the gendered position and the discrimination she experienced is not peculiar to her case but many other women colleagues have lived through the same unequal gender relations. Thus, the meanings she attributes to her experiences as a woman in the media sector are based on a structural interpretation of the gendered norms and values in that she relates them to the patriarchal society.

According to Göğüş, the most challenging part of a woman columnist's career is to prove her qualifications. She states that when she first started to write a column, male executives as well as the readers were at first suspicious of her abilities as a columnist:

“It took some time to convince some readers that I am the one who writes my columns. It was as bad as this. ‘Who is behind her; who is actually writing this column’ were questions that I had to confront.” (Ibid)

Moreover, she stated that to be approved, a woman journalist is forced to behave in a modest fashion and be obedient to the executives who try to limit her professional aspirations:

“They expect you to be a ‘nice’ girl. They assign you to cover issues that will narrow your horizons or lead you to deal with gossip news.” (Ibid)

Relying on such experiences, Göğüş declares that she has been definitely discriminated against in the media sector. She openly uses the term “discrimination” to describe her experiences as a woman in the media sector. This deliberate choice is in tune with her gendered approach to her position in the media.

Mine Kırıkkanat, another columnist in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, tells about her career as a columnist in detail but unlike Göğüş, she says that she has not

experienced any kind of discrimination because of the privileged position she had as a Paris correspondent. According to her account, the fact that she has worked as a foreign correspondent exempted her from sexual harassment and all kinds of inequalities in the editorial office.

“Having started journalism as a foreign correspondent, I visited Turkey for short periods of time since I lived abroad till 2005... I was protected against sexual exploitation, inequalities, the fights in the ‘kitchen’... Thus, I have never experienced discrimination in the media, lived through sexual harassment or come across unequal treatment because I am a woman.” (September 26, 2012)

As seen from here, at one point, she touches upon the gendered inequalities that women journalists experience and displays an awareness of the systemic aspects of gendered inequalities. However, having outlined gendered inequalities as salary, promotion and misogynist discourses, Kırıkkanat underscores that she enjoyed a privileged position throughout her professional life which prevented her from gender discrimination in the media:

“As far as I know from my friends, they get lesser salaries. Second, their number in executive positions is of course less. For example, even though Cumhuriyet is a newspaper which employs the greatest number of women both as columnists and executives, still less women work here in such positions when compared to men. *I exclude myself*, but when I look at my friends working in executive positions, I see that at times of clash, their woman identity may turn into a tool of assault.” [emphasis mine] (Ibid)

Her narrative formulation as “my story versus others’ stories” blocks the possibility to reveal the commonalities that she may be sharing with “victims” of patriarchal norms. Hunter (2002: 115) notes that the act of privileging one’s position vis-a-vis gendered inequalities may have both structural and individual reasons. First, according to her, male hegemonic values may not allow one to recognize the omnipotent character of gendered inequalities. Second, since it is widely believed that the acknowledgment of discrimination fixes one’s position as a victim, the act of

privileging one's position may be geared towards stressing agency that is usually thought to be the positive counterpart of victimhood. Having noted this, Hunter claims that neither structural nor individual reasons are enough to explain the act of privileging. She interprets the act of privileging one's position as "a discursive practice of gender politics and the constitution of the subject's own gendered identity". (Ibid, 116) This act may involve both structural and individual reasons but when read in more broader terms, it gives us clues about how the narrator negotiates her gendered subjectivity in a particular discursive regime and on which part of her identity she puts the stress on.

Weir (2008) defines feminist struggles not only as acts to tell our stories or listen to and recognize others' stories but also as an attempt to make others' stories ours. In this sense, the distance that Kırıkkanat puts between her position and the position of others does not take into account the interrelational aspects of gendered identities and excludes the idea of permeabilities and commonalities that one may find in different gendered subject positions. Event though she acknowledges the embeddedness of gendered relations in professional life and regards gender bias as a systemic matter, the epistemic privilege that she reserves for herself tones down her mention of gendered subjectivity in her narrative.

Mehveş Evin, columnist in *Milliyet*, also displays a certain gender awareness throughout the interview. As for the consequences of being a woman journalist in the male-dominated media, she first elaborates on the difficulties related to promotion and how difficult it is to balance the family life and the responsibilities at work. She also declares that sometimes women choose to remain in lower echelons of the hierarchy in order to have more time for their personal lives because having an executive role means taking a lot of responsibilities.

While talking about her own experiences, Evin outlines the stages of her career towards being a columnist. She mentions that it was not easy for her to get promoted and some of the positions she had in the past did not really give her critical roles in the editorial office:

“They offered me the position of assistant editor-in-chief... Yet, I was not aware that this was sort of assuming the role of a nanny. You never have the right to have a say. Rather, you are supposed to manage your boss as well as those working under you. Only later I came to realize that the job definition of this position entailed nannying and motherhood...” (October 31, 2012)

Yet, despite this statement, the tone of Evin’s narrative in general is not angry or resentful. She says that she is content with the path that her career has followed so far. On the other hand, this does not mean that she is not critical of the advantageous status that male journalists enjoy in the media sphere:

“I have seen many male colleagues who performed quite poorly in terms of communication skills, lacked updated knowledge on global affairs and made me wonder how come they can sustain their positions in the media. A woman can never enjoy such advantages. It is very probable that she gets fired in the very instant when she makes a mistake.” (Ibid)

In addition, she underlines that she has learned to protect herself from sexual harassment at an early age and that in general she has worked in friendly working atmospheres:

“Sometimes very annoying things can happen but such things exist in many places where women and men work together. Some women get very angry about this but I don’t. It is possible to confront this in a certain civility. For example, swearwords... Generally, I have enjoyed a friendly working environment in the institutions where I have worked so far but I have learnt at the beginning of my career things like how to protect myself from sexual harassment...” (Ibid)

Having said this, Evin takes a moment to think about the issue of discrimination further and mentions a case which, she thinks, could be an example of discrimination. She tells that before coming to *Milliyet*, she served as the editor-in-chief in the weekly news magazine *Aktüel*; yet, despite this, *Milliyet* newspaper has

offered her a position in the gossip section and wanted her to prove her qualifications once again before being a columnist. Even though she thinks that this can be regarded as a case of discrimination, she does not outspokenly say that she was discriminated against.

On the one hand, it is obvious that Evin makes a gendered analysis of her position in the media and acknowledges the systemic aspects of gendered inequalities that women journalists suffer from. On the other hand, her narration of cases where gender discrimination is visibly felt, does not overtly resort to the term “discrimination”. In this sense, she interprets “discrimination” as a categorical term signifying victim feminism that should be reserved for cases of right violations blocking women’s way altogether throughout their career path. As a successful woman columnist today, Evin frames her narrative by prioritizing her efforts to find a way to perform her profession in a way that is most suitable to her qualifications and career targets. For her, to be located and singled out as discriminated against implies a less powerful position where one is prevented from using her abilities. Putting the stress on personal efforts, rather than on discrimination, makes it possible to avoid the victim’s discourse and build a narrative focused on intentionality and agency. Therefore, it is possible to say that in Evin’s narrative, there is an attempt not to reify gendered inequalities and instead focus on the possibilities of agency in the male dominated media sector.

Müge İplikçi, who is a columnist in *Vatan* newspaper and also writes novels and short stories, begins her narrative by touching upon the differences that her womanhood makes in her career. We see that she has gained self-confidence about her writing at the time when she has started to articulate her ideas about gender roles. Specifically, she identifies her studies in women’s studies graduate program at

Istanbul University as a turning point in her life which allowed her to interact with like-minded women and gain confidence about her gender conscious approach to writing. Thus, it is possible to suggest that her inspiration to write comes to a great extent from her gender awareness.

İplikçi states that from the very beginning in her career, she has always presented herself as a woman writer. Moreover, she declares that since writing has always been a realm where male norms and values dominate, at some point in her career, she has experienced discrimination and has had hard time to prove herself as a woman writer:

“I am someone who set off facing criticisms that accuse the language, the words I use for not being literature. This bothers me less now but when you are at the beginning of the road and believe that you are not prepared enough-girls in this geography always begin with a lack of self-confidence-, you feel devastated. You have to be strong and believe in yourself. You have to be very passionate to go on because everything is there to make you give up. Telling you ‘go home my girl’...” (September 27, 2012)

İplikçi interprets her position in media and literature always through her gendered subjectivity. Her gendered self constitutes the backbone of her “interpretive horizon” (Alcoff 2006), which helps her make sense of her experiences and become aware of the web of power affecting the positionings of gendered selves. In this sense, she thinks of her gendered identity not in terms of limitations or fixations but as an enabling perspective that cannot be detached from her subjectivity.

Regarding the issue of being a woman in the media, Gila Benmayor, who has worked for 30 years for *Hürriyet* newspaper, first expressed her concern about the patriarchal character of the media sector. Benmayor criticized the misogynist coverage of news and the sexist language and told how she and her colleagues have always struggled against this mind-set. She further recounted that they formed a

small gender conscious group at *Hürriyet* to combat against the patriarchal tendencies in the news language.

When I directly asked her whether she thinks that she has experienced any discrimination, she stated that *Hürriyet* was like a home for her and she cannot say that she has experienced unequal treatment. Moreover, she added that if you work very hard, nobody can discriminate against you. On the other hand, she stressed that she has heard from many colleagues that gender bias is highly prevalent in the media sector:

“Of course there is discrimination. For example, it is discrimination if women cannot have a say in the editorial board... I have never attempted to be included in this board; if I did, maybe then would have experienced discrimination. Even though I have not experienced it personally, I have heard about it from other women colleagues. It is mostly women who lose their jobs. It is much easier for men to find a job... When women are detached from the profession, it is very difficult for them to come back.”
(November 20, 2012)

Having mentioned the gender bias and the discrimination against women, Benmayer frames women’s gendered subjectivity in the media in terms of their positive assets and the difference they make in their profession. She touches upon the differences between the work ethics of male and female journalists by stating that when compared to men, women journalists are always more disciplined and hard-working. For her, women are more competent in dealing with crises and finding resolution for such situations. It is important to note that Benmayer does not limit her narrative to the acknowledgement of gender bias in the media; she also puts emphasis on women’s journalistic and other professional skills and in this way portrays women’s existence in the media as a success story.

With regard to the consequences of being a woman in the media sector, Yazgülü Aldoğan, columnist in *Posta*, states that it is quite hard for women to climb

the ladder to the highest executive positions. For her, having a column instead of being the executive editor of the newspaper is a sign showing that women are not allowed to be at the highest echelon of the hierarchy:

“I had some experience in executive positions but they never make you editor-in-chief. You always stay in a middle ground executive position and after a while you get bored. Therefore, being a columnist is like having a little squatter house in the newspaper.” (November 26, 2012)

Aldoğan also touches upon the issue of unequal payment. Moreover, she declares that there is a tendency in the media to urge women writers to write on certain issues such as gossip. Aldoğan is quite critical of women columnists’ being ghettoized to such issues, which, for her, depreciates their credibility and is an insult to their qualifications. She tells that as a journalist, who has a Ph.D in journalism and has worked for several years in leading newspapers as a columnist writing about the political agenda, during a period of unemployment she had been offered a position that underestimates her skills as an experienced journalist. For her, this example is clearly expressive of the devaluation of women journalists’ qualifications in the media:

“I could not believe it when they offered me to lead the gossip supplement of a major newspaper. How could I do it, I did not even know the popular celebrities... They said you are a woman, you can do this. This is what is expected from you. Lead a gossip section and do not get interested in political matters...” (Ibid)

When I ask her whether she thinks that she has been exposed to discrimination because of her womanhood, Aldoğan denotes that she has never experienced sexual assault because she has always enjoyed a powerful position and her male colleagues have always seen her as a “sister”. In addition, she states that her privileged position as a woman with a Ph.D in journalism protected her from such vulnerabilities:

“My generation did not experience discrimination that much. Since we as women journalists were very few in the media, they treated us like sisters to

protect and hold in high esteem... Maybe this was related to my own position in the media... As a team who learned the profession outside the academy, they were not used to journalists who are university graduates. My position as a woman journalist with a Ph.D was even more difficult for them to comprehend.” (Ibid)

It is striking that while talking about discrimination, she cites “sisterhood” as a protection mechanism against sexual assault: “They kept watch over us and treated us like a sister.” Kandiyoti (1997) and Durakbaşı (1998) point out that since the early Republican period women in Turkey could participate in the public sphere on the condition that they tame their sexualities. Aldoğan’s narrative shows us that the same condition may apply to the pioneering women columnists in the post-1990s period, i.e. a time period in which the media has been privatized and gone through an impressive transformation. It is clear that “sisterhood” as a tool to tone down their sexuality is a protective belt for them against sexual assault.

In Aldoğan’s narrative, the statement regarding the protection against sexual harassment is followed by a short statement about vulnerability to misogynist language and then, by an emphasis put on the difference that women make in the media. This is a complicated narrative with different themes and ideas. On the one hand, Aldoğan acknowledges women’s vulnerability to discrimination and gender bias; on the other hand, she prefers to put the emphasis on women’s skills and qualifications that give women a privileged position. This shift of focus in the sequence of narrative can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid the fixation women’s position as victim.

Similar to other columnists, Ruhat Mengi, a columnist who makes TV programs and used to write for *Vatan* newspaper, touches upon the gendered power relations in the media and states that while writing for *Sabah* newspaper, she received the lowest salary when compared to male writers:

“In the end I was so frustrated that I told them: ‘You don’t give me the salary I deserve because my husband is a journalist and you think that I will not starve. But this is a matter of prestige for me. If I am a successful woman journalist, why should not I get the same salary with a male journalist?’” (May 16, 2013)

Mengi criticizes that even though she had the highest ratings on TV, it is usually men who receive the TV awards. For her, male journalists take it as an insult if a woman journalist becomes more successful than themselves. Another discriminatory case that Mengi told during the interview is about male journalists’ attempts to degrade women columnists on the basis of their family lives and their sexuality. When she criticized Fatih Altaylı for the huge amount of transfer payment he received from a newspaper, Altaylı in return wrote a column implying that Mengi could become a columnist thanks to his husband who is the leading columnist in the same newspaper.

Regarding this, Mengi states the following:

“I have seen that men attempt to hurt me by using my private life, even my children and they think that they can do this easily because I am a woman.”
(Ibid)

As seen above, Mengi is aware of the fact that she is positioned in the midst of gendered power relations. Her narrative clearly reveals that one cannot exist in a non-gendered, generic way in the media sector. Yet, on the other hand, at a later point in the interview she states that she does not believe in differentiations in journalism on the basis of gender. The coexistence of the gendered perspective and the denial of articulating gendered subjectivity in self-presentation is in fact not unique to her narrative but also appear in other narratives in different ways. This complicated coexistence will be thoroughly discussed in the following parts.

For Ferai Tınç, a columnist who worked for *Hürriyet* newspaper for 30 years, “being a woman journalist” is a prominent theme that helps her make sense of her career path in the media field. Tınç posits that from the very beginning of her career,

her professional goal has been to integrate women's perspective into her journalism. She underscores that media is a male dominated institution where a sexist language dominates. Like Benmayor, Tınç recounts that together with other colleagues they have struggled against the sexist news language in *Hürriyet*. Moreover, to stress the absence of women in higher echelons of hierarchy, she explains that women are expected to behave like men in order to take an executive role. According to Tınç, not only the decision making mechanisms but also the general habitus of journalism built with male norms and values excludes women journalists:

“Male journalists can go together to a kebab restaurant or to a bar... They build affinity through a male language but as a woman who lives in Turkey, you cannot do this... Moreover, you have responsibilities at home. For example, when my kids were small, I had to restrain my professional ambitions to have more time to spend with them...” (May 12, 2013)

When I ask Tınç whether she has experienced any discrimination, she states that journalism has always been a very difficult profession for women since it is highly dominated by men and she has experienced a lot of difficulties. First, she states that women are frequently silenced in meetings:

“When you are young, it is even worse... They treat you like a little girl. This sexist approach is always prevalent and you try to protect yourself from it...” (Ibid)

Moreover, Tınç also touches upon the issue of sexual harassment and how young women journalists in the past were highly sexualized and ghettoized into 'light' subjects such as culture or environment. From here, it is clear that as an experienced journalist, Tınç has witnessed many gendered inequalities in the media. Are these experiences reflected in Tınç's negotiation of her gendered identity in public? Being aware that women have gendered positionings in the media, does Tınç as well as other women columnists feel the need to stress their womanhood in their public self-portraits? Or do they assume a generic, non-gendered existence in order to get away

from gendered inequalities that prevent them from climbing higher in the career ladder? Discussions in next parts will help us tackle with such questions in greater detail.

In sum, as seen from the statements above, all women columnists evaluate the current state of media and their position in it through critical gendered lenses. Some of them may refrain from directly talking about their own experience of discrimination; some others may reserve a privileged position for themselves or frame cases of discrimination in reconciliatory terms. Some associate discrimination with other female colleagues or tell their story of discrimination without overtly naming it as discrimination. In this way, they avoid producing a victims's discourse. It is obvious that these columnists are well-educated and professional women and enjoy a privileged position. While talking about gendered inequalities, they also aim to stress agency, i.e, personal efforts and qualifications to make the narrative not sound merely as a victim's discourse but also present it as a success story.

7.1.2. About Being a Woman Writer

The idea of *gynocriticism* in feminist literary theory puts forward that women have *a literature of their own* and when investigated, their works reveal particular specificities. (Showalter, 1979) This attempt to distinguish women's writing and define a distinctive female tradition in literature is based on the assumption that patriarchal gender relations in society in one way or another affect women writer's literary perception of the world and render it unique. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, women's writing, gynocriticism and *écriture féminine* were quite popular

subjects in literature.¹¹⁸ However, with the rise of the poststructuralist approaches, the interest in women's writing has begun to disappear from the feminist theoretical agenda and the term "woman writer" and "women's writing" have gradually lost credibility as analytical categories. Poststructuralist theories argued that in literary texts, meaning is constructed through the play of signifiers without any reference to a speaking subject. (Moi 2008) In line with this, feminist theorists began to question the studies focusing on the sex of the author. It has been argued that the term "woman writer" entails threats such as essentialism, uniformity and articulation of sexual difference in reifying and ahistorical terms. Moreover, stressing that the category of "woman" reifies the processes that construct woman as a subordinated subject position, it has been suggested that the term "woman writer" fixes women in a subordinated position and obscures the processes of subordination. (Kamuf 1980)

In response to the decrease in the interest in women's writing, Moi (2008) argues that the dismantling of the term "woman writer" results in generic, non-gendered speaking positions which deprive women of a language that is expressive of their experiences as gendered subjects. In addition to the decreasing interest in women's writing in feminist literary theory, in her seminal essay, Moi (Ibid) also focuses on women writers' negotiation of the gendered speaking positions. She claims that women writers' denial of gendered authorship should be read as a defensive speech act employed to protect themselves from stereotyped fixations about how women's writing should be. In this sense, Moi argues that the denial of gendered subjectivity and gendered authorship is regarded by women writers as a tool to eliminate their particularities to be able to speak from a universal position.

¹¹⁸ Some of the examples from the books written in this era are as follows: *A Literature of Their Own* (Showalter, 1977), *Women Writing and Writing about Women* (Jacobus, 1979), *The Poetics of Gender* (Miller, 1986)

Moi reminds us of Beauvoir's claim that man is associated with the universal while woman is prisoned into particularity. According to this logic, women can have authority to speak and write only if they suppress their gendered subjectivity and assume a generic existence; otherwise their authorship is pushed into the limits of a stereotypically defined "feminine" realm. Regarding this point, Moi (2008: 266) argues the following:

"In the USA, I have discovered, a man trained as a nurse is called a 'male nurse'... Male nurses are quite easy about their access to the universal: they speak of themselves as nurses, male nurses, or as men in nursing, without any sense of strain, even when they complain that male nurses suffer discrimination from female nurses. There seems to be no situation in which a male nurse would feel compelled to say: 'I am not a male nurse, but a nurse'. This goes to show that in a sexist society, one can't belittle a man by reminding him of his gender. (This is a hypothesis, so far.) The male or the masculine is still the norm, the female or feminine remains the deviation."

Similar to Moi, Friedman (1998: 31) argues that in a social setting where patriarchal formations continue to have a material reality, one cannot dismiss gendered subjectivity from analysis. For her, the retreat of gynocriticism would only serve to the patriarchal tendencies that are indifferent to women's textual agencies. Thus, she underscores that especially in settings where women's writing is trivialized and marginalized, it is politically imperative to focus on women's writing as a distinctive literary product. However, Friedman (Ibid, 26) also points out the importance of redefining the idea of gynocriticism and women's writing in a historically situated way. She criticizes gynocriticism as a metanarrative which fails to account for shifting constituents and multiple facets of identity. For her, an adequate feminist criticism should go beyond conventional binaries such as man/woman, male/female that define fixed, foundational narratives about the self and thus fail to capture the interplay between different constituents of identity such as gender, age, class or ethnicity. Accordingly, any attempt to discover the embodiment in writings of a

gendered subjectivity should encompass a fluid matrix of differences and take into account the interplay of multiple roles. In sum, in Friedman's account one can find a stress on the importance of gynocritical study of the writer's gender and also a warning against reifying binary categories such as man/woman. As a resolution, she argues for a new feminist literary criticism that takes into account multiple positions and fluid epistemological standpoints.

Against this theoretical background, this study incorporates into the analysis the idea of women's writing and the term "woman writer/ women columnist/ women journalist" as another indicator to measure the negotiation of sexual difference in women columnists' narratives. How do the women columnists negotiate gendered authorship? Do they find it liberating or limiting? What are the reasons underpinning their negotiations? To be able to answer such questions, I have asked women columnists how they would receive it if someone would label them as a woman writer/ woman journalist/ woman columnist. This question can be thought of in line with the questions inquiring about columnists' gender awareness. The main aim here is to understand to what extent they attribute priority to their womanhood and see the world through women's point of view. Except for Müge İplikçi and Ferai Tınç, all women columnists denied the label "woman writer/ women columnist". Some of them refused it by saying that it is a residual category which depreciates women writers' qualifications and ghettoizes them to certain issues. For them, the term "woman writer" implies the patriarchal character of the intellectual realm and presents the woman writer as a secondary figure.

According to Göğüş, the term "woman writer" connotes that authorship is granted to women as a favour.

“They invite five men to a panel discussion and you feel like they have included you just because of the gender quota... In the media sector I have also heard statements such as ‘we have already one woman columnist, why would we need the second one’... Of course we are women writers and they are male writers but if women are specifically labelled as women writers while men are exempted from gendered authorship, then it is necessary to call men as male writers, too. I resort to this language as a reaction...” (September, 25, 2012)

Upon my asking how she interprets the case of writers who define themselves as women writers, she states that she is quite critical of such women writers because they resort to this term in return of a patriarchal bargain. For her, in order to get the benefits they want, they have to write in line with the patriarchal expectations of the media sector.

From above, it is clear that for Gögüş, the term “woman writer” is an external imposition that positions women writers in an inferior status and degrades their writing. In this understanding, labels regarding gendered authorship are nothing but the materialization of the patriarchal character of the intellectual realm. Adopting this view, Gögüş denies the term “woman writer” on the basis of a Beauvoirian critique. Like Beauvoir, she believes that man symbolizes the norm, the universal while woman in the intellectual field is always regarded as deviation, as particularity and thus is given a specific name, i.e. “woman writer”.

In a similar vein, Kırıkkanat regards the term “woman writer” as an insult to her authorship. She declares that to differentiate writers according to their sex is a degrading treatment:

“Authorship cannot be defined according to gender, as if categorizing boxers as featherweight or heavyweight. Neither authorship nor intelligence is proportional to weight... Thus, for me, categorization of writers according to gender is an insult...” (September, 26, 2012)

Kırıkkanat tells that throughout her life, she has always witnessed women being more clever and successful in intellectual activities. Although Kırıkkanat differentiates between men and women on the basis of their intellectual talents and distinguishes women as superior, she opposes the gendered approach to authorship for two reasons. First of all, for her, the term “woman writer” is a product of the patriarchal mind-set and is a degrading term undermining women writers’ qualifications. Second, she thinks that those writers who use the term to stress gender consciousness and women’s point of view, believe in the superiority of women, which is unacceptable for social and political arrangements. According to her, writers who adapt the label “woman writer” are either “blond gossip writers” or those who are in favour of women’s supremacy over men.

For Evin, to use the term woman writer is absurd because there is no such term as man writer. Evin thinks that this term is used as if the authorship and publicity are granted to women as a favour:

“Women columnists constitute only 16 percent of all columnists in the media. Most of them write in supplements and their writings focus on topics such as beauty or soft expertise areas such as “economy”. They rarely write on sport; very few of them write on politics... Sometimes when I am invited to TV programmes, I can understand that I am invited as a vase, just to fulfill the quota reserved for women. The prevailing understanding grants women this quota symbolically, not because they love to see women there...” (October 31, 2012)

Evin also states that some women writers use this term as a marketing strategy. As Göğüş said before, she implies that these writers submit to the expectations of the patriarchal media sector and in return, hope to enjoy some benefits. Moreover, for her, if one is really a feminist, one should definitely avoid the term since it overlooks one’s professional qualifications and puts the emphasis on womanhood. Similar to Göğüş’s and Kırıkkanat’s narratives, in Evin’s account, the term “woman writer” is

detached from its connotations related to gender awareness and women's perspective and is interpreted strictly within the limits of its patriarchal definition.

Benmayor states that she wants her name mentioned in terms of her journalistic writings, not with a reference to her womanhood. In this sense, she declares that she is a journalist first:

“I define myself as a journalist and prefer to be defined by others in this way. Not over my womanhood... I am a journalist by profession, not a woman journalist.” (November 20, 2012)

When I ask her what she thinks about the employment of the term as a sign of women's point of view and gender consciousness, she says that there is no need to overstress womanhood; the readers can already sense the writer's gender awareness between the lines. Yet, she adds that she supports organizations that bring women journalists together to empower them:

“The name of this profession is called journalism. So, I do not want to utilize my gender in presenting my professional identity. However, quite paradoxically, I joined a journalistic network organized by women on the status of women journalists in the Mediterranean region... So, ‘woman journalist’ is a term that is in circulation. I can join an organization that prioritize women journalists’ concerns. The fact that I do not use my gender in my public self-presentation does not necessarily lead me not to support women journalists’ organizations. I support such organizations because it is a fact that women are subject to discrimination and they should be powerful in all areas.” (Ibid)

From here, it is clear that for Benmayor, there is a gendered aspect to one's identity but she prefers not to put it forward in her public self-identification. In her narrative, open articulation of gendered self is limited to particular contexts and issues. As for her professional identity, she regards womanhood as a particularity that may overshadow her competence as a successful journalist.

Aldoğan's narrative about gendered authorship is also marked by fluid negotiations about gendered self. On the one hand, Aldoğan is against the employment of the term, denoting that labeling a writer as a woman writer is a sign of insolence. Like other writers covered so far, for her, the term "woman writer" degrades women's qualifications. On the other hand, at some other point during the interview, Aldoğan clearly says that there is no other choice for a woman to write through a women's point of view. She tells that at the beginning of her writing career she wanted to employ a genderless point of view but later when she became familiar with feminist ideas she realized that she has always employed a women's point of view without intending to do so:

"For example, while debating the news with male colleagues, I realized that they do not see the details that I see because I am much more sensitive about these issues. In this way, I realized how important it is to be a woman in the production of news. I began to employ a women's point of view in my writing or rather, I should say that I have always been writing as a woman even though I didn't know it until that day." (November 26, 2012)

As seen from above, Aldoğan believes that women incorporate their gendered positions into their writing, which allows them to see what male writers cannot easily see. In this sense, she defines "women's writing" by leaving the patriarchal connotations out and associating it with profeminist ideas. Nonetheless, when asked to elaborate on the term "woman writer", she regards the term as a patriarchal term and refuses to use it. It is clear that her denial of self-identification as a woman writer is a response to the possible public attempts to reduce her writing to certain issues and traits. In other words, it can be interpreted as a defensive speech strategy that does not capture her conception of women's writing as a whole.

Unlike the previous writers, İplikçi regards the term "woman writer" as a liberating term which has helped her to establish herself as an accomplished writer in

the male-dominated literary field. She declares that from the very beginning in her career, she has presented herself as a woman writer:

“There is no use in rejecting the gendered self. The pen always writes in gendered terms; you cannot escape it. And you should not... Because women’s writing is a wonderful writing. It has its own music, its own poetics. Thus, I adore it...” (September 27, 212)

İplikçi states that in the male dominated literary field, women’s perspective and their unique language is marginalized and trivialized as sentimental and peripheral. She tells about the difficulties that she had as a young woman writer who publicly announced that she writes through a women’s point of view. However, she denotes that in the later stages of her career, she no longer felt the need to make this emphasis on her womanhood since she believed that she has verbalized her cause enough. When I asked her to elaborate further on her giving up to announce outspokenly that she is a woman writer, she says that she does not see this as a retreat since she hasn’t given up to write from a women’s point of view. She tells that presenting yourself as a woman writer is a very difficult choice because then, you are severely criticized for this and your writing is reduced to certain themes and traits. The fact that she no longer feels the need to present herself as a woman writer can be obviously read as a strategy to avoid criticisms. Having established herself as a well-known author, it may be more difficult for her to oppose the hegemonic ideas about the term “woman writer”. From here, one can suggest that İplikçi clearly differentiates between strategy and denial of gendered position. Accordingly, even though one cannot imagine a speaking position in isolation from one’s gendered being, one can choose not to prioritize the gendered aspects of the self as a strategy deployed to deal with the hegemonic discourses.

In Mengi's narrative, the term "woman writer" is isolated from its feminist connotations and thought of as a patriarchal imposition from outside.

"...I write the facts without fear. If I cannot write them, I should not do journalism. Thanks to this understanding I am always one of those who write facts first. Therefore, I don't accept differentiations between men and women journalists. Nor do I accept it in TV. Therefore, I never put my womanhood forward in my TV programs. I always appear in classical clothing, put my womanhood in the background and prioritize the news." (May 16, 2013)

Here, it is obvious that in Mengi's mindset, womanhood in professional life is an obstacle that devalues one's professional qualifications. According to her, in order for women to make their professional competency acknowledged, the category "woman" has to be eliminated from the picture altogether. On the other hand, Mengi also states that sometimes it is necessary to point out the unique aspects of women's perspective to stress the details that men may ignore. However, for her, this kind of public articulation of gendered position is a rare case; what is really needed is to stress that women can leave all particularities aside and act as "professional" as men do.

Tinç's views on gendered authorship shift between a defensive strategy and an emphasis put on the importance of assuming gendered positions. First, she states that there should not be any differentiation between men and women journalists since such a differentiation reproduces patriarchal discourses that attribute women inferiority. Yet, later she adopts a standpoint where she affirms the public articulation of gendered self.

"If it is a fact, why do we hide it? There is a difference between a man and woman writer... This means that being a woman has further implications. This difference does not originate from my ignorance or incompetence but it is directly related to my womanhood. If this is so, I should be aware of the consequences of my womanhood and overcome them. Ignoring the gendered self means entering a war that the male dominated society wanted, without knowing that you are in a defeated position." (May 12, 2013)

Here, Tınç makes use of the constitutive effect of narrative reflection to figure out her position vis-a-vis gendered authorship and revises her conception of the term “woman writer” during the act of narration. For her, in order to sharpen her gender consciousness and remind others about the unequal gender relations, it is important to stress that women have gendered positions in professional life:

“We are women journalists. If we are discriminated against, it’s because of the approach of patriarchal society to women, not because of our incompetence. This is our identity... In order not to be caught in the traps of the statement that “there is no need to differentiate between men and women, we are all journalists”, I find it right to present myself as a woman journalist.” (Ibid)

Tınç is aware of the dangers of assuming a generic, non-identity position. For her, since individuals are all positioned in the web of power depending on our gender, ethnicity or religion, they should be able to freely express where they stand. She states that failing to do so will result in suppression of their particularities. One can maintain that in her negotiation of gendered authorship, Tınç interprets the term “woman writer” through its feminist connotations, not as a label imposed from outside in the form of a patriarchal stigmatization.

To sum up, most of the women columnists strictly oppose the term “woman writer” since they interpret it as an insult to their authorship. Women columnists’ denial of gendered authorship tells a lot about how a woman public opinion leader establishes herself in the public sphere in Turkey. To prove that they are equal actors of the intellectual realm, women writers curb the difference of their writing. However, this does not mean that they ignore their gendered positioning altogether. Some suggest that women’s writing is unique in that women can see the details that men cannot see. Earlier, we have seen that they also acknowledge unequal power relations in professional life and the political implications of gendered identities.

Relying on this, it is possible to suggest that women columnists' denial of public articulation of gendered authorship does not necessarily imply a denial of their gendered positioning. Rather, it is more likely that as public figures, they prefer to speak in non-gendered terms in order to protect themselves from the patriarchal implications of gendered positions. Yet, it is quite interesting to note that most of them interpret the term "woman writer" as an externally imposed patriarchal label that devalues their qualifications and do not attempt to define the term anew by employing women's perspective. In this sense, one can suggest that most of the women columnists construct their narratives on gendered authorship in a defensive, protective narrative tone, not as an unrestrained reflection on their positionings.

7.2. Meanings of Feminism for Columnists

How do women columnists situate themselves vis-a-vis feminisms and feminist identity in a conservative political regime? To investigate this, I have asked women columnists how they define their relationship to feminism. My aim was to formulate this question as broadly as possible. Different strands of feminisms in Turkey are not openly mentioned in the question. Rather, I expected women columnists to touch upon the cleavages among feminisms in Turkey on their own initiative. The motive behind this was to see whether women columnists think of feminism in Turkey as a monolithic block or whether they incorporate the differences among feminisms into their analyses. Some of the women columnists mentioned three different strands of feminism as Republican, Islamic and Kurdish feminisms, while some others did not touch upon the cleavages at all. For the majority of women columnists, the most striking divide emerges between Republican and Islamic feminisms.

On the one hand, secular women columnists argue that different strands of feminisms in Turkey should work hand in hand and pious women should voice the idea of gender equality in their communities. On the other hand, some of them declare that they do not believe in the compatibility of Islam and feminism since Islamic doctrines do not provide a fertile ground for cultivating gender equality. As for Kurdish feminism, some writers touch upon the Peace and Democratic Party's intra-party policies regarding gender equality and dynamic women's activism taking place in provinces such as Diyarbakır and Van yet Kurdish feminism did not come forward as a major topic throughout the interviews.

Secondly, when I asked women columnists to reflect on the most critical issues with respect to gender relations in Turkey, a great majority of them limited their answers to women and did not touch upon the issue of sexual orientation at all. Thus, it is important to note that even among a gender conscious sample, the issue of LGBT rights and sexual orientation is not regarded as a critical subject in contemporary Turkey.

Thirdly, while explaining their relation to feminism, women columnists feel the need to differentiate between radical feminism and feminism as gender equality and women's rights. On the one hand, they criticize the stereotypical conceptions of feminism in the public mind such as "feminism as man-hating". On the other hand, while explaining their position vis-a-vis feminism, they stress that they support feminism to the extent that feminism is not about women's supremacy and man-hating. This paradoxical stance is also witnessed in their approach towards the label "feminist", which is explained in greater detail below.

7.2.1. Relationship to Feminism and Feminist Identity

When I asked women columnists how they define their relationship to feminism, the following points have come forward in their statements. Göğüş states that she has been quite active in the flourishing of the second wave women's movement in the 1980s in Turkey. She denotes that having contributed to feminist organizations, publications and taken part in feminist protests, she has developed a firm commitment to the importance of adopting a feminist perspective:

“I am one of the founding members of Ka-Der [Kadın Adayları Destekleme Derneği]. I have organized its mobilization in the media sphere... I have also edited a book titled “Never Without Women”. It was a very important book back then because it claimed that there can be no progress without women participating in the decision-making processes. Moreover, I have made considerable efforts to bolster women's existence in politics. I was also present in the first, emblematic protest walk in 1986 organized against violence against women.” (September 25, 2012)

Furthermore, Göğüş openly declares that having grown up in an egalitarian family environment, she is feminist by birth. She underlines that if one supports feminist ideals, one should call oneself feminist. Therefore, she criticizes those who refrain from calling themselves as feminist since they don't want to assume any responsibility in accepting a particular identity. For Göğüş, the acknowledgement of gendered inequalities on the one hand and the refrainment from public declaration of feminist identity on the other is a hypocritical attitude:

“Those who state that they support women's rights but do not want to accept the feminist label, act strategically to avoid criticisms... I can be very reactionary about this attitude, so much so that I see it as self-denial.” (Ibid)

Yet, despite this strong declaration, Göğüş's narrative is marked by some reservations in terms of displaying a feminist position. She first states that she has never censored her writings and her speech when it comes to expressing feminist ideas. Following this, she admits that in the past there were times when she could not

fully put forward her feminist identity in her career choices. She denotes that while writing a research book in the early stages of her career, she decided not to focus on gender issues because of the reactions from her colleagues.

Earlier, we have seen that Göğüş denies the label “woman writer” on the basis that it is a patriarchal tool to label women’s writing as inferior. This indicates that in a male dominated society where feminist identities are stereotypically defined, even those who are in favour of public declaration of feminist identity find themselves in a defensive position vis-a-vis hegemonic patriarchal discourses and tone down their feminist position. This position is based on a reactionary rhetoric that aims to avoid stigmatization by denying the patriarchal definitions of feminist identity but at the same time fails to define it anew through a feminist stress on gendered subjectivity. In this sense, one can safely suggest that patriarchal discourses set the limits within which one can negotiate feminist attitudes.

In her conceptualization of feminist positionings, Göğüş espouses that there is not one feminism but many:

“Feminism has greatly changed in time. It evolved into different camps and developed new discourses...” (Ibid)

As for the Turkish context, Göğüş differentiates between secular, Islamist and Kurdish feminisms and defines the cleavages between these feminisms as the most acute problem for the feminist mobilization in Turkey, noting that their strictly formed boundaries inhibit any possibility for forming coalitions. However, despite this stress on the importance of building coalitions, Göğüş does not engage in a self-reflective analysis of her own positioning vis-a-vis different cleavages among feminists in Turkey. Defining herself as a secular feminist, she is suspicious of the

emancipatory potential of Islamic feminism. Both in the interview as well as in her columns, Göğüş interprets headscarf as submission to patriarchy. Opposing the claim that veiling may entail free will and agency, Göğüş puts forward that women resort to the veil only to be able to take part in public life.

“Veiling is in no way liberatory... Many women who are not allowed to go to the grocery store in their neighborhood in Adapazarı, may come to Istanbul to visit a religious sect in Fatih just because they belong to that particular sect... This is of course important for them.” (Ibid)

Göğüş argues that the religious framework inhibits the realization of feminist ideals but hopes that feminism will transform Islam into an egalitarian position. With respect to Islamic feminism, she states the following:

“I cannot say that an Islamist woman cannot be feminist. She can be feminist, why can't she? But they have some blockage points; they will proceed by overcoming them or creating a new track for themselves. So it can happen as long it is possible to agree on certain points.” (Ibid)

For Göğüş, Islam and feminism can collaborate but their collaboration is bounded with the limitations of Islamic practices such as veiling. In this sense, the conception of collaborative feminist politics in Göğüş's mind is in fact very fragile because it fails to engage in an authentic dialogue with Islamic feminists, their demands and conceptualizations of feminism and agency. Göğüş utters that despite all its defects, the Republican project of women's emancipation is still a valid ideal to improve women's access to education and public life.

“If my grandmother who was a very religious person sent all of her three daughters to university, there is only the Republican project underneath this... Without the Republican ideology this could not have happened; we have to accept this.” (Ibid)

Considering the urbanization and modernization of Islamist identities in recent decades, one can maintain that Göğüş's analysis cannot capture the gist of gendered relations in Islamic communities in contemporary Turkey. Urban, well-educated

veiled women who participate in public life today conceptualize veiling by prioritizing agency. Thus, the association between veiling and suppression of agency is not an adequate frame of thought to explain the demands of veiled women in contemporary Turkey. In a nutshell, one can state that Göğüş is aware of the multiplicities in feminism but fails to critically reflect on the situatedness of her ideas. Relying on her epistemic privilege as a secular, well-educated, urban, middle class feminist, she provides a limited definition about how women's liberation should be and blocks the possibility of dialogue and collaborative politics between different strands of feminisms in Turkey.

With respect to her approach to feminist identity, Kırıkkanat first states that each and every woman should be feminist if they regard themselves as free individuals. Having normalized the feminist identity for women in general, she makes a strong declaration about her own feminist position:

“All over the world, half of the population oppresses the other half. People like myself back up the oppressed, right? So, what is more understandable than my being feminist? ... I was born as a feminist and will die as a feminist...”
(September 26, 2012)

However, following this expression, Kırıkkanat remarks that she is a feminist as long as feminism is about defending women's equality with men. In this sense, she expresses her dissent from a feminism that argues for women's superiority. For Kırıkkanat, feminism loses its legitimacy when it is understood as retaliation and leads to supremacy of women to men. She stresses that she diverges from a feminism in which some women deny their femininity by refusing to wash their hair or choose to wander around in ragged clothing. In Kırıkkanat's understanding, this denial of femininity and claims for the supremacy of women are factors that lead to the failure of feminism:

“There has to be an egalitarian struggle and it has to be done without disclaiming womanhood. In the past, feminists refused to wash their hair for the sake of the feminist struggle... This kind of nonsense gave way to the decline of the feminist struggle.” (Ibid)

Earlier, we have seen that Kırıkkanat is quite critical of the term “woman writer” since she interprets this term as a product of the patriarchal discourse that attempts to repudiate women’s qualifications. Kırıkkanat’s approach to gendered authorship indicates that she refrains from stressing gendered subjectivity in the public presentation of identities. A similar approach can be found in her interpretation of feminism. Defining feminism as the struggle for equal rights of women, Kırıkkanat adopts a liberal understanding that favours a generic existence. Limiting her focus to issues such as equal pay, merit based employment and legal rights, Kırıkkanat does not put any stress on gendered subjectivity. One can safely maintain that Kırıkkanat builds her narrative on the liberal understanding of neutral, abstract and disengaged individual, which claims that particularities should be left behind before entering the public sphere in order to ensure equality before the law.

Hekman (2004: 40) points out that liberalism and feminism in this respect may be thought as oxymoron. Accordingly, the liberal discourse of abstraction and universality, which suggests that particularities belong to the private realm and individuals have no identity per se in the public, obscures power differentials originating from different positionings in the web of power. In this vein, Kırıkkanat’s position vis-a-vis feminism is characterized by the limitations of the liberal idea of abstract individual.

On the other hand, despite her critique of feminism, Kırıkkanat wants to make sure that she has clearly expressed her alignment with feminist identity. Thus, following her critique of certain strands of feminism as supremacist, she mentions

her writings in a French feminist website in order to stress the feminist tone in her narrative. One can say that Kırıkkanat's narrative goes back and forth between a strong declaration of feminist identity and a critique of certain strands of feminism.

Another important point in Kırıkkanat's narrative is her conceptualization of feminism as a monolithic block. This becomes visible when she elaborates on the compatibility of Islam and feminism. According to Kırıkkanat, Islam and feminism are mutually exclusive in that the Islamic framework inhibits any attempt to achieve gender equality. In this sense, she criticizes the idea of Islamic feminism and Islamic feminists by defining feminism as the antithesis of Islam:

“It is not possible for someone who accepts the religious rules as the backbone of her life to struggle for women's rights... I know some conservative women in the media who call themselves as feminist. How can they justify this? ... When they define themselves as Muslim, they already submit to the position that they are ascribed to in Quran. However hard they struggle to oppose it, it will not be possible for them to change this order or it will take too long... Because their position contradicts their belief...” (September 26, 2012)

The interpretation of feminism as antithetical to Islam is a main theme in Kırıkkanat's narrative. Identifying the increasing conservatization in the country as the main obstacle in front of gender equality, Kırıkkanat argues that women's liberation can be realized only when religion is criticized. In this sense, she repudiates the idea of Islamic feminism by labeling it as paradoxical and inherently misogynist. Like Göğüş, Kırıkkanat constructs a narrative that attempts to define the right way for the realization of gender equality. As such, she fails to take into account the multiplicity of women's positions and demands.

Stating that she is a feminist since her early twenties, İplikçi defines feminism as a worldview that enables one to reflect on the world critically, employ multiple perspectives and develop effective strategies to struggle against patriarchal norms

and values. Criticizing the stereotypical claim that “feminists are ugly and angry women”, İplikçi underlines the importance of articulating the feminist self-identification in public. Regarding the denial of the label “feminist”, she states the following:

“Feminism constitutes a dangerous territory. Since it is one of the most threatening counter ideologies, many attempts have been made to suppress it. Yet, it is brave, stubborn and never gives up... The rising neoliberal conservatism across the world today attempts to eliminate ideologies like feminism... ‘I believe in women’s rights but I’m not a feminist’... How come? This is imposed by the discursive formation that produces stereotyped discourses such as ‘feminists are ugly’. In fact women have no fault in this. If you cover something up, it is difficult to reveal it.” (September 27, 2012)

In this frame, for İplikçi, despite the widespread stigmatization of feminist identity in the patriarchal society, one should not refrain from maintaining one’s feminist position since it helps one make sense of one’s experiences, find ways to struggle against gendered inequalities and feel more powerful. It is clear that İplikçi defines feminism as a hermeneutic site where one can interpret and work through the social world. For her, it constitutes an interpretive horizon through which experiences are rendered meaningful. As Alcoff (2008) argues, this understanding of identity is not inhibiting, rather enabling in that it operates as a horizon through which certain phenomena can be rendered visible. In this vein, İplikçi identifies feminism as an empowering component in her life that helps her deal with the social world, engage in dialogue with others, question the social world and transform herself.

Having defined her position vis-a-vis feminism as such, she further explains what she really means when she talks about feminism. Concepts such as *intersectionality*, *dialogue* and *intersubjectivity* are at the core of İplikçi’s conceptualization. She criticizes the exclusionary tendencies in feminism that have dominated feminist movements for a long time and resulted in the erasure of differences among women. Questioning the feminist movement in 1980s’ Turkey on

the basis of its exclusive focus on the demands of well-educated, middle class women, İplikçi touches upon the issue of class as a crucial factor that should be taken into account in the articulation of feminist demands:

“When we look at the protest walks, we see women from middle or upper middle class... A few years ago, when we visited the Bakırköy Prison, women from poor backgrounds stated that they are there because they wanted to protect their honor. How can we reach them if we do not deal with the issue of honor? ... Can we do something that can help them claim their bodies and remind them their bodies belong to themselves. For me, limiting the feminist struggle to certain classes is the major dilemma of feminism...” (September 27, 2012)

This intersectional perspective allows her to state that “feminism is not luxury”. İplikçi also puts emphasis on dialogue and the interrelational aspects of ourselves. She clearly states that her feminist position provides a ground for her to relate to others and feel affection and empathy for them:

“One of the important things that feminism has taught me is to see others’ pain, at least to try to see it and act conscientiously...” (Ibid)

According to İplikçi, this intersectional, interrelational feminism not only struggles against the patriarchal web of power relations and unequal legal arrangements but also transforms the self:

“I used to be a much more angry person. Having realized that anger does no good, I have learnt from feminism how stay to calm, find the courage to continue and say that we [as women] should continue [our struggle] because there is no other way...” (Ibid)

From above, it is clear that İplikçi’s conception of feminism is enabling, inclusive and dynamic. To underline this dynamism and distance herself from fixed, rigid conceptions, İplikçi denotes that her understanding of feminism is quite *smooth*.

When I ask her about her relationship to feminism, Evin tells that during university years she has always kept her distance with feminists since she regarded

feminism as an extreme ideology. However, following this statement, she adds that as she gained more experience in her career and became aware of the unequal gendered relations, gradually she has developed a profeminist consciousness:

“As people learn from life, they come to realize that feminism is about basic human rights. As a young girl, I may have distanced myself from feminists and leftists because of fear but now I head towards the opposite direction. I think it is the same with many women... As women age, life reveals them the fact that it is necessary to be a feminist or at least to take feminist demands seriously.” (October 31, 2012)

Accordingly, one can suggest that her subjective experiences as a woman journalist in the male dominated media sector have provided Evin a unique perspective through which she has come to discover and work through her gendered subjectivity. Alcoff's concept of “interpretive framework” could be useful here to explain Evin's relationship to feminism. One can suggest that Evin's position as a woman journalist in the media sector leads her to construct meaning in relation to her lived experiences. This interpretive horizon formed both by subjective experiences and hegemonic discourses allows her to see what has remained invisible until then. This gradual formation of the profeminist position also involves a time dimension, which indicates that identity positions are not formed once and for all but are constantly worked through depending on subjective experiences and contextual factors.

On the other hand, despite her declaration of a profeminist position, Evin states that she does not feel the need to articulate her feminist identity in public outspokenly:

“If it's necessary I would verbalize it but I don't think there is a need to do that because I already make my position clear through my writings.” (Ibid)

Having said this, Evin expresses her concerns about labels and categorizations accompanying certain identities. According to her, if a writer announces that she is a

leftist, environmentalist or a feminist, then she is reduced to that particular identity and is denied to employ any other perspective in her writings. Suggesting that identity categories cannot encompass multiplicities and thus reduce the self to a single dimension, Evin takes a cautious position vis-a-vis identity labels so as to protect herself from the reductionist tendencies in the hegemonic public discourse about identities. One can maintain that her disengagement with feminist identity is more a strategic tactic rather than a disbelief in feminist ideals. Evin chooses not to mention her feminist identity outspokenly with the aim to have more discursive freedom in her writings. For her, women experience stigmatization and negative labeling even more deeply when they articulate identity claims because their position as a woman renders them more vulnerable in the public sphere. Evin further denotes that the articulation of an identity may change depending on the context:

“When you talk about feminism during a visit in a village, you can face resistance from native women but talking about life in general will enable you to touch upon that topic.” (Ibid)

Relying on this, one can safely argue that to understand one’s self-identification, one has to take into account the location in which the identity in question is negotiated. Depending on the character of this location, identity labels may be denied/ accepted or toned down/ toned up. In this frame, it is possible to state that unlike some other writers who criticized feminism more in terms of its extremity, Evin’s relationship to feminism is rather shaped by tactical concerns. The stereotypical labeling of identity categories in hegemonic discourses prevents her from openly articulating her profeminist position in public.

As for feminisms in Turkey, Evin elaborates on the differentiation between secular and Islamic feminisms. Regarding this, she defines the coexistence of Islam and feminism as paradoxical, stating that Islam is a male dominated religion. She

also criticizes Islamic feminism for its restricted conception of gender equality. However, Evin does not pose an essentialist criticism against Islamic feminism in which both Islam and feminism are categorically fixed. Rather, she states that she hopes for an Islamic feminism in which gender equality is more deeply integrated into the Islamic line of thinking.

On the other hand, Gila Benmayor, a columnist who frequently writes about women entrepreneurs, women politicians and many other gender issues, states that she believes in gender equality but does not call herself a feminist. She clearly differentiates between women's human rights and feminism in that for her, feminism is more about feminist movement and activism. She tells that she has never been as committed to the women's movement as "real" feminists are and therefore cannot call herself feminist. According to her, feminism includes ideas defending women's superiority over men and also a belief in the primacy of women's perspective. In this respect, Benmayor sees feminism as a strict ideological position that dominates one's point of view and requires one to speak always in gendered terms:

"...I do not call myself blindly as feminist. I have always believed that in life men and women should walk side by side... For example, I may argue for positive discrimination if necessary. I also believe in quotas in politics as well as in professional life... But this is not a truly feminist point of view... Of course feminism deals with such issues but it's more committed to gender. I'm not committed to feminism in such a way as to call my entire point of view as feminist but I support it. Maybe one can call this feminism too, I don't know... I support it with respect to women's human rights." (November 20, 2012)

In Benmayor's interpretation, feminism and feminist identity connote a position that is more radical and extreme than the support for women's human rights. For her, this extremity originates from the feminist attempts to dominate over men. Even though Benmayor states that she supports positive discrimination and even employs the principle of positive discrimination in her columns by giving priority to women's

stories, she refrains from a self-identified feminist position in order to ensure gender equality without dominating men. In this respect, Benmayor's narrative is quite complicated since it is difficult to relate her pro-feminist position in her columns to her disassociation from feminism and feminist identity. One can note that Benmayor's conception of feminism is based on a stereotypical understanding of feminism as rigid, extreme and anti-man. Moreover, Benmayor regards feminism as a dominant ideological position that reduces the self to a single dimension, excluding other aspects of identity. Since Benmayor's narrative does not directly deal with the possible negative effects of feminist self-identification, one can suggest that her disassociation from the feminist label cannot be explained as a strategic tactic which she resorts to in order to avoid ostracization and/or negative labeling. Rather, despite her ardent support for feminism and feminist movements, she aligns with hegemonic discourses on feminism when it comes to identifying herself as feminist. Her narrative in this regard is quite intricate and multi-layered as it oscillates between a profeminist position and a stereotypical critique of feminism.

Yazgülu Aldoğan defines feminism as a lifestyle that crystallizes in women's economic independence, education, professional identity and autonomy. She further alleges that one does not have to be involved in feminist activism in order to be a feminist:

“The woman has to have property, a job, a car. Those women who fulfil such requirements are all feminists. To be a feminist one does not have to participate in a Purple Roof protest.” (November 26, 2012)

She further argues that a woman who can lead such an autonomous life does not need to announce aloud that she is a feminist. Quite paradoxically, Aldoğan also declares that she is critical of those women who lead feminist lives but say that they are not feminist. It is even more puzzling that upon my asking whether or not she puts her

feminist identity into words in the public sphere, she tells that she is tired of labels and there is absolutely no need for shouting feminist identity as a slogan:

“In this country, for years they have called us as communists, leftists, then feminists and now laicists. No one knows what all these labels are all about... If they ask me, yes, I support women’s rights to the very end, I write for this and will do so but I won’t label myself as others do.” (Ibid)

Referring to the criticisms she received upon publishing a novel in which she deals with women’s sexuality, Aldoğan states that labels discriminate against you. Aldoğan’s refrainment from verbalizing her feminist position aloud could be attributed to her concerns about being reduced to a label in the public mind. Thus, like most of the narratives in this study, her refrainment can be read more as a tactical strategy, rather than a disbelief in feminist identity.

Stating that every woman should be a feminist since feminism is about women’s rights, Aldoğan deconstructs stereotypical accounts on feminism and argues for a flexible conception of feminism. Yet, at a later point she criticizes feminism for being rigid and stable. Her denial of the feminist label relies on an attempt to avoid strictly defined set of ideals.

“I have an approach of my own within the limits of my own lifestyle. Because I don’t really believe in labels. I don’t want to be included within stable lines. I should say, ‘I’m pink, not red. When I was in university, I wasn’t a leftist because I cannot stand discipline. These identities require a lot of discipline. You should go there, you should behave like this. This is not for me; that’s why I don’t like labels.” (Ibid)

In addition, Aldoğan states that she does not believe in the compatibility of Islam and feminism since religion suppresses women. In this sense, she belongs to the group of secular women columnists in the media who criticize the idea of Islamic feminism and reserve gender equality only for the secular line of thinking.

Mengi, a columnist who frequently writes about violence against women and urges the government to take action in this regard, clearly states that she is not a feminist. For her, feminism is extreme in that it associates women's liberation with women's sexual agency. She argues that since 1980s the feminist promotion of women's sexual agency has resulted in the demise of family values in Turkey.

“The social process started by feminism in Turkey has reached such a level that today even in England and the USA, family values and traditions are more deeply embedded in society than in Turkey... We have come to this point because of feminism. Thus, I have never called myself feminist.” (May 16, 2013)

Mengi argues that the excessive emphasis put on women's sexual agency also contradicts with motherhood. Criticizing this, Mengi distances herself from feminism and underlines that she is a women's rights advocate. Clearly differentiating women's right advocacy from feminism, Mengi defines feminism as an attempt to treat men and women as the same. For her, women's rights advocacy argues for equality between men and women both in the public and private sphere. The themes that come forward in her narrative are equal division of labour, equal legal rights and prevention of violence against women.

In Tınç's narrative, the stress on gendered subjectivity is a prominent theme in the narrative line. As seen in her views on gendered authorship, Tınç believes that it is vitally important to recognize the gendered consequences of one's position in the professional arena. On the other hand, when it comes to the relation between gendered subjectivity and feminist self-identification, Tınç differentiates between the political necessity of acknowledging a gendered positionality and identification with a stable feminist identity:

“Feminism is part of my life. But I don't like labels, categorizations. I have always looked through feminist lenses... I see myself as a woman who tries

to be aware of women's point of view. Since concepts change over time, feminism as a concept changes as well... It is not like being a fan of a football team. Even sports fans' obsessions may become flexible depending on circumstances... Thus, what matters is to empower individuals with checks and balances... Feminism is included in this empowerment, so is leftism but not conservatism and dogmatism." (May 12, 2013)

As seen from the quotation above, Tınç constructs a cautious narrative on the feminist label with the aim to avoid the essentializing aspects of identification. For her, feminist self-identification may connote a fixed set of values and demands that preclude change by stabilizing one's position. Hence, even though she strongly affirms the mention of gender in the public presentation of her professional identity, she states that self-identification with feminism is not that vital for her. Rather than openly stating that she is a feminist, she prefers to define her position over feminist values and ideas. In this sense, Tınç replaces the term "identity" with "identification-with":

"I am someone who believes in feminist ideas and principles. But there are many other components of my identity other than feminism... I am a feminist, an egalitarian, a socialist... Yet, if you say so [I am a feminist], it may connote a certain kind of determinism... On the other hand, I feel myself most comfortable with people who share feminist ideals. This means that I have built my whole life on feminist principles." (Ibid)

As discussed earlier, the term "identification-with" provides a useful ground to cope with the essentialist connotations underlying the hegemonic conceptions of identities. Weir (2008: 116) suggests that it involves a shift from an essentialist model of identity to a political one. Putting the stress on one's attachments, values and commitments, this approach redefines identity politics by replacing it with politics of identification that allows space for subjective, interest-driven, identification-based and relational identities. This non-categorical conception of identity makes it possible to present the self in public through identifications with what is significant

to us. In this frame, Tınç's narrative on feminist identity can be regarded as a call for replacement of identity politics with politics of identification.

To sum up, all columnists espouse a certain feminist position, though in differing degrees and perspectives. There are some critical points which come forward in columnists' responses. First of all, in some accounts a particular conditionality accompanies the espousal of feminist identity. One can allege that in these narratives, the famous statement "I'm not a feminist but I'm in favour of gender equality" evolves into the following statement: "I'm a feminist but..." Kırıkkanat's account is emblematic of this case. In her statements, we witness a strong alignment with feminist identity; yet, having declared that there is no question that she is a feminist, she feels the need to stress that she is feminist only to the extent that feminism is about gender equality. Through this statement, Kırıkkanat provides a response to a possible public stereotyping that associates feminism with extremity, man-hating or women's superiority. To avoid any such association with extremity, she also attempts to normalize feminist identity by saying that "each and every woman should be feminist". A similar normalizing approach can also be detected in Aldoğan's account: "In this patriarchal society, how can we call a woman smart if she is not feminist?" I think that this normalization effect functions as a protective shell for women columnists while making strong public statements about feminist identity.

Moreover, the oscillations in their narratives are expressive of the challenges of feminist self-identification in the public sphere. It has become clear that the espousal of feminist identity in women columnists' narratives is often accompanied by a critique of certain strands of feminism. However, having criticized certain feminisms as such, with the aim to assure the interviewer that there should be no

doubt that they are feminists, women columnists give examples proving their commitment to feminist identity. Secondly, even though women columnists may be quite willing to espouse feminist ideas and label themselves as feminist, to secure their public position as an acknowledged women columnist/journalist, they may prefer to disassociate themselves from the feminist label or tone down their commitment to feminism. These kind of tactical strategies permeate even into the accounts marked by strong declarations of feminist identity. For example, at some point during the interview, Göğüş states that she is a feminist by birth and she never makes a compromise in this respect. However, at another point she admits that in the past there were times when she did not give voice to feminist ideas in her writings with the aim to secure her place in the media sector. Similar to this, throughout the interview, İplikçi underlies that feminism has always been a source of inspiration for her writing. She further states that at the beginning of her writing career she has espoused not only the label “feminist” but also “woman writer”. However, she adds that in later stages of her career she became a deactivated feminist and has quit publicly announcing that she is a woman writer. She tells that when you call yourself a woman writer, critiques may attempt to reduce your work to certain categories such as sentimentality. It is plausible to suggest that İplikçi’s choice is another example of a tactical strategy employed in order to cope with the stereotypical labeling in the public mindset. The same strategizing could be found in Aldoğan’s and Evin’s narratives as well. Despite her ardent commitment to feminist identity, Aldoğan states that since labels such as “feminist” serve as an assault to people in Turkey, she avoids to call herself feminist aloud and tells that one can already sense her feminist identity from her writings and her lifestyle. On the other hand, Evin directly admits that since identification with “-ism”’s puts a burden on your shoulders, she refrains

from the feminist label and believes that in this way, she can have a greater discursive freedom in her writings.

7.3. Narratives on AKP's Gender Politics

The antifeminist ethos of the AKP era has generated discursive opportunity structures that lead both antifeminist and feminist discourses to reinforce their publicist character, reach broader masses and develop their efficacy in public debates. In this sense, in order to explore the effects of the contemporary gender discourses in Turkey on women columnists' positionality vis-a-vis feminist subaltern publics, it is important to put forward women columnists' views on AKP's gender politics. This analysis can shed light on how women columnists see the public standing of feminist subaltern discourses and their own positionality in the current antifeminist era.

One can safely suggest that all secular women columnists are highly critical of the patriarchal tones underlying AKP's gender discourses. Yet, there are different narrative lines in this critique. First, identifying the conservative character of AKP's gender politics as the main problem of the current gender regime in Turkey, women columnists stress that AKP's gender politics reproduces traditional gender roles by confining women's status to the familial realm.

Regarding Erdoğan's urge for families to have at least three children,

Benmayor states the following:

“We have a PM who urges couples to have at least three children... Yet, if you call for three children, this means that you confine women to the familial realm because you do not take the necessary actions to prepare the ground for women's employment. There are no kindergardens, no elderly care centers;

all these responsibilities are on women's shoulders... This approach that does not regard women as individuals but instead prioritizes the notion of family, harm women's status in society. Of course this situation has to do with the current government..." (November 20, 2012)

In a similar vein, Aldoğan touches upon the stress on women's familial roles in AKP discourses as follows:

"The role model that the AKP promotes is a woman who has many children, is well-educated but does not participate in the workforce... The rise in violence against women in society is also related to this secondary role attributed to women. In addition, there is a striking recess in women's employment... Even when they seem to struggle for improving women's employment, they urge women to work at home by giving microcredit for handicraft activities." (November 26, 2012)

As clearly seen from above, for some women columnists, the AKP's attempts to define the "ideal woman" within the confines of the family is the distinguishing character of the contemporary gender regime. They suggest that contemporary forms of patriarchy is different from earlier forms in that they rely on prevailing public discourses constantly reproducing conservative gender roles. According to them, the ubiquitous character of conservative gender discourses and the prevalent stress on traditional gender roles are the main themes in the gender regime today that have to be challenged to reinforce gender equality.

It is also useful to note that this narrative on the distinguishing aspects of AKP's gender politics may adopt an essentialist tone in some of the interviews. For instance, in Kırıkkanat's narrative, the AKP's gender politics is defined as inherently misogynist due to its pro-Islamist motives and incapable of accommodating gender equality as a guiding principle. According to Kırıkkanat, the interweaving of increasing conservatism today and pro-Islamism exacerbate women's status in society in an unprecedented way:

"Those who accept religious rules as guideline in their lives, cannot struggle for women's rights... It is very telling that violence against women has

dramatically increased under the AKP rule. It means that there is an organic link between conservatization and the increase in violence against women. Thus, as long as this conservatization relies on a religious basis, violence against women will continue rising...” (September 26, 2012)

It is obvious that women columnists’ critique of AKP’s gender politics is crucial for the expansion of profeminist discourses in public sphere since it has the potential to collaborate with feminist struggles aiming to reinforce gender equality in contemporary Turkey. Yet, when this critique adopts an essentialist tone, its feminist potential is replaced with an anti-Islamist motive and its pro-feminist plot is degraded. Thus, one could suggest that women columnists’ critique of the AKP’s gender politics assumes a profeminist character only if it can incorporate a non-essentialist tone into its analytical frame.

Some women columnists touch upon the difference between the profeminist critique of AKP’s gender politics and the ultrasecularist critique that employs a profeminist discourse in a strategic way in order to challenge pro-Islamist politics. For instance, Evin states the following:

“The RPP benefited a lot from the AKP’s approach to women. But I am not sure about whether they really believe in the [profeminist] critique they articulate. How many women politicians are there in RPP’s executive cadres? ... Recently, identification with feminism has become easier for those who oppose the government... I don’t think it has anything to do with feminism. There is a strategic motive behind it.” (October 31, 2012)

Evin’s remark is illustrative of the fact that different motivations and narrative lines underlie the critique of AKP’s gender politics in public debates. As seen above, this point also holds true for women columnists’ narratives. Yet, despite the ultrasecularist/ strategic motives underlying some of the profeminist critiques, it is possible to suggest that women columnists’ narratives acknowledge the discursive opportunity structures that have come into being as a result of the rise in

conservative, anti-feminist gender discourses. Earlier, I have noted that the antifeminist gender politics under the AKP era did not result in the hegemonic stabilization of meaning in the field of gender relations. Rather, it has given momentum to feminist discourses to challenge the rise of the patriarchal regime. Relying on this idea, women columnists refer to the expansion of the pro-feminist discursive frameworks and point out the need for further feminist activism both in their interviews and newspaper articles.

7.4. Concluding Remarks

The above analysis has disclosed that women columnists' narratives studied in this chapter display highly intricate narrative lines in which profeminist motives come into focus at some points, while they fade away at others. This constant shift in narrative lines does not connote incoherence but rather points out the complexity of narratives on identity positions. This complexity stems from both the intricate, multi-layered character of identity narratives and the contextual setting in which the feminist identity is negotiated.

First, it is useful to note that identity narratives resist stabilization as they are always open to change. Narrative lines can change not only over the course of time but also within the same narrative. The shift in narrative lines in the same narrative may crystallize in the concerns about the public connotations of the identity in question, the urge to avoid negative labeling, resistance to fixation and strategic appropriation of identity claims in accordance with the character of the public context in question.

To stress the flexible character of identities, many scholars underline that identity claims are provisional since the contextual setting as well as the subject's position in this setting change over time. (Lloyd 2005, Alcoff 2006) Moreover, they point out the possibility of redefining the meanings of identity categories beyond hegemonic fixations, in line with one's needs and demands. (Hekman 2004, Alcoff 2006, Weir 2008) They further elaborate on the nomadic aspects of identities, suggesting that some identities are constructed on borderlines and resist categorization in an attempt to explore how to live with multiple differences. (Braidotti 1994, Anzaldua 1987)

One can suggest that the shifting narrative lines in women columnists' narratives reflect their attempts to challenge the fixed character of identities through reconceptualizing identity positions along the lines that contemporary feminist scholars outline. Their assumption that identity categories are hegemonic discursive products imposed on subjects from outside make their narratives unstable. They resort to various narrative strategies to avoid from being confined to fixed identity categories. Some women columnists reserve a privileged epistemic position for themselves in order not to be confined to a victim's position, while others put the stress on agency, intentionality and individual success to enhance the public recognition of their professional identities.

Finally, the contemporary gender regime and the contextual circumstances of being a female public figure also affect women columnists' narratives on gendered subjectivity and feminist identity. The male-dominated character of the media sphere lead women columnists to define professional expertise and rationality in generic and/or masculine terms and disassociate themselves from gendered subjectivity. On the other hand, the rise of patriarchal discourses in the contemporary gender regime

generate significant opportunities for women columnists to collaborate with subaltern feminist discourses, especially when certain issues are at stake. In a nutshell, such janus-faced qualities of secular women columnists' narratives result in puzzling shifts in narrative lines, which have both profeminist, progressive motives and limiting, essentialist tones beneath them.

CHAPTER VIII

ISLAMIC FEMINISM AND PIOUS WOMEN COLUMNISTS IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

Along the course of Turkish modernization the deepest intellectual and emotional gaps between the modern West and Islam have come to the foreground most strikingly at the level of gender relations and definitions of the private and the public. (Göle, 1997: 86) In other words, women have been perceived and treated as markers of the frontiers between these two civilizations. Modern Kemalist women were defined by the Kemalist discourse as the ones who actively participate in public life and are liberated from the religious or cultural constraints of the intimate sphere. In this understanding, women had to make a radical choice about whether to be Western or a Muslim. (Ibid)

Discussions about the status of women in society began to appear in the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire. Main topics that were discussed were women's attire, family, marriage, education, employment, rights and place in society. The Young Ottomans produced works criticizing arranged marriage, the subordinated

position of women in marriage, family life and society.¹¹⁹ Moreover, a quite fertile women's movement led by women themselves came into existence in the late Ottoman society.¹²⁰ The rise of nationalism in the post-1908 period established a new framework to discuss the status of women in society. Ziya Gökalp, the nationalist ideologue, pointed to the national-cultural rather than Islamic references for norms and morales. He traced the roots of Turkish feminism back to pre-Islamic origins and shamanistic rituals and justified the equality of men and women and monogamous marriage in this way.¹²¹ In the post-1923 period, the new Republic implemented national policies to foster women's equality in the public sphere and granted many rights to women. Thanks to the Republican reforms, upper and middle class urban women found the opportunity to perform as professionals. However, veiled women who could not leave tradition in terms of dress were considered as incompatible with the Republican ideal of modern, secular, professional and well-educated woman. Thus, a bifurcation among women emerged as a result of the highly exclusive Republican project of women's emancipation. In this sense, it turns out that the Kemalist project of emancipation mainly targeted urban and middle class women, who comply with a certain code of attire and neglected veiled women.

According to Çınar (2008), states try to set the norm about public attire in the public sphere; they constitute this sphere through regulating how people appear in public places. Displaying photographs of modern woman in bathsuits in beauty contests, in Western attire in ballrooms or in serious suits as lawyers, scholars,

¹¹⁹ Şinasi's *Şair Evlemesi* (1860) and Namık Kemal's *Intibah* (1876) could be mentioned among the works problematizing family, marriage and woman's status. For a comprehensive study accounting for the thought of the Young Ottomans, see Mardin (2000).

¹²⁰ Women's journals and associations provided a useful platform for the articulation of demands about enhancing women's education, employment and place in the private sphere. For a detailed account see Çakır (1996: 43-78).

¹²¹ For a detailed account, see Ziya Gökalp, 2001. *Türkçülüğün Esasları*, İstanbul: İnkılap, 139-149.

professionals, was a useful tool utilized by the Kemalist elite to encourage a particular dress code. (Graham-Brown, 1988) One can suggest that even though the state did not ban the headscarf while it introduced a Hat Law in 1925 for men, it openly promoted and encouraged a particular public image for women. The image of the modern woman was a strategic means to prove Turkey's break with its past and its belonging to the Western civilization. On the other hand, veiled women were perceived as the epitomes of the Orient, the traditional, the backward and the "other" of the Kemalist modern women. Being veiled and being a modern woman were thought to be at odds with each other in the Republican modernization project.

8.1. Political Meanings Attached To Veiling: The Post-1980 Period

One has to acknowledge that the headscarf issue is quite contextual in Turkey, meaning that its meaning has changed from time to time. In the early years of the Republic, uncovering was seen as an indicator of the commitment to the Republican reforms. As mentioned earlier, though veiling was not prohibited, a particular dress code was encouraged for women by the Republican elite in line with the Western standards. Accordingly, a modern woman was expected not to veil. On the other hand, Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu (2008) state that in the 1940s and 50s headscarf was associated with rural Turkey and symbolized underdevelopment and poverty.

It can be said that the real gist of today's discussions about headscarf has emerged in the post-1980 period. In the 1980s veiling was redefined as part of the identity of educated, urban, Islamist women. In this period, university students emerged in the public sphere, giving headscarf a new meaning. The headscarf was no

more a matter of the poor, rural, uneducated women as it was during the 1950s and 60s but it has acquired new connotations in the city. Islam that has been condemned to being the other of the urban, the rational, the modern, of what Kemalism praised, emerged in this decade in a quite different form that the secularists did not know before.

During the 1980s the headscarf came to be seen as a political symbol rather than simply being a religious attire. Since the essence of the matter is directly about appearance, different connotations have been attached recently to different forms of veiling. Accordingly, today urban, veiled woman prefer *türban*, i.e., a particular kind of veiling which is different than the traditional headscarf and tightly covers the head and neck but is not necessarily accompanied by a long coat. One could say that it is *türban* that causes reactions from secular circles because it implies the demands of urban Islamist women.

Especially in the post-1980s, when headscarf has gained political connotations beyond its religious meaning, the identity of veiled woman has become an arena in which the secularist and Islamist camps have confronted each other. The control on veiled women's bodies has turned into a tool of the orthodox secularism to create a public sphere that would secure its own existence. (Çınar 2005) Yet, since it is not possible to associate headscarf with rural, uneducated and unliberated women anymore, headscarf debates have posed serious challenges to the existing Republican definitions of "modern woman" and pushed the boundaries of the Republican front, leaving it in a very confused mood.

In recent ethnographic studies on veiled women's identity in Turkey, it is stressed that headscarf is not necessarily the symbol of submission to Islamist

patriarchy but rather a modern form of agency. (Saktanber 2002, Özdalga 1998) Göle (1991) alleges that in today's Turkey, marginalization of veiling and the exclusion of covered women from public life would result in women's subjection to Islamic patriarchal codes rather than emancipation from them. This perspective on veiling acknowledges that the act of veiling may in fact work towards empowerment of women in certain ways. In some contexts, the veil could serve as a guard against the patriarchal mind-set and open the way for women to be more active in the public sphere.

On the other hand, young, urban, well-educated veiled women with professional identities contribute to the redefinition of the meanings of veiling by displaying autonomous identities and asking for an all-inclusive public sphere. Presenting veiling as an act of free will and agency, they have discarded the essentializing Republican assumption that associates veiling with submission to patriarchy and revealed that old paradigms about veiling cannot explain the newly emerging dynamics of urban veiled women's identities. Their demands for an inclusive public sphere that would allow them to perform their professional identities, point out their commitment to women's participation into the workforce. Their objection to the binary opposition between modernity and veiling becomes also clear when their lifestyles are compared and contrasted with unveiled young urban women. Studies reveal that veiled and unveiled young urban women may share similar tastes and consumption patterns. (Genel and Karaosmanoğlu, 2006; White 1999) For example, as Islamic lifestyles intermesh with urban experiences and become more and more visible in the urban landscape, the codes of veiling adopt urban trends and change in line with the modern fashion codes, which in return renders the dichotomy between the "covered" and "uncovered" obsolete. These

commonalities in terms of urban trends put forward that the discrepancy between Islamic and secular lifestyles as portrayed in the Republican imagination does not hold true.

Relying on veiled women's demands and critiques in recent decades, one can safely argue that the rising public visibility of educated, urban, veiled women has led to the dismissal of the Republican definition of "modern woman". Veiled women's critique of secularism has expanded the parameters of democratic participation and helped change the political values that are not in line with the contemporary social, political and cultural dynamics. (Arat 1998)

8.2. Veiled Women and Islamist Politics

The demands of veiled women in the public sphere have not only challenged the orthodox secularist Republican front but also criticized the patriarchal dynamics of the rising Islamist politics in the country. As noted above, the orthodox Republican circles have regarded veiled women's identities and bodies as a domain where the rise of the Islamist politics could be fought back. Yet, one should also note that the symbolization of veiled women's identities in the Islamist political party experiences in the 1990s and 2000s has been as intense as it has been in the Republican front. Therefore, veiled women's critique of the Republican interpretation of secularism and "modern woman" has also been accompanied by a critical stance towards male hegemony in Islamist politics.

Beginning with the mid-1980s, women's involvement in Islamist political activities has begun to play an important role in the political arena. Growing numbers of women have become active in the Welfare Party women's commissions but they

were largely excluded from decision making mechanisms. (Narlı 2009: 168) The case of Sibel Eraslan, a prominent activist lawyer, clearly displays the party's approach to women. Eraslan played a crucial role in the Welfare Party as the head of the women's commission of Istanbul. Despite the fact that she has successfully mobilized women and worked very hard for the election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the mayor of Istanbul in 1994, she was excluded from the decision-making processes. In an interview that she gave to the feminist journal *Pazartesi* in 1995, Eraslan openly criticized the male hegemony in the Welfare Party. (Arat, 2004: 288.) This exclusion of women from decision making positions has been also witnessed in the successive Islamist political parties. In fact, the marginalization of women in party politics is not a phenomenon that is peculiar to Islamist party politics but rather, characterizes each and every political party on the political spectrum in Turkey. However, this marginalization have been much more acute in Islamist party experiences especially for veiled women since veiled women who have zealously worked for the mobilization of voters, could not be put on the candidate list because of the legal restrictions on veiling and thus have been condemned to serve in women's commissions.

The unrest among veiled women about the headscarf bans has risen particularly in the final years of the AKP government. Just before the 2011 elections, a group of veiled women activists from "Gathering Women Platform" initiated a campaign titled "no veiled deputy, no vote!", which calls political parties to offer veiled women candidates in the upcoming elections. Women activists as well as veiled women columnists who supported the campaign stated that political actions necessary for granting veiled women the right to be elected, should not be delayed any more and all political parties, particularly the AKP, should take action against

the violation of this fundamental human right.¹²² The campaign attracted a wide range of support from the liberal segments of society but was severely criticized by the PM Erdoğan. Erdoğan stated that to say “no veiled deputy, no vote”, is undemocratic, improper and headscarf should not be turned into a tool of bargain to enter into parliament. This attitude has caused mistrust and disappointment for many veiled women. For instance, in her column in Habertürk newspaper, Nihal Bengisu Karaca heavily criticized Erdoğan’s interpretation of the campaign as a bargain and stated that veiled women’s demands to be elected as MP’s is a cry for a fundamental human right, not a bargain.¹²³

Moreover, Erdoğan’s comments on the bill brought forward by the Peace and Democratic Party (BDP), which proposes a change in the bylaws to allow women to wear trousers as well as headscarf in the parliament, has caused harsh criticisms among pious women writers. Erdoğan said that BDP’s attempt is not sincere and blamed the party for exploiting the headscarf issue for its own political gains.¹²⁴ Regarding this debate, Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, columnist in *Taraf*, argued that for the last decade the AKP has ignored veiled women’s efforts contributing to the party’s electoral success and even prohibited the political attempts to grant veiled women the right to be elected.¹²⁵ For Tuksal, this clearly shows that AKP’s approach to veiled women is no different from the orthodox Republican understanding. In a similar vein, another veiled woman columnist, Hilal Kaplan wrote that AKP’s

¹²² See <http://basortuluadayyoksaoydayok.wordpress.com/basintoplantisi/>

¹²³ Nihal Bengisu Karaca, “Hak Talebi Ne Zamandan Beri Pazarlık Oldu” [Since When is A Rights Claim Considered As a Bargain], *Habertürk*, <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/nihal-bengisu-karaca/621012-hak-talebi-ne-zamandan-beri-pazarlik-oldu>.

¹²⁴ “Dini Zerdüştlük Olanın Böyle bir Derdi Olabilir mi?”, *Milliyet*, 15 Ekim 2011, <http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/-dini-zerdustluk-olanin-boyle-bir-derdi-olabilir-mi-/siyaset/siyasetdetay/15.10.2011/145167/default.htm>

¹²⁵ Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, “Keşke Siz de Zerdüşst Olsaydınız”, *Amargi Feminist Quarterly*, Winter 2011. Here, Tuksal especially expresses her resentment to AKP’s rejection of the bill proposed by the Peace and Democracy Party, which was designed to allow women to wear trousers and headscarf in the parliament.

blaming of the BDP for utilizing headscarf for political gains is the same discourse that the orthodox Republican politicians have always used against Islamist politics.¹²⁶ For Kaplan, AKP delays political actions towards improving veiled women's rights with the aim to rebuff the opposition through a moderate stance and achieve other goals with high priority such as winning elections or making a new constitution.

The constitutional amendments initiated by the AKP in 2008, which made it possible for veiled women university students to enter universities with headscarf, had led to optimism and hope. However, today veiled women still do not feel secure and empowered since the recent enhancement of veiled women's rights in universities is a de facto situation, not a legal acquisition guaranteed in law and thus can be easily taken back. In this sense, veiled women demand further legal enhancement with regard to the issue of veiling in universities.¹²⁷ Furthermore, they find it quite difficult to explain AKP's long-lasting reluctance to lift the headscarf ban in other public institutions and open the way for them to become MPs. In 2013, through a democratization package announced on September 30, the AKP lifted the ban on wearing headscarves in public offices. Accordingly, public servants except prosecutors, judges and military personel, acquired the right to wear headscarf in public offices. However, these recent improvements in the status of veiling could not eradicate mistrust and disappointment in veiled women' state of mind arising from AKP's longlasting reluctance to lift the bans. It is a commensical expectation that a political party, which has gained the majority of votes in three succesive elections, would empower veiled women in the public sphere by lifting all the hitherto existing headscarf bans without any further delay. AKP's inability to do so implies that the

¹²⁶ Hilal Kaplan, "BDP'nin Başörtüsü Önergesi", *Yeni Şafak*, 14 October, 2011, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/yazarlar/HilalKaplan/bdpnin-basortusu-önergesi/29367>.

¹²⁷ Hilal Kaplan, "Başörtüsü Yasağı Sadece Uygulamada Çözülemez", *Taraf*, 13 October, 2010, www.taraf.com.tr/hilal-kaplan/makale_basortusu-yasagi-sadece-uygulamada-çözülemez-html.

party discourse about veiled women is to a great extent shaped by strategic concerns in the party's contentions with the Republican front. In other words, the identities of veiled women are seen in the party mindset as a discursive space to be utilized in order to justify the Islamist project and its political goals.

Sibel Eraslan, a prominent pious writer and activist, explains veiled women's particular position in the Islamist community by referring to the term "bacı", i.e., "sister", which was mostly used among the leftist circles in the 1970s in Turkey with the aim to desexualize women "comrades". For Eraslan (2011: 16), *bacı* in the Islamist community is a silent entity, that is genderless and works for the communal aims without complaining. Eraslan further notes that regardless of the political aims, all ideologies treat women as a symbol, flag or criterion rather than as a subject. For her, veiled women's claims for autonomous subjectivity can only be achieved if the attempts to redefine the orthodox meanings attached to secularism and public sphere can be combined with a struggle against the discursive utilization of women's identities in the Islamist community.

In this frame, if one great obstacle to veiled women's position in society is the prevailing orthodox Republican discourses and the constraining legal frameworks, the other one is the discursive utilization of their identities in Islamist politics. In an interview that she recently gave to a mainstream newspaper, Ayşe Çavdar, a journalist and academic, who had to decide to uncover because of the hardships to find a job as a covered woman in the job market, articulates her reaction to the discursive utilization of veiled women's identities as follows:

"...Tayyip Erdoğan cannot know as much as myself what it means to be covered. Even though I am not covered now, I feel hurt whenever he talks about headscarf. Tayyip Erdoğan does not know what it means to cover or uncover. I had to uncover because my headscarf was more visible than I was... Since I could not find work as a covered woman, I always had to work as cheap labour force. In order to appear "normal", the Islamist capitalists still

try to keep the number of veiled women workers as low as possible. Quite a few well-educated veiled women had to give up working...”¹²⁸

As seen above, today veiled women’s resentment towards Islamist politicians mainly stem from these male politicians’ claiming the right to talk on behalf of veiled women. For Çavdar, it is the veiled women who should have a say prior to anyone else when the headscarf issue is debated in public. Moreover, Çavdar’s statement clearly reveals that this dual nature of the discrimination against veiled women is not only specific to the political realm but is also severely felt both in secular and Islamist job market.¹²⁹ In a nutshell, one can safely suggest that the common-sensical assumption that veiled women’s status in society would be irreversibly improved under a pro-Islamic party that is in power for over a decade, seems to be untrue because the age-old confrontation between the Islamist and Republican camps is still in force and continues to reproduce itself through the symbolization of veiled women’s identities for political purposes.

8.3. Pious Women Writers As Influential Public Figures in Turkey

Veiled women have come forward in the public sphere in Turkey in the post-1980 period and helped change the status quo in Turkish politics. The political struggles fought at universities over headscarf in the 1980s was succeeded by the emergence of veiled women as influential actors in the intellectual arena in the 1990s. They began to publish books- novels, collections of story stories, research books, doctoral theses- and attained crucial roles in the media sector. This was an unprecedented phenomenon in the intellectual life of the country. It is possible to say

¹²⁸ See “2002’de Tanıdığımız Erdoğan, O Kışlayı Yapmayiverelim Derdi”, *Milliyet*, June 24, 2013, [http://www.milliyet.com.tr/-2002-de-tanidigimiz-erdogan o/gundem/ydetay/1726846/default.htm](http://www.milliyet.com.tr/-2002-de-tanidigimiz-erdogan-o/gundem/ydetay/1726846/default.htm).

¹²⁹ For a detailed study on this matter, see Cindoğlu (2011).

that Şule Yüksel Şenler, born in 1938, who was a precursor pious woman writer receiving wide public acclaim with her public speeches and books especially in the 1960s and 70s, has been a role model for a very long time for younger veiled women having intellectual aspirations. Yet, in the post-1990s, a new model of pious intellectual woman has come to the foreground. These “new” pious intellectual women were modern, urban, highly educated women who write not only for the Islamist community but also for the general public. Their weekly columns have appeared in Islamist newspapers as well as in mass circulation secular newspapers. In addition to publishing books and writing regular articles for journals and newspapers, some of these pious women writers engaged in political activities to increase the electoral success of Islamist parties. Others have contributed to the foundation of civil society organizations that aim to enhance veiled women’s status in society. In sum, the 1990s and especially the 2000s have witnessed the emergence of pious women writers as influential public figures in different realms such as literature, journalism, politics and activism.

The Republican definition of “ideal woman” establishing a binary opposition between women’s liberation and veiling is clearly challenged in the very persona of pious intellectual women in the last decades in Turkey. The fact that veiled women, the “other” of the modern, liberated woman in the Republican psyche, can leave their imprint on the intellectual field, a field that requires a great deal of symbolic and cultural capital in the Bourdieuan sense, is maybe the best proof of how orthodox Kemalist paradigms about veiling have eroded and veiled women have emerged as influential actors in the public sphere in Turkey.

One should underline that the main difficulty that pious women writers have to confront in the intellectual field is not specifically their religiosity but their being a

religious woman. This means that the challenges of being a pious woman writer has a dual character: On the one hand, pious women writers have to struggle against the orthodox Republican reflexes of the intellectual field. Even though most of them write in pro-Islamist newspapers or magazines, as public intellectual figures appealing to wider audiences their competence is frequently questioned as there is no conception of “pious woman intellectual” in the Republican psyche. On the other hand, they also have to struggle against the patriarchal mind-set in the Islamist community. In this sense, being a well-educated woman writer writing for national newspapers is a great challenge to the patriarchal gender relations in orthodox Islamist communities, which attempt to confine women to their duties at home as mothers and wives.

One of the most overt examples of orthodox Islamist male figures, who is highly criticized by pious women writers, is Ali Bulaç, a well-known author and columnist in Islamist circles. In his columns in *Zaman* newspaper, Bulaç deals with issues such as women’s employment and family unit through an archaic viewpoint and alleges that women’s contemporary claims for enhancement of their status in society damages the integrity of family and society. For Bulaç, women’s employment causes difficulties for men to find jobs and in return, leads to disintegration of domestic life. Therefore, Bulaç openly writes that the ideal place for women is home.¹³⁰

Pious women writers have written many columns that harshly challenge Bulaç’s views. For example, Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal sarcastically responded to Bulaç’s views on women’s employment by stating that not women’s employment but

¹³⁰ Ali Bulaç, “Kadın İstihdamı”, *Zaman*, 1 May 2010, www.zaman.com.tr/ali-bulac/kadin_istihdamı_979060.html

Bulaç's call for women to stay at home and wash their husbands' sweet-smelling socks is a danger to the familial integrity.¹³¹ Tuksal also mentions that in her encounters with Bulaç in meetings and conferences, she has been accused by him of bringing gender issues to the agenda just to show off her feminist identity. Nihal Bengisu Karaca, on the other hand, argues that Bulaç's approach to women's employment is not specific to him but represents the views of many conservative men in the Islamist community.¹³² She further claims that there can be no difference between Republican and Islamist political fronts in terms of their approach to women if in the end they both try to confine women to the private realm.

It is also significant to note that beginning with the 1990s the writings of pious women writers have begun to display a considerably individualistic tone when compared to the earlier examples. As Çayır (2007) argues, the novels written by pious women writers in the 1980s were more concerned about reaching salvation through defending Islam against the Westernized, secular lifestyles. The main idea in these novels was that Islamic way of life is superior than secular lifestyles.¹³³ Yet, in the 1990s a new form of Islamic novel has risen, which deals with protagonists' questionings of religiosity, urban life, marriage and love, rather than presenting Islam as the perfect ideal.¹³⁴ The fact that the focus in the Islamic literary realm has shifted from the presentation of Islam as the way to salvation towards a stress on women protagonists' inner conflicts and questionings reveals that the new generation of pious women writers in the 1990s do not feel themselves as symbolic markers of the Islamist politics and thought but are rather interested in expressing their authentic

¹³¹ Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, "Ali Bulaç'ın Yaman Çelişkisi", *Star*, 4 August, 2010.

¹³² Nihal Bengisu Karaca, "Ali Bulaç'ın Problemi", *Habertürk*, 4 August, 2010, <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/nihal-bengisu-karaca/538841-ali-bulacin-problemi>

¹³³ See Şerife Katırcı Turhal, 1988, *Müslüman Kadının Adı Var*, İstanbul: Seha Yayıncılık.

¹³⁴ See Halime Toros, 1997. *Halkaların Ezgisi*, Kırkambar Yayınları; Cihan Aktaş, 1991. *Üç İhtilal Çocuğu*, İstanbul: Nehir Yayıncılık.

selves. In this frame, one can argue that the new generation of pious women writers display quite autonomous identities in the sense that they are highly critical of the ideological projects that attempt to utilize their identities for broader social and political goals. Opposing discursive utilization, they refuse to be symbolic pawns of Islamist politics and formulate a new way of reconciling Islam with a modern, urban and gender-conscious thinking.

Confronting the discriminatory discourses articulated both by orthodox Republican and Islamist communities, pious women intellectuals deeply influence the intellectual field today, a field that has high walls and barriers for outsiders. Yet, they also state that being able to write and publish is not a free choice for them. Rather, writing is the last resort where they can go after having rejected many times elsewhere. The hardships of performing their professional identities as lawyers, chemists or sociologists render them obliged to write. For example, Hilal Kaplan, a young pious columnist in *Yeni Şafak* newspaper, declares that she would not need to write if she could freely enjoy her rights and liberties.¹³⁵ Similarly, in the interview that I have conducted with her, Eraslan clearly states that today most of the pious women writers have taken refuge in writing because they cannot perform their professions freely:

“Cihan Aktaş is an architect by profession, Yıldız Ramazanoğlu is a pharmacist and I am a lawyer. We all have different professions. But we write because there is no place to go other than writing. As a matter of fact, writing is very close to silence. It is too close to inertia... It is both a remedy and a sign of despair... Since we cannot work elsewhere, we take refuge in writing.” (interview, January, 28, 2013)

Keeping this in mind, while analyzing their writings and interviews, one should treat pious women columnists’ statements as a manifestation of their discontents with the

¹³⁵ Hilal Kaplan, “Özgür Olsaydım Yazar Olmazdım” [If I Were Free, I Wouldn’t Be a Writer], *Yeni Şafak*, 2010, <http://www.yenisafak.com.tr/pazar/ozgur-olsaydim-yazar-olmazdim-288817>.

social, political and cultural context and as a projection of their quest for an autonomous self.

8.4. Core Debates on Islamic Feminism

When asked about their approach to feminism, pious women writers' first reaction is to differentiate between feminism as a Western ideology and a different understanding of feminism that allows to reinterpret gender equality through reconciling it with the Islamic faith. Therefore, to understand pious women writers' conceptions of feminism, first, one should put forward the distinguishing traits of Islamic feminism.

One of the main disputes in the literature on Islamic feminism is about the compatibility of Islam and feminism. Feminists are quite divided on this matter. Secular feminists such as Moghissi (2011) and Mojab (2001) oppose the idea that Islam and feminism could be reconciled since Islam contradicts women's rights. Moghissi (1999) argues that none of the interpretations of Islam can be in line with the idea of gender equality. She maintains that Islamic feminism refers to the absorption of secular ideas of feminism into a religious framework, which works against women's rights:

“What we are witnessing [in Islamic feminism] is not the “multi-lingualism” of feminism but the transformation and absorption of its secular “language” into a religious one, which, through discriminatory practices, is sanitized and renamed as empowerment.” (1999: 140)

Similarly, Mojad sees the formulation of Islamic feminism as a threat to the feminist project:

“In this theorization, the women of the world are fragmented into religions, ethnicities, tribes, cultures, nations and traditions, which determine the agenda of women’s and feminist movements. The political ramifications of this cultural relativism are clear...” (2001: 143)

She stresses that since the ruling religious elite can easily dismiss the feminist reinterpretations in Muslim contexts, the real democratization can only be achieved outside of the religious framework.

In opposition to this, pro-Islamic feminist stance is justified by such scholars as Badran, Najmabadi and Moghadam. Moghadam (2002) investigates the possibilities of framing feminism in Islamic terms. She refers to Najmabadi who points out how Islamic feminists in the Iranian context have come to argue that gender discrimination has a social rather than a divine basis and how this could facilitate the applicability of feminism to Muslim societies. (Ibid, 11) Following Najmabadi, Moghadam notes another reason for celebrating Islamic feminism. For her, through reconciling Islam and feminism, it is possible to open up a dialogue between Islamic women activists and secular feminists and eliminate the old hostility between the secular and religious thought. For Moghadam, what is crucial is to revisit feminism’s meanings and develop a new approach to feminist identity that prioritizes women’s praxis rather than their ideology. As Misciagno (1997: 31) argues, sometimes women may engage in activities that struggle against the ideology of patriarchy without directly addressing the issue of patriarchy as an ideology. Keeping this in mind, Moghadam calls for understanding feminism on the basis of actions rather than solely concentrating on ideas. Moreover, for her, it is equally important to evaluate feminist ideals through the lenses provided by the historical context.

For Islamic feminists such as Asma Barlas, Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi, who believe in the possibility of equality, equity and empowerment within an Islamic context, the most crucial task of Islamic feminism is to struggle against the misogynist interpretations of Qur'an. They allege that discrimination against women in Islam does not stem from the teachings of the Qur'an but from the secondary religious texts, i.e., the patriarchal reinterpretations of the holy text. (Saadallah, 2004: 221) In this vein, Badran (2009) points out how Iranian scholars Afsaneh Najmabadeh and Ziba Mir-Hosseini have challenged the misogynist constructions of Islam by stressing the Islamic feminist rereadings of the Qur'an since the early 1990s. She also notes the writings of Moroccan feminist sociologist Fatima Mernissi and the ideas of Sibel Eraslan, a pious Turkish writer and activist, as contemporary Islamic feminist endeavours to deconstruct patriarchal interpretations of Islam.

As Cooke (2000: 58) suggests, while investigating the compatibility of Islam and feminism, one of the key points is to differentiate between Islam and Islamism. This differentiation between Islamic/Muslim and Islamist discourses suggests that while the conservative approach to the status of women in Islamist discourses precludes a genuine critique of patriarchal structures, Islamic feminism tries to reconcile Islamic faith with the principles of gender equality, dismantling the male-dominated religious discourses. Accordingly, Islamist feminism argues that women's quest for being equal with men leads to their oppression because in this quest their integrity and dignity as women is disintegrated. (Saadallah 2004: 218) By suggesting that not the international human rights discourse but only Islamism gives women dignity and integrity, the Islamist argument openly reproduces patriarchal values. Muslim/Islamic feminism, on the other hand, allocates space for an emancipated

female subjectivity within Islam. Relying on this differentiation, Saadallah argues that “Islam and feminism *are* compatible, while Islamism and feminism are not.” (Ibid 220)

This differentiation between Islamic and Islamist feminisms could be quite useful in understanding pious women writers’ approach to feminism in Turkey. It is quite clear that they present an Islamic feminist discourse that engages with Islamic sources while reconciling the Islamic faith with international human rights discourse. Yet, when conflicts emerge while trying to reconcile Islam and feminism, how is the resolution achieved? What are their red lines? Is it possible to argue that the rights discourse of Islamic feminism may evolve into an orthodox Islamist position when certain issues are at stake? These questions will be kept in mind while analyzing pious women writers’ discourse on feminism in Turkey.

8.4.1. Accommodation of Islamic Feminism in the Third Wave Feminism

Islamic feminists on the one hand struggle against the patriarchal interpretations of Qur’an and the patriarchal gender codes in their own communities; on the other hand, they try to defend their particular position vis a vis secular circles. If one resolution of the binary opposition between Islam and feminism is the differentiation between Islam and Islamism, the other one could be the pluralistic approach provided by third wave feminism. As Saadallah (2004: 225) puts forward, third wave feminism attempts to find a way out of the rigidity of the universalizing premises of the second wave feminism by relying on multiplicity. It encapsulates the demands, needs and discursive strategies of non-Western feminisms, including

Islamic feminism. Secular feminism faces resistance in Muslim societies because it has been regarded as a signifier of Western culture and thus as a threat to authenticity. Since third wave feminism encourages multiplicities in feminist approaches, it tries to overcome the divergence of Western and Eastern feminisms and provides a space where Islamic feminism can claim its authenticity without having to abandon Islam or feminism.

The confrontation between secular and Islamic feminists on the basis of claims about the superiority of one form of feminism over the other is quite problematic in the sense that this kind of logic presupposes a true “ownership” of feminism which authorizes the speaker to identify what is good for all women. Third wave feminism opposes this claim for ownership, suggesting that feminisms should adopt an elasticity that would facilitate to respond to emerging necessities. Saadallah (Ibid, 219) notes that this new wave of feminism embraces diversity and works towards constructive solutions to enhance women’s status in society. In this frame, she identifies Muslim/Islamic feminism as a *tactical change* in the feminist movement rather than as a non-feminist project.

8.5. Pious Women Columnists’ Narratives on Feminism, Islamic Feminism and Feminist Identity

8.5.1. Attempts to Disclose Women’s History/Memory and Rewrite Official History from the Viewpoint of Pious Women in Turkey

Pious women columnists, who have played crucial roles in the media field as pioneer women, deeply question official narratives of women’s history and attempt to rewrite it with a special focus on pious women’s role. They declare that writing is of central importance for them in defining their position in society as veiled women since it

allows a space where they can articulate their identity positions and revise women's history and memory from the viewpoint of veiled women in Turkey.

Sibel Eraslan, columnist in *Star* newspaper and novelist, states that the main goal of her writing is to disclose women's history and memory. Committed to this ideal, she rewrites the history of Islam by prioritizing influential female figures who had been ignored in the canonical historical narratives for a very long time. This attempt to bring women's history to the foreground constitutes the core pillar of her work. She explains her gender-conscious approach to writing as follows:

“... The faces of women are always flu. They are always in the background, either in the attic or in the basement. One cannot find reliable information in the archives. Thus, you have to search the private drawers of history. You have to listen to your grandmothers and talk to elderly women. One needs to struggle a lot to transcribe this information from oral memory into a written narrative...” (January 28, 2013)

Eraslan claims that women's consciousness provides possibilities to listen to the margins. Without a female voice, one surrenders to blindness and deafness. As though being a woman writer who is interested in awakening women's consciousness and disclosing women's history was not a difficult position on its own, the discriminatory policies and discourses regarding veiling has made Eraslan's professional life even more difficult. She declares that she has always been exposed to inequalities and confined to the margins, which in return obliged her to a relentless struggle to disassociate veiling from the margins and place it at the “center”.

In this frame, writing, for her, has a dual function: On the one hand, she writes in order to read history through gender-conscious lenses and learn from the past memories and stories of women who have been rendered invisible in history. On the other hand, writing helps her struggle against the discriminations regarding veiling in the present time. In short, writing is a truly empowering act for Eraslan,

which enables her to position herself in time and place and provides her a space to articulate her identity as a veiled woman.

On the other hand, for Yıldız Ramazanoğlu, novelist and contributor to *Zaman* newspaper, writing from the very beginning means resistance and protest. It is the most elaborate means to comprehend the world and make sense of one's experiences. Since writing for her is first and foremost an attempt to understand the world, Ramazanoğlu states that she has never approached to it as a way leading to visibility and fame and has written under different pseudonyms for a while. The idea of dialogue appears to be at the very center of her writing. She states that the visit that she has made to Germany many years ago as a guest speaker invited by a women's organization has been a turning point for her writing career. Ramazanoğlu notes that the dialogue that took place between herself as an Islamic feminist from the Middle East and the Western feminists from the hosting organization in Germany has provided herself the opportunity to speak about the reconciliation of Islam and feminism and explain how she experiences emancipation through the Islamic framework:

“They told me that they are interested in learning how a woman who claims that liberation through Islam is possible, expresses herself in this century. This has been a turning point in my life... The women there have written many articles on this topic... This meeting has been very productive not only for me but also for them because they met women with a totally different background that they did not know before...” (June 4, 2013)

Later, we will see that this emphasis on dialogue is a building block in Ramazanoğlu's conception of identities in general and her relationship with secular feminist women in particular.

To point out the possibility of writing women's history in Turkey anew by enhancing veiled women's visibility, Ramazanoğlu cites Serpil Çakır's seminal work

Ottoman Women's Movement as a major step among attempts to revise the Republican accounts of women's liberation. She states that dating the history of women's movement back to the Ottoman times, this work has exposed the first attempts of religious women to enhance women's status in society. To contribute to the rewriting of women's history, Ramazanoğlu herself has edited a volume titled *The Transformation of Women's History From the Ottoman Times to the Republic*. It is obvious that such attempts are crucial for pious women writers in order to position themselves in history and identify their precursors.

It is also significant to note here that writing is not a privileged, protected realm for pious women writers where they can write without being subject to disciplinary norms and exclusionary power mechanisms in society. They clearly point out that writing is the very realm where power relations marginalizing veiling and veiled women crystallize. The exclusionary logic of the literary and media field and pious women columnists' experiences in this respect will be discussed in greater detail below.

8.5.2. Media, Gender and Being a Pious Woman Professional in Media: An Intersectionalist Approach

Intersectionality exposes that different axes of identity interact on multiple levels and systematically contribute to experiences of domination and exclusion. According to this, different axes of identity can only be comprehended in the light of each other. In line with the intersectionalist argument, pious women columnists denote that womanhood experiences in the Islamist community are not constituted on a single axis, i.e, gender but come into being as a result of the multi-layered

interactions of gender and religion. Accordingly, since gender is just an abstract category on its own, it can only acquire further meaning when its close relation to religion is taken into account. Thus, for them, womanhood and veiling are inseparable components of a veiled woman's subjectivity that cannot be grasped wholly without one another. Moreover, it is important to note that while explaining different layers of their gendered subjectivities, pious women writers also cite women's consciousness as a crucial component. They refuse to speak from within a generic category of gender but always position themselves as pious women writers who frequently deal with matters relating to women's consciousness. Below is a summary of their intersectionalist approach to womanhood experiences in the media sector and the literary field.

I have asked Eraslan to describe her professional experiences as a woman who has spent long years in the media sector. Her response to my question about being a woman in the media was thoroughly informed by intersectionality. She does not imagine her position as a woman in isolation from other components constituting her identity. In this sense, she refers to different subject positions stemming from different components of her identity and states that each subject position imposes different barriers and difficulties on her. She identifies two dominant subject positions to define her subjectivity: Being a religious woman and being a woman who writes her books and articles with the aim to contribute to women's memory and history. For her, each of these identity positions leads to different consequences for a woman writer.

“Things are difficult, if you are a woman; it is more difficult if you are a pious woman. It gets even worse if you struggle for women's history and memory...”

(January 28, 2013)

It is obvious that Eraslan does not treat experiences of womanhood as a monolithic category. Rather, she acknowledges that female subject position may change depending on multiple facets of identities. In line with the intersectionalist argument, Eraslan stresses that other axes of oppression intersect with being a woman and result in quite diverse experiences of womanhood. Therefore, while talking about her experiences as a professional woman in the media sector, she feels the need to touch upon the complex ways in which different components of her identity crosscut each other. For her, it is not possible to think of a womanhood position in which she can articulate her experiences as a woman in isolation from her veiling. Neither can she isolate her religiosity from her womanhood. In this regard, she states the following:

“Once I was invited to a panel discussion at TRT but later, when I was about to board on the plane, they told me that I cannot participate in the program because of my veil. I have struggled against this censorship a lot... If I were a man with the same religious conviction, I could have easily overcome many of these difficulties...” (Ibid)

Moreover, as noted above, Eraslan frequently refers to the consequences of being a woman writer who is committed to exposing women’s history. These different yet intersected layers, i.e., being a veiled woman and being committed to women’s history and memory, generate multiple positions, which point out the multiple layers underlying Eraslan’s experiences of womanhood. In this vein, Eraslan’s conceptualization of identity clearly displays an intersectionalist character.

In a similar vein, while elaborating on gender identities in the media sector, Nihal Bengisu Karaca underlines that not only gender but intersections of gender and other axes of identity should be taken into consideration to fully grasp womanhood experiences:

“Being a woman makes you confront gender inequalities in the media sector but being a veiled woman imposes on you an additional burden as veiling is a

signifier that brings to mind both your womanhood and the political meanings attached to the veil... Every second you have to struggle against the pejorative connotations ascribed to womanhood; what is more, you are subject to explicit forms of otherization and discrimination because of your veiling. You experience these two levels of discrimination simultaneously.” (June 27, 2013)

Echoing the intersectionalist argument that the experience of womanhood varies depending on different components of identity, Ramazanoğlu’s narrative on being a woman writer in the literary and media field is also composed of different aspects of her womanhood experiences. Upon my asking about her experiences as a woman during her writing career, she first refers to the difficulties of reconciling writing with the duties assigned women at home:

“Life does not provide women the time to write... It tells you things like this: you are a woman, you can only write after you have looked after the kids and made your husband and relatives happy. This means that you can only write after everyone has gone to sleep... This is like turning into a wolf woman, i.e, a woman writer, when the full moon rises...” (June 4, 2013)

Ramazanoğlu further declares that in addition to this burden at home, pious women writers confront double discrimination both from their own communities and from the secular circles. On the one hand, they are exposed to the patriarchal discourses of Islamist men, who tend to overlook and even restrain women’s authorship. On the other hand, they also face discriminatory discourses of secular circles, which deny pious women writers legitimacy in the intellectual field.

Intersectionality and the double discrimination that pious women writers face appear as a constitutive theme in Tuksal’s narrative as well. She clearly points out how womanhood experiences originate from the intersection points of various axes of identity, which result in different types of exclusions in different contexts and communities.

“Women’s experiences depend on many factors such as gender, veiling and religiosity... For the conservative community, I am supposed to represent conservative values and viewpoints and thus they do not approve of any other representation my speeches may lead to... As for the leftist circles... I may defend the same idea with them but I articulate it in my own words without using their jargon... Thus, they may choose to ignore what I say. Therefore, the marginalization and exclusions you experience vary depending on what kind of a woman you are...” (April 15, 2013)

Tuksal’s remark is crucial as it reveals that multiple identity levels that a pious woman writer experiences lead to different interpretations in different communities and thus further complicate the marginalization processes. According to Tuksal, a pious woman writer’s interactions with different communities bring to light the vulnerability of her multiple identity positions. She elaborates on this vulnerability in detail throughout the interview.

From above, it is plausible to conclude that when building a narrative about womanhood experiences and women’s gendered subjectivities, pious women writers refrain from thinking of identity as a monolithic block and always refer to the complexities arising from multiple identity positions.

8.5.3. Pious Women Writers, Intellectual Legitimacy and the Literary Field

As noted earlier, pious women writers state that writing is an empowering act as it enables them to elaborate on the marginalized aspects of their identities. Yet, one should also keep in mind that writing at the same time connotes an area for them, where exclusionary norms of the literary field become highly visible. Questioning the norms regulating intellectual legitimacy in the secular intellectual field, pious women writers point out the need to demolish the high barriers that cast veiling and intellectual legitimacy as binary opposites.

In this frame, Eraslan declares that the exclusionary character of the cultural space exacerbates the degree of the hardships that a pious woman writer experiences. She puts forward that the discriminatory policies that she has confronted in the literary space are more severe when compared to the media sector. Even though she identifies censorship as one of the main problems that she has encountered in the media, especially in secular TV channels and newspapers, she states that she could always find other newspapers or TV channels, where she could express her opinions. However, she denotes that the secular literary field is a space strictly reserved for those who could get authorization from the influential figures in the field:

“The censorship in literature is much more repressive than the one in media... The literary field has its own ‘guru’s, who enjoy a much more privileged status than a king or a prophet. You need to get their permission first to be able to enter into this field.” (January 28, 2013)

Eraslan strongly stresses that to enter into this particular public is already difficult for women writers but it is even more difficult for pious women writers and for women writers who write in order to contribute to women’s history and memory because the “guru’s or “prophets” of the literary field do not allow them to enter into this field.

Eraslan’s account clearly exposes the reflections of the age-old secular-Islamic divide upon the cultural field. The sui-generis secularization experience in the modernization process in modern Turkey, which defined Islam as backward and archaic, not only produced a particular definition of “ideal citizen” and shaped mores and manners accordingly but also affected the cultural realm. The concept of “high culture” in the light of a Bourdieuan reading can be utilized here to explain the reflections of the secular-Islamic divide on the cultural field in Turkey. In Bourdieu’s (1984) analysis, the consumption of art works is closely related to the social codes that people from different socio-economic status adopt. Economic, cultural and

symbolic capital that people acquire in life in return are matched with certain kind of dispositions, tastes and values, creating a particular habitus. In this line of thought, the secular literary canon and the rising Islamic literature in Turkey refer to different sets of aesthetic values and expectations and thus signify two different habitus. It can be argued that the elitist character of the secular literary public overlooks the rise of pious women writers' literature with a historical reflex derived from the cultural hegemony established by the modernization experience. Relying on Eraslan's account, it is possible to say that pious women writers find it difficult to find a place in the secular literary field as the gates of the subject field are closed to them.

On the other hand, Ramazanoğlu points out that the double discrimination that pious women writers face both from secular and Islamist circles also holds true when it comes to the literary field and intellectual legitimacy in this field. She states that when she published her first collection of stories, a leading Islamist male figure advised her not to enter into the literary realm because otherwise she could lose her way and get out of hand:

“Why did you choose this way? You were writing beautiful articles; your writing style is strong but literature is a waste of time... You may get out of control here and get lost...” (June 4, 2013)

While such an advise from the Islamist community attempts to restrain veiled women's authorship, the discriminatory discourses of secular circles deny pious women writers the symbolic and cultural capital necessary for entering the literary field. As seen in Eraslan's narrative, the power configuration embedded in the secular literary field is composed of certain dispositions, tastes and values that do not provide enough opportunities for pious women writers to acquire intellectual legitimacy and visibility. Ramazanoğlu alleges that pious women writers' credentials are most of the time undermined through such statements:

“You cannot write about sex or you cannot tell about women’s experiences in the field of sexuality. Because you are conservative people...” (Ibid)

Ramazanoğlu challenges such statements by saying that narrating a certain human condition does not mean telling each and every detail about it; thus pious women writers may choose to be selective in their narratives and this should not undermine their authorial credentials. To disassociate her writing from the stereotypical connotations of veiling, she states the following:

“What I only want from the reader is not to perceive me. Forget about me, forget what you see. Please only deal with my text or try to comprehend what I say...” (Ibid)

Ramazanoğlu also heavily criticizes the tendency to isolate the secular and Islamic literary fields from each other. For her, limiting writers to their own communities is an act that suffocates them by imprisoning them to certain identities. What she suggests instead is a new understanding that affirms differences and facilitates the foundation of literary platforms where both Islamist and secular writers can find a place and share their writings. She argues that the literary field should serve as a catalyst that would help writers and readers discover the commonalities between the Islamist and secular circles and discard the essential, fixed categorizations imposed on subjects:

“Everybody defines a peculiar literary public for his/her own community. Every community has its own literary supplements and your name cannot be mentioned there unless you belong to that particular community... You are given a name: veiled, Islamist woman writer. This label goes on and on like the tail of a kite. However, you are just a writer after all... We prefer lives that resemble what we live and resonate our experiences... In the end, the possibility for a different life, different point of view and a different image of women gets erased altogether... But if we care to listen to each other, we can figure out how our differences can crosscut each other. Otherwise we become ghettoized to particular communities... We should not suffocate one another like this, condemning different ones to certain identity categories.” (Ibid)

Ramazanoğlu identifies the attempts to fix subjects’ positions through identity categories as the foremost threat to dialogue and communication. Her position vis-a-

vis identity categories primarily stems from her critique of fixed essences attributed to certain identity positions. For instance, the following categorization that Ramazanoğlu heard from a well-known secular professor during a conference organized by Istanbul University is quite telling in this respect. According to Ramazanoğlu's account, the professor's statement that targets Ramazanoğlu's persona is as follows:

“...It is not very proper for you to speak here because here we speak about women's rights but you are a woman who wants to be one of four wives of a man and who listens to Ferdi Tayfur...” (Ibid)

Ramazanoğlu alleges that in this prototype of the orthodox Republican psyche each and every detail about a veiled woman's identity, even the kind of music she listens to, is defined in such a way that in the end she comes to represent what the Republican subject regards as “inferior”. For her, such a binary opposition in return excludes any possibility for finding a common ground to share experiences and prohibits transitivity between different subject positions. Looking through the lenses provided by the Bourdieuan analysis of power relations, one can suggest that regardless of the cultural capital that pious women writers have, their veiling and religiosity is the most decisive factor in the determination of their relative positioning in the intellectual field. Veiling is evaluated as the “other” of the dispositions constituting the secular literary field in the orthodox Republican mind-set. This configuration of power makes Ramazanoğlu quite suspicious about labels denominating identity positions. Her concerns in this regard are clearly reflected in her approach to the labels “woman writer” and “feminist” as well, which we will discuss later.

Tuksal's narrative is another emblematic example of the regulatory norms in the intellectual field. Tuksal tells about two particular incidents which expose the

silencing of veiled women in both secular and Islamist intellectual fields. First, she tells about her experiences regarding the 2013 Hrant Dink memorial meeting, where she was a keynote speaker. She states that even though every year the speakers' speeches are broadcasted on TV channels, her speech was ignored. She also declares that not only the secular channels but also the conservative ones censored her speech. Relying on this statement, one can clearly see that as an intellectual persona Tuksal is neither welcomed in Islamic, nor in secular publics.

As noted above, in the Bourdieusian framework, one's position within the power configuration in a certain field is related to one's habitus and the capital accumulation. With respect to pious women writers in the intellectual field, one can suggest that their belonging to multiple communities blurs their position in the power configuration. On the one hand, they represent Islamic values and lifestyles; on the other hand, their views and ideological positions are different from those of many other conservative writers in the Islamic community who submit to the patriarchal codes in the orthodox readings of Islam. Therefore, since they display a complex disposition that brings together pieces from both the Islamist and secular/profeminist habitus, they do not easily fit into prevailing categorizations, which incites hegemonic forces to ignore their intellectual persona or position them into pre-set, fixed categories.

Another example in Tuksal's narrative that evidently shows how her veiling is essentially coded as "anti-intellectual" is as follows: While she was writing for the daily *Taraf*, one day she went to see the editor-in-chief Yasemin Çongar. But the security guard at the door of the newspaper building did not want to let her in. Tuksal says that the guard had no conception of a "veiled woman writer" and thus thought that he should not let her in.

According to Bourdieu (1984), a field connotes a social setting organized around specific types of capital, i.e., resources of power determining the relative positioning of the subject, and in return, generates and generated by a certain system of certain dispositions, namely, *habitus*. In this framework, a particular set of rules govern the strategies and practices in the field. Moi (1991: 1024) maintains that “any field is necessarily structured by a series of unspoken and unspeakable rules for what can legitimately be said or perceived within the field.” Thus, any field functions through certain forms of censorship. As Moi (Ibid) says, the field grants the right to speak or act to those individuals who possess the necessary capital and display dispositions adjusted to the field. In this frame, the practice of veiling is seen by the powerful agents in the secular literary field as part of a certain habitus that does not belong to the literary public. Pious women writers declare that this exclusion takes place on the basis of symbolic capital and legitimacy that is denied to pious women writers, rather than cultural capital denoting literary competence.

As noted earlier, the existence of pious women writers in the public sphere in the post-1980 period have resulted in crucial repercussions both for the public sphere in general and for the literary field in contemporary Turkey. Pious women writers deny the argument that the act of veiling and religiosity are not in line with the set of dispositions required by the field in question. They reconstruct the boundaries of the secular and Islamist habitus and challenge the requirements placed on them by the prevailing power configurations in the field. Their reconciliation of religiosity with the claims for intellectual legitimacy in the field point out that a new conception of habitus and field comes into being along with the new set of dispositions displayed by pious women writers.

8.5.4. The Term “Woman Writer”

Pious women writers are very cautious about identity labels as they do not want to be defined through pre-defined, fixed identity categories that contribute to their marginalized position in society. This cautious approach is also valid with respect to their conception of the term “woman writer”.

When I ask her how she interprets the term “woman writer”, Eraslan first states the following:

“Of course I am a woman. They use the term ‘woman writer’. Why is it woman writer, but not just ‘writer’? Probably because authorship is seen peculiar to men...” (January 28, 2013)

For Eraslan, there is no need to use the prefix “woman” to describe someone’s authorship since the sex of the author can be clearly seen. She points out that in her case the term “woman writer” turns into “veiled writer” or “headscarved writer”, signifying another form of discrimination. In Eraslan’s mind-set, such discriminations based on gender and religiosity are already outdated in 2000s.

Eraslan’s belief in the relevance of gender as a social and analytical category can be clearly felt throughout the interview; yet, when it comes to the term “woman writer”, she sees this reference to gender as an overt crystallization of discrimination against women and describes it as outdated. She interprets the term “woman writer” along the same lines with the label “veiled writer”. Such categorizations, for her, place subjects into fixed, essential positions and operate as discriminatory discourses.

Her analysis of the term “woman writer” is quite brief and to the point. Having criticized it as discriminatory and essentializing, Eraslan continues her response with an analysis of the dramatic change in the approach to identity politics across the globe. She notes that the image of Muslim woman as a victim who is

repressed by Eastern patriarchal traditions and needs to be saved, has begun to change in line with the dissolution of the discriminatory labels and essential categorizations of identities in 2000s as more and more feminists support the choice to veil and protest against the bans on veiling in Europe. Similarly, the transformation of feminisms in Turkey from an elitist position in the 1980s that excluded veiled women towards a more accommodating and all-inclusive position makes Eraslan think about the effects of postmodernity on identities. She asks the following question:

“Is this postmodernity? Could be... However, I don’t think that there are huge rifts between the traditional and the modern on the one hand and between the modern and the postmodern on the other. There is no gigantic holes. And I think that in time the possibility to establish connection between them will emerge out of women’s language.” (Ibid)

Eraslan’s above statement is quite revealing in terms of her approach to identities. As a reaction to essentializing conceptualizations of veiled women’s identities, she points out new trends in identity politics, which dismiss old essentialist understandings and acknowledge differences and multiplicities in the construction of subject positions. Stating that there should not be an absolute cleavage between the new and old forms of subject positions, she suggests to find a midway through women’s language, which could serve as a mirror to uncover commonalities between different subject positions.

On the other hand, when asked to explain her conception of the term “woman writer”, Ramazanoğlu elaborates on the disciplinary mechanisms inherently embedded in identity categories. She declares that the act of labeling women writers on the basis of their sex is a form of violence:

“It is a form of violence... I feel as if I were exposed to physical violence. I told you earlier that someone accused me of wanting to be one of the four

wives of a man... This is a categorization. Just like I cannot find an answer to give to such a categorization, I cannot accept the term ‘woman writer’ either.” (June 4, 2013)

For Ramazanoğlu, identity categorizations and labels can only be used if subjects themselves define their meaning. All other definitions imposed from outside are attempts to fix the subject’s position in the existing power configuration. Thus, she states that she could use the label “woman writer” if she herself defines what it really signifies. In this sense, she states that she accepts the usage of the label “woman writer” only if it aims to stress gender consciousness and women’s peculiar experiences. Her approach to the label “veiled woman writer” also displays similar features. She states that the subject position defined through the label “Islamist woman writer” is an uncanny realm because she cannot really know how those who use this phrase define it. It is an uncanny realm for her in the sense that it is used as a discursive tool to silence the very subject it attempts to define.

“If someone uses the term ‘woman writer’ to stress women’s consciousness and women’s differential traits, I can accept that. But if she/he also adds the term ‘Islamist’ as a prefix in front of this label, then I would say this would be totally unnecessary. After all, I don’t define myself as ‘Islamist’. If I were to use this label, I would explain in detail what Islamism really is... However, if someone else categorizes me through this term, I don’t know what it includes. Since it is a very suspicious and uncanny realm for me, I cannot accept it...” (Ibid)

For Ramazanoğlu, the label “Islamist” or veiled woman writer” is a discursive tool that positions its user hierarchically vis-a-vis Islamist women since the user claims that s/he knows everything about Islamist women and thus leaves no room for Islamist women to speak in their own name. In short, Ramazanoğlu states that she would use the label “Islamist women writer” only if she herself defines what “Islamist” and being an “Islamist women writer” means.

Relying on the statements above, one can suggest that for Ramazanoğlu the critical question is for what purpose the label in question is utilized. She denies all the labels and identity categories if they are utilized with the aim to attribute an essence to subjects and fix their position in society. In this sense, it is possible to claim that for Ramazanoğlu, defining one's identity through a label does not inevitably lead to essentialism. In her account, if the subjects themselves define what the identity labels correspond to, then it signifies an expression of an identity position which is not necessarily fixed or essential. However, if the label is defined from outside and imposed on subjects, then it should be evaluated as a form of sheer violence.

Adopting a critical approach to identity labels, Karaca claims that the labels "Islamist woman writer" or "veiled writer" are discursive tools utilized by the secular front to resist against the enhancement of veiled women's status in society and to imply that they don't want to live together with veiled women. For her, the aim in using such labels is to present pious women writers as marginal subjects.

In Karaca's mind-set, the label "woman writer" is already outdated; nobody can dare to use it because it openly corresponds to a sexist terminology.

"There is nothing to praise in the term "woman writer"... Considering that no one ever uses the term "male writer", I believe that the stress on womanhood in addressing a woman writer cannot be well-intentioned." (June 27, 2013)

Having said this, Karaca states that unlike the term "woman writer", the label "veiled writer" and "Islamist woman writer" are still in force and are boldly used to stigmatize veiled women's writing. According to Karaca, these labels directly target the potential readers who may read pious women writers' columns and aim to warn them about the "marginal" stance that they may encounter in such columns. Karaca

claims that labels are mostly used to point out what deviates from the established set of norms in society. In a sarcastic tone, she states that we never use labels such as “writer who wears glasses” or “writer whose hair has gone grey” since we accept them as “normal”. In this sense, for her, individuals resort to labels only if they want to underline the “marginality” of certain identity positions.

Tuksal agrees with other columnists on the idea that the term “woman writer” is a patriarchal term locating women writers in an inferior position vis-a-vis male writers.

“As if women represent a species that is unable to write and there are those other women who surprisingly write... This kind of a stress expressed through the term ‘woman writer’ is really absurd and weird.” (April 15, 2013)

Tuksal also elaborates on different ways in which the term woman writer is utilized. She differentiates between a sexist usage of the term and other discursive attempts that resort to this term to stress women’s consciousness. Yet, it is interesting to note that rather than acknowledging the possibility of redefining the content of the term in an affirmative, positive way, she focuses more on the essentialist public usage and thus denounces the term.

“In public discourse this term is used mostly with the aim to differentiate women on the basis of gender, not to refer to women writers with gender consciousness. Even women who write like men, are called women writers. That is, one is not called a woman writer because of the content of the writing, but just because of one’s gender.” (Ibid)

As seen above, pious women writers are quite critical of essentializing attempts that position them into fixed identity categories through certain identity labels. While some writers conclude their critique with a denial of all identity labels, others differentiate between essentialist use of labels and subject’s own definition of that particular identity label.

8.5.5. Islam, Feminism and Islamic Feminism

As seen so far, pious women columnists harshly criticize essentialist conceptions of identity labels that in return serve to marginalize veiling and veiled women's subject positions in society. One can argue that this anti-essentialist critique promises a significant potential to deconstruct the orthodox arguments defining Islam and feminism in binary opposition. In this sense, pious women columnists' narratives on Islam, feminism and Islamic feminism expose novel ways in which the relationship between Islam and feminism can be redefined through a dialectical approach. Yet, despite this transformative, regenerative potential, their narratives also have serious limitations in reconsidering the coexistence of Islam and feminism. Below is a summary of the striking points in pious women columnists' narratives on Islam, feminism and Islamic feminism.

Eraslan (2011: 13) investigates the applicability of the term "Islamic feminism" to the Turkish context. To this end, she poses the following questions:

"Is there an Islamic feminist movement in Turkey?", Is it proper to identify women's sensitivities, reflexes and activities about certain subjects as a movement?, Can we evaluate women's activities and protests which are incorporated into other ideological projects as an independent women's movement?"

Keeping such questions in mind, Eraslan alleges that it is not possible to identify current activities of religious women in Turkey as a women's movement that treats women as individual subjects and aims to make structural transformations for enhancing gender equality. Rather, for Eraslan (Ibid) these activities can be seen as reactive, political, gradual responses to certain discriminatory practices and legal frameworks. Thus, Eraslan prefers the term "Islamic women's activity" (*İslami kadın hareketliliği*) over "Islamic women's movement".

Having made this differentiation, Eraslan points out the importance of intellectual attempts to write women's history¹³⁶ and the mobilization of broader masses in the formation of a women's movement and alleges that the formation of Islamic women's movement in Turkey is not completed in terms of these components.

“There is a certain activity but it has to go through certain processes and have a history. This means that it is necessary to make an analytical study into its historical roots... There are certain historical studies such as Yıldız Ramazanoğlu's *Kadın Tarihinin Dönüşümü* or my article titled 'Uğultular, Silüetler...' But these works talk about Islamic women's activity, not a women's movement.” (interview, January 28, 2013)

On the other hand, in her introduction to the collection of essays of Şule Yüksel, a precursor pious woman writer in the 1970s, she identifies the symbolization of veiled women's identities in the Islamist movement as the major reason to account for the lack of an Islamic women's movement in Turkey. As noted earlier, she uses the term “bacı” (sister) to express the genderless and silenced existence of women in Islamist politics. In her mind-set, *bacı* refers to a selfless entity which gives up on her needs and demands and devotes herself to the broader social and political goals defined by the ideological project in question. To explain this genderless position further, she notes that when Islamist men wanted to praise Şule Yüksel, they used such terms as “our brother Şule Yüksel” or “hoca efendi”, which aim to obliterate her womanhood and even turn her into a man. (2011: 16)

In this frame, Eraslan asserts that the erosion of gender differences in the Islamist movement endangers the possibility of organizing a women's movement based on gender consciousness. She further declares that there is always another

¹³⁶ See Eraslan (2002), Ramazanoğlu (2000). Eraslan cites these works as crucial attempts to reconceptualize women's history in modern Turkey.

component in Islamist women's activities such as family, environment, children or health; thus, these activities fail to focus primarily on gender consciousness and women's autonomous identities. On the other hand, Eraslan also adds that Islamist women's activities have come to embrace a wider array of differences and display a higher representativeness in the first decade of 2000s, which increases their chance to gradually evolve into a women's movement. (Ibid, 17)

One can argue that Eraslan's analysis about the lack of an Islamist women's movement in Turkey has also to do with her own journey into the feminist thought and activism. As a pious woman writer, who cannot accommodate herself in the existing publics represented by the orthodox Islamist thought on the one hand and the secular feminist movement on the other, she expresses the need for an Islamic feminist platform through which the feminist ideals and Islamic faith could be reconciled. Given that one can hardly find such platforms in pious women's civil society activities, Eraslan had to find her way on her own by appropriating feminist ideals in line with her religiosity. Thus, it can be claimed that by stressing the lack of an Islamic women's movement in Turkey, Eraslan implies the uniqueness of her position marked by efforts to reconcile her religiosity with feminist ideals and the difficulty of positioning her authentic experiences in the public sphere.

She also touches upon the idea of empathy and self-reflexivity as connection points between the secular feminist ideas on the one hand and the religious commitments on the other. In this sense, regarding her experiences about the secular feminist movement in Turkey, Eraslan stresses the unique importance of individual stories as principal elements of the relationship in-between:

“When you unearth the uniqueness of individual stories, you see that there is a whole different world beyond the categories such as women, men or

Islamists. The studies I have done on women's history have opened this door for me. I have learnt that thinking through categories and masses makes one lazy. Having acquired this knowledge, I have come to know myself better... Given the religious conviction that you have, how can you make room for yourself in the Western understanding of freedom? Asking such questions, I have come to figure out the meanings of freedom thanks to the women's movement." (January 28, 2013)

One can suggest that this stress on relationality, self-reflexivity and affection is another building block in Eraslan's critique of the polarizing character of fixed identity categorizations and labels. By pointing out the importance of dialogue, Eraslan appreciates the possibility of recognizing commonalities between Islamic feminist and secular feminist positions. In this sense, what is most important in her narrative on the relationship between Islam and feminism is mutual understanding and affinity established by close human relations transcending essentialist fixations of identity positions.

In her narrative on Islamic feminism, Ramazanoğlu first deals with the compatibility of Islam and feminism. She opposes the argument that Islam is a misogynist religion and Islamic practices are against women's rights. Rather, she argues that not Islam and Qur'an per se, but the patriarchal interpretations of Islamic verses contradict women's human rights. In this sense, her narrative echoes the arguments trying to justify the compatibility of Islam and feminism in the feminist literature and is formulated as a defense against possible counter-arguments. To justify her position, Ramazanoğlu gives examples from the history of Islam, showing the dignity and respect women enjoyed in the Islamic tradition:

"Ontologically Islam is not a religion that suppresses women; rather, the opposite is true. There was this past tradition in Islam that urged fathers to raise out of respect when their daughters enter the room. Each time when Fatima entered the room, our prophet raised because of his affection and respect for her." (June 4, 2013)

It is important to note that Ramazanoğlu's narrative begins with a defensive discourse. One can say that defensive discourse strategies underlying veiled women's public visibilities echo in their public declarations about their Islamic feminist stance as well. They produce a defensive and cautious narrative that takes into account possible counter-arguments.

Having justified the compatibility of Islam and feminism, Ramazanoğlu states that reading feminism through Islamic lenses enhances her conception of feminism and vice versa. Ramazanoğlu maintains that feminism gains a new perspective through a reading that is informed by Islam, more specifically by the Islamic conception of equity (*hakkaniyet*). For Ramazanoğlu, Islamic equity is a concept that is superior than the feminist ideal of equality. It is based on the compatibility of men and women and forms expectations, allocates tasks and responsibilities according to the ontological capacities of both genders:

“I always give this example... The artwork of an Iranian miniaturist. This picture of Ferhat and Şirin depicts a story in which Şirin gets tired and her horse gets tired, too. Upon this, Ferhat shoulders Şirin together with her horse. When I first saw this, I thought that this should be what goes beyond feminism. A man who can shoulder the woman together with her tired horse...” (Ibid)

Ramazanoğlu also argues that when read in the light of the feminist framework, Islamic verses acquire new meanings beyond the patriarchal interpretations and Qur'an is reconciled with contemporary feminist ideals. Therefore, she stresses that it is not possible to grasp Qur'an fully without acknowledging the usefulness of feminist scholarship first.

Ramazanoğlu's narrative oscillates between an Islamic and a feminist framework. At one point, Ramazanoğlu celebrates the feminist line of thinking on the basis that it has transformed the patriarchal approach to women in Islam; yet at

another point, she prefers the Islamic framework over the feminist framework. For example, while discussing the idea of gender, she prioritizes the Islamic concept of equity, rather than equality. She differentiates between the Islamic concept of equity and equality by referring to the idea of compatibility between sexes. In this sense, she maintains that it is better for men and women to realize their ontological disposition rather than to adopt to a legal understanding of equality. For her, the legal conception of equality may not take into account the potentialities and capacities of sexes and thus may lead to a relentless conflict between sexes.

Ramazanoğlu's views on equity/equality debate becomes more clear when her views on motherhood and construction of gender identities are taken into account. Ramazanoğlu argues that motherhood is a unique experience that women should not suppress or deny because it is an expression of women's invaluable ontological capacity to create life. Here, she articulates an objection to the radical feminist argument, which claims that motherhood and maternal thinking may hamper women's autonomy.¹³⁷ Moreover, with respect to the construction of gender identities, she thinks that gender is not socially constructed altogether but also corresponds to an essential core in both sexes:

“The concept of gender leads us to the point where we find ourselves defining womanhood and manhood culturally... Yet, having raised children, I can see that there is a certain masculinity/femininity that humans are endowed with by birth... My grandson, whose mother tried to make her play with dolls to arouse affection in him, automatically gets interested in cars, trucks, etc... How are we going to explain this? One of the thinkers who profoundly affect me is Kristeva... She opposes the cultural definition of motherhood. For her, if we define motherhood as such, we become impoverished because it is an existential and ontological part of our existence, not something that we should suppress... I agree with her...” (Ibid)

¹³⁷ For a detailed account, see Ruddick (1980).

Here, Ramazanoğlu explicitly refuses the idea that gender identities are completely social constructs. For her, social constructivism in this regard may lead to the idea of sexual orientation and legitimize homosexual relationships, which is quite problematic in Ramazanoğlu's thinking. She states that she would defend the LGBT rights to the end yet she would not display a special effort to promote homosexual relationships through gay prides or other mechanisms because of the difficulties that she experiences in reconciling her Islamic faith and the issue of sexual orientation.

In addition to the equity/equality debate, Ramazanoğlu opposes the attempts to excessively demarcate gender identities. She refers to the Islamic idea that gender identities are ephemeral images and thus should not be that decisive in the expression of identity:

“In fact souls are genderless... while descending to earth, we appear as man or woman. This is created by God as a richness. One should not produce a language from here to stigmatize people with gender identities...” (Ibid)

For Ramazanoğlu, instead of generating a conflict based on gender identities, individuals should try to negotiate on the basis of what is right or wrong.

In sum, while reconciling her Islamic faith and her feminist stance, Ramazanoğlu utilizes the conceptual tools of the Islamic framework at some point and those of the feminist thought at some other, which makes her narrative quite unstable and flexible. Therefore, one can argue that her conception of Islamic feminism corresponds to a very peculiar standpoint that makes it impossible to identify a stable, core ideological framework that Ramazanoğlu primarily relies on. Since her interpretive framework constantly shifts between Islamic and feminist standpoints, neither Islam nor feminism constitutes the permanent linchpin of Ramazanoğlu's conception of Islamic feminism. Rather, it is the dialectical

relationship between Islam and feminism that gives its peculiar tones to her conception of Islamic feminism. The quotation below is quite useful in this respect:

“My position vis-a-vis feminism acknowledges feminism’s weaknesses and poses criticisms against it. Yet, despite this, it appreciates the usefulness of feminist literature, makes use of it and even gains a deeper insight of Islam in the mirror of feminism. Because you cannot understand Qur’an without this knowledge. If my understanding of Qur’an does not include all women and cannot address their problems, then it is not meaningful enough. It is crucial to interpret it by reconciling different layers of experiences.” (Ibid)

Similar to Ramazanoğlu, Tuksal constantly revises and renegotiates the meanings of Islamic feminism by engaging in a critical reading of both Islam and feminism. Her critique against the patriarchal tones in the commentaries on the Qur’an dates back to her doctoral dissertation where she meticulously identifies the misogynist points in the Islamic tradition and points out the possibility of reading Islam’s holy text through gender conscious lenses. On the other hand, the challenges she poses against secular feminisms cover a broad array of subjects ranging from the elitist character of feminist movements in Turkey to the essentialist tendencies of feminisms in the West. Drawing on these two lines of criticisms, Tuksal denotes that Islam and feminism can be read in the light of each other in such a way that in the end they come to embrace multiplicities and different subject positions. Her criticisms of secular feminisms and the peculiarities of her Islamic feminist standpoint will be much more clear when her approach to feminist self-identification and identity labels are discussed in greater detail.

What is also interesting in her narrative is the generational reading that she resorts to in evaluating gender consciousness among Islamist women in Turkey. As a pioneer woman in the public sphere who has challenged the misogynist discourses in the Islamist community and the exclusionary character of the secular camp, she states

that in the contemporary era it is easier for veiled women to adopt a gender conscious standpoint as they have more access to intellectual resources.¹³⁸ For her, this makes it more likely that Islamic feminism in contemporary Turkey can flourish on a larger scale than before:

“In the past everyone had to believe what the local religious leader said... But in time we as women theologians formed our own interpretations of the Qur’an and escaped the tyranny of misogynist interpretations... I see these deep questionings flourishing among women in the conservative circles... They have role models now, these were very few of them in the past but now there are plenty... I hope this will have a positive impact on conservative women’s questionings...” (April 15, 2013)

Like Ramazanoğlu’s narrative, Tuksal’s narrative is marked by a pendulum movement oscillating between feminist and Islamic frameworks. At certain points, she puts the emphasis on the feminist rereading of Islam; at other points she shifts to a mainly Islamic position and elaborates on aspects of feminism which contradicts her religious conviction. This dynamism and hybridity in her conception of Islamic feminism makes it difficult to locate it into a fixed framework.

This constant movement in Ramazanoğlu’s and Tuksal’s narratives turns into a stable account in Karaca’s narrative. Even though Karaca acknowledges that Islam and feminism can transform each other, she clearly puts the emphasis on the Islamic framework when reflecting on the coexistence of Islam and feminism:

“The category of Islamic feminism includes every individual who on the one hand appreciates the Islamic framework and wants to live according to it and on the other hand, is aware of gender inequality in society and is convinced that since God cannot approve of it, this inequality should be overcome altogether. However, what is important here is to disclose the ties that Islamic

¹³⁸ Indeed, this generational reading is not peculiar to Tuksal’s narrative but can also be detected in many other narratives in this study. As most of the women writers in this study are pioneer women in their fields, they tend to adopt a generational approach and make comparisons between their time and the contemporary time period. This point makes it necessary to take into account this generational aspect as an analytical category. Thus, in the upcoming chapters, I will try to understand how the issue of being a pioneer woman in the intellectual field in Turkey affects women writers’ approach to identities.

feminism has with the secular form of feminism in the West... If it is going to be called Islamic feminism, then the Islamic framework should be maintained as its reference point... If secular feminism constitutes the center of gravity in our conceptions of Islamic feminism, then you cannot call it Islamic..." (June 27, 2013)

In her statement above, Karaca clearly distinguishes the Islamic framework as the decisive component in the conceptions of Islamic feminism. For her, feminism can be reconciled with Islam as long as the Islamic framework permits for this interaction. This clear-cut emphasis on the Islamic framework stems from Karaca's criticisms' against secular feminisms in Turkey and in the West, which we will touch upon later in this chapter.

To conclude, veiled women columnists acknowledge the coexistence of Islam and feminism and the transformative effects of the relationship inbetween, though in differing degrees. Despite certain reservations in their line of thinking, Tuksal and Ramazanoğlu tend to adopt an Islamic feminist position; Eraslan stresses the hybridity and peculiarity of her standpoint, while Karaca clearly distances herself from any identity position. As a result, their narratives on Islamic feminism display a heterogenous character. Some of these narratives have the potential of coming up a dynamic, flexible understanding of Islamic feminism. They can also be considered as striking examples pointing out the limitations deeply embedded in the relationship between Islam and feminism.

8.5.6. Critique of Western Secular Feminisms

It is possible to suggest that pious women columnists' approach to feminist self-identification and their conception of the coexistence of Islam and feminism is to a great extent shaped by their critique of Western secular feminisms. They state that

essentialist and elitist categories that Western feminisms have produced over years have rendered many of the feminist ideas alien to Muslim women.

For example, to challenge the prevalent definition of “liberated woman” in the Western discourse, Ramazanoğlu touches upon the recent war in Iraq and Afghanistan which has had a great impact on her writing. For her, while devastating an Eastern country in the name of freedom and democracy, the Western powers also claimed that they liberated the indigenous women, unveiled them and saved them from the patriarchal indigenous men.

“Afghanistan has become devastated during the war; but the news in the United States announce this as the following: ‘Women are very happy. They got rid of their burqas and found themselves in hairdressing salons...’ How are we going to make sense of this?” (June 4, 2013)

In her critique of the Western discourse about women’s liberation in the East, Ramazanoğlu echoes the postcolonial feminist arguments. Referring to Spivak, a well-known postcolonial feminist theorist, she elaborates on the limitations of the colonial feminist arguments and alleges that the West discursively utilizes the image of Muslim women to promote its actions in those regions. In this sense, she reacts both to the Western conception of Muslim women as victims to be saved from the patriarchal Eastern men and the so-called women’s emancipation in Iraq and Afghanistan which she sees as limited to the allocation of a few symbolic seats in the parliament to women. She has published her views in two collections of essays titled “Baghdad Fragments” and “Women During Occupation”.

In addition, in her critique of elitism in Western feminisms, she also aligns with the black feminist struggle:

“For example, let’s look at the feminist movement in England... I may be a black woman or an hispanic, Indian or Pakistani woman. If I am humiliated

here mainly because of my color..., can the feminist movement raise its voice against this discrimination? ... Women of color criticize the feminist movement, saying that 'we cannot cooperate because you form hierarchical, elitist relationships.' These are quite rightful criticisms..." (Ibid)

On the other hand, Tuksal denotes that one of the most acute problems of feminism in general is to impose on women certain role models and career paths. She argues that the feminist conception of professional woman who is assertive, ambitious and aspires to climb higher in the organizational hierarchy, may not respond to all women's needs and desires. According to her, if a woman chooses to stay at home and have more than two kids, or prefers to work part-time in order to spend more time with her family, this should not be named as a retreat from feminist ideals:

"For example, let's take the issue of flexible working hours. Our feminist friends always oppose this... But, some women prefer part-time jobs... If a woman is a teacher, feminists want to see her as the director of her school. I was a teacher but I never wanted to be a director. Maybe I do not want to spend the whole day at school, maybe I want to stay at home and meet my friends. Thus, we are not supposed to impose on everybody the image of "ideal" woman who competes with men on every occasion." (April 15, 2013)

For Tuksal, perception of sexuality as a sign for women's liberation is also quite problematic. She claims that some women in feminist movements resort to sexuality in order to feel themselves liberated. Tuksal's critique regarding this approach to sexuality stems from her belief in rendering feminist struggles local. In this sense, she states that instead of imitating the Western lifestyles, norms and values, non-western feminists should attempt to reconcile Western feminist ideas in line with the local practices.

"Living a certain kind of [sexually permissive] lifestyle is regarded as an indicator of being a courageous and liberated women. I think this is an imposition. The definition of ideal woman changes accordingly. They define this kind of lifestyle as the norm so much so that for them, we lead banal, wasted lives. As long as they follow this line of thinking, it is not possible to build a common struggle... Thus, for me, the most acute problem of the

feminist movement in Turkey is not to be able to localize its struggle...”
(Ibid)

According to Tuksal, the emphasis on sexual freedom in feminist movements alienate a great segment of women, which in return results in failure in mass-mobilization. Therefore, for her, what is really needed is not to adapt the Western theoretical framework as it is but to appropriate it according to the local context. This idea of “localization” of the feminist movements lies at the very center of Tuksal’s understanding of feminism. Since her thoughts are deeply informed by a critique of essentialism, she incorporates the intersectionalist argument into her narrative and clearly argues against any abstract conception of “woman”. In this sense, it is very critical for Tuksal that feminisms acknowledge women’s needs and demands in different contexts or identity positions.

In Eraslan’s narrative, one can see a similar concern to localize the feminist thinking in line with indigenous demands and needs. For example, she criticizes feminism by stating that it is based on an anti-family stance and argues that this anti-family ideology is a cleavage ideologically separating feminist and Islamist women:

“I believe that family is the place where a child can be raised best... I have raised three kids so far... Based on my experiences, I can tell that it should be the parents who protect the children and take care after them... Therefore, we clash with feminist friends most when it comes to the issue of family...”
(January 28, 2013)

As pointed out in earlier parts, Eraslan’s approach to women’s history, feminism and Islamic feminism involves hybrid, dynamic elements and tends to promote dialogue and communication between differences and multiplicities in subject positions. Yet, as far as her statement above is concerned, one can suggest that at certain points, her narrative may shift towards an essentialist conception of Western secular feminism, coding it categorically as anti-family.

Similar to other women columnists' stress on motherhood, in her critique of Western feminisms Karaca also maintains that motherhood is a unique ontological capacity that women should cherish. In this regard, she underlines that a feminist position may be rightful only if it does not see women's reproductive capacities as a burden:

“I have never struggled against the ontological state of being a woman but always criticized the norms and limitations put on my womanhood... And I have never denied the fact that a woman is first and foremost a mother... A woman's life is not limited to motherhood but ontologically she is created with a potential to be a mother... She may have other talents in life but this does not annul her potential to be a mother.” (June 27, 2013)

Moreover, like other women columnists, Karaca identifies hierarchical social relationships among women as a crucial theme that feminism should deal with. She denotes that feminism cannot ignore the relationship between powerful women and women from lower strata in society. In this frame, through her critique of essentialist, categorical feminist ideas, she attempts to come up with a new definition of feminism that would be in line with her pious standpoint. In fact, all women columnists in this chapter negotiate feminist ideas, criticize essentialist conceptions of feminism and point out the possibility of redefining feminist approaches in a way that is inclusive of one's needs and demands. On the other hand, at certain points in their critique of Western feminisms, they tend to limit Western feminisms' meanings to essentialist conceptions. This paradoxical discourse that includes both deconstructive and essentialist components will be touched upon at length in the analysis part.

8.5.7. Critique of the Secular Feminist Narratives and Feminist Movements in Contemporary Turkey

To understand pious women writers' relationship to feminism, one also has to analyze their critique of the secular feminist movement in Turkey. The autonomous feminist movement when first emerged in the post-1980 era, failed to incorporate the demands of veiled women into its discourse. Organized by middle class, well-educated, secular women, the post-1980 feminist movement in Turkey as a counterpart of the the second wave feminism in the West mainly focused on issues such as the elimination of violence against women and suppression of women's sexuality. (Sirman 1989) In this context, feminist women developed a new language prioritizing autonomy and individualism. They utilized this new language to redefine their relationship to state and challenged the Kemalist Republican framework for women's emancipation. Heavily criticizing the orthodox Republican mindset, they argued that the Republican modernization project confined women's emancipation to legal equality and relied on an ideal public image of professional women as the marker of modern Republic while ignoring repressive gender relations in the private domain. (Arat, 2000: 10) Yet, as noted above, this feminist critique mainly focused on the rights and liberties of middle class, secular women and could not integrate the demands of veiled women into its discourse.

The divide between secular and religious women has come to be challenged only in the 1990s with the emergence of cleavages and multiplicities in feminist demands. Islamist and Kurdish women as well as the lesbian–gay–bisexual–transsexual (LGBT) movements have led to the disintegration of the monolithic conceptions of gender relations in Turkey and helped bring about a dramatic change in the history of feminist movements. (Diner & Toktaş 2010) The rise of differences

on the stage of feminisms in return has led to self-reflexive questioning of secular feminisms and pointed out the necessity of a stance accommodating pluralities. For example, the feminist monthly *Pazartesi: Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* [Monday: Newspaper for Women] published between 1995 and 2003 is emblematic in this respect. In various issues of the journal, it has been stated that the headscarf bans marginalized veiled women, resulted in their isolation from public life and confined them to the private realm. (Arat, 2004: 288) Arguing against state authoritarianism that prohibits headscarf, the journal conducted interviews with veiled women activists, published passages from pious women intellectuals' narratives and in this way provided a space for them to voice their opinions. (Ibid, 289) Such platforms facilitating dialogue between secular and religious women can be clearly noted as invaluable accomplishments of women's movements in the 1990s. As discussed in Chapter V, the political urgency of hot gender debates in the 2000's resulted in the flourishing of these collaborative platforms. However, during the interviews I have observed that veiled women today are still cautious while talking about the dialogue with the secular feminist movement. They expect more empathy and a genuine interest in their demands to further enhance this dialogue.

As noted before, Eraslan's motivation for writing stems from a commitment to expose the neglected parts of women's history. In this sense, she puts great emphasis on historical accounts providing new readings of women's emancipation in Turkey. Confronting the canonical Republican narrative, which limits the history of women's emancipation to the time period following the foundation of Republic, Eraslan cites influential female figures from the late Ottoman period as important reference points in her line of thinking:

“Fatma Aliye, Emine Semiha, Halide Edip, Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, Safiye Erol, Semiha Ayverdi... I regard these figures as my precursor. There is also

another cohort of women writers who did not personally experience the Ottoman modernization period, were raised in the Republican period but define themselves through Islamic values. Şule Yüksel was the precursor in this new generation of women writers who adopt an Islamist standpoint.” (January 28, 2013)

The intellectual figures cited above from the late Ottoman period are crucial for Eraslan since they reconciled the Islamic faith with claims for gender equality. In a similar way, the generation of pious women writers in the 1970s and 80s, among which Şule Yüksel is a precursor figure, are significant role models for Eraslan. Reference to such influential female figures in history clearly reveals the motives underlying Eraslan’s writing: First, she aims to write women’s history in Turkey anew by rendering pious women visible. Second, in an attempt to define her peculiar place in the public sphere in Turkey today, she attempts to position herself on the stage of history by establishing intellectual ties with like-minded historical female figures.

For Eraslan, there are different turning points in the trajectory of historical accounts on women’s liberation in Turkey. The revelation of the late Ottoman women’s movement is quite significant for Eraslan in the sense that as a result of this discovery, the historical experience of interpreting gender equality through the lenses provided by the Islamic framework have been brought to light. In addition to this, Eraslan cites the rising visibility of pious women in the public sphere in the post-1970 period as another turning point in this respect. Thirdly, with regard to the dialogue between the secular feminists and pious women, she regards the 1990s as another turning point in women’s history.

As Eraslan explains, the language of state feminism, which established a binary opposition between the religious and the secular, has become obsolete in the 1990s and 2000s as a result of women’s discovery of areas of common struggle:

“Struggling against headscarf bans, in union activism or following a rape case, we learned from each others’ sensitivities. These experiences have brought us closer...” (Ibid)

Eraslan underlines how cooperation and dialogue helped erode the distance between secular and religious women. It is important to note that for Eraslan, this dialogue has not only changed the dynamics of secular feminist movement but also pointed out the potential in Islamic women’s activities towards developing a movement based on women’s consciousness.

As alleged above, Eraslan’s views on the lack of an Islamic feminist movement in Turkey mark the uniqueness of her positionality in the public sphere as a pious woman writer who argues for reconciliation of Islamic faith and feminist ideals. Thus, her remarks stressing the commonalities between the demands of secular feminists and religious women could be read as a projection of her authentic relationship with feminism. With an attempt to figure out her position vis-a-vis the secular feminist movements, she stresses the existence of pluralities in feminism and criticizes the tendency to place subjects into categories or groups. She calls for an understanding to evaluate each and every case with its authenticities and differences. It is obvious that this criticism stems from a reaction to categorical attempts to label religiosity and veiling as traditional, backward and as the marker of submission to patriarchy. In this regard, Eraslan’s conception of feminism is motivated by a critique of essential categories and generalizations and is highly informed by concepts such as positionality, context and difference.

The key terms for Eraslan are “solidarity, cooperation and sisterhood”. She uses these terms frequently while explaining her conception of Islamic feminism and her position vis-a-vis feminism in general:

“Cooperation, love, friendship... I take these concepts quite seriously. It is important that we can transact information via women’s experiences and acts.

Despite all the disagreements between us, whenever we, women in the media and literature, come together, we have always learned something from each other...” (Ibid)

This particular discourse stressing cooperation and solidarity represent an intersection point where Islamic references meet secular feminist ideals, generating a new position inbetween. The recurrence of themes such as cooperation and friendship implies that for Eraslan the meaning of feminist ideals can only be discovered in dialogue with other women. This bold emphasis on dialogue could be read as an expression of hybridity, dynamism and change, which prepares the ground for a constant learning process from others’ experiences and repositioning of the self in line with this process.

On the one hand, it is obvious that this stress on dialogue implies close ties with the secular feminist movement. Eraslan tells that she has very close feminist friends whom she can trust by all means:

“...I have come across good feminist women who make me feel secure, encourage me and make me laugh. I was lucky, I guess. Feminism means friendships and solidarity to me...” (Ibid)

On the other hand, this call for dialogue inevitably corresponds to a particular distance between different subject positions. Especially when it comes to labels or naming identity positions, Eraslan prefers to stress the distance inbetween.

As for Ramazanoğlu and her views on the relation between the secular feminist movement and veiled women, it is possible to say that she is both optimistic and cautious. She first states that much has been accomplished to establish a dialogue between secular feminists and veiled women. Having said this, she adds that it took too much time to reach the current state of affairs and this is a major drawback in the dialogue inbetween, which makes it difficult to keep up with constantly changing social and political realities of veiled women. Ramazanoğlu further elaborates on

veiled women's first attempts to contact with feminist women writing in feminist journals:

“For example, journals such as Feminist and Kaktüs excited us. We wanted to get in touch with them in order to figure out whether we could collaborate. There are letters that they have written us. They said: ‘How could we collaborate if you have certain ideas in your mind.’ But they had certain ideas, too... Intentionally or unintentionally, they treated us with a statist understanding.” (June 4, 2013)

Ramazanoğlu clearly puts forward that in these first attempts to build a dialogue, the discourse of secular feminist women was mainly shaped by a statist understanding that regards headscarf as a barrier to women's liberation. To point out the difficulty of establishing a dialogue inbetween, she quotes a friend commenting on secular feminists' attitude vis-a-vis veiled women:

“When a veiled woman speaks, they get surprised as if a jug or a vase suddenly came to speak.” (Ibid)

For Ramazanoğlu, this elitist attitude in the secular feminist movement in Turkey, which limits feminist projects to urban, middle-class, unveiled women, reminds one of the exclusion of black or working class women from the second wave feminism in the West.

Ramazanoğlu expresses that the encounters between secular feminists and veiled women have increased in the aftermath of the foundation of the Başkent Kadın Platformu (Capital Women's Platform), a non-governmental women's organization initiated by Islamist women. She also refers to Amargi Women's Solidarity Cooperative [Amargi Kadın Dayanışma Kooperatifi], a women's NGO based in Istanbul, as a significant platform contributing to the burgeoning of dialogue between two parties. She puts great emphasis on the collective works that provide a ground for secular feminists and veiled women to come together for common goals. In this

sense, she cites the Platform “We Stand By One Another”¹³⁹, (Birbirimize Sahip Çıkıyoruz Platformu) as a turning point in the history of women’s movement in Turkey. Ramazanoğlu narrates one of the protests of the platform as below:

“Nükhet Sirman (a feminist activist and sociology professor in Bosphorus University) took the flag and said: ‘I am there just to share my knowledge with my students. How could you attempt to use me as a police force to throw veiled students out. I object to this...’ Many feminist women have taken part in our protests. All women from the Amargi circle... This was an invaluable experience for us...” (Ibid)

Taking into account all the way that veiled women’s activism and secular women’s movement has gone through, Ramazanoğlu argues that the integration of veiled women’s demands into secular feminist movements has extended the scope of feminist projects in Turkey and revealed how much women need to cooperate and live together side by side.

“...We do not have the luxury to live in our ghettos and produce constant opposition against each other. Everyone has a lot to share with each other... If so many well educated young women today declare that they veil on their own will and experience liberation through their veiling, one has to take them seriously. Finally, they [secular feminists] have started to take them seriously.” (Ibid)

In this frame, similar to Eraslan, she identifies cooperation, dialogue and mutual understanding as key terms in feminist movements. It is also worth noting that for Ramazanoğlu, this dialogue should embrace all different segments of society. Here, she refers to another platform called *Women’s Initiative for Peace*, which brings women together to collaborate on the Kurdish question and the recent attempts to maintain peace. In this sense, one can suggest that feminist politics for Ramazanoğlu does not only concern women’s rights and demands but should have a say about

¹³⁹This was a women’s platform founded in 2008 with the aim to bring together both veiled and unveiled women around the common cause of protesting against headscarf bans.

other policy realms as well, especially other right claims. Accordingly, in Ramazanoğlu's mind-set, feminist politics crosscuts all political debates with regard to identity politics and displays an intersectionalist character.

As clearly seen above, for Ramazanoğlu, the dialogue recently established between secular and veiled women is quite promising in the sense that it has demolished the elitist, hierarchical relationships in the feminist movements in Turkey. In this regard, Ramazanoğlu's narrative is marked by optimism, not resentment. On the other hand, this optimistic narrative is followed by a cautious narrative that points out the orthodox tendencies in the secular feminist movement. Ramazanoğlu identifies the Merve Kavakçı case as the marker of the distance between veiled women's demands and secular women's conception of women's rights and liberties.

In 1999 elections, Merve Kavakçı has been elected as an MP from the Felicity Party. Yet, when she entered the parliament, she was precluded to take the parliamentary oath due to her headscarf. Ramazanoğlu reminds us that on the very same day, a group of secular women, who define themselves as feminist, protested against Kavakçı and called her to leave the parliament:

“...Rather than arguing for a pluralist understanding of women's representation in the parliament, they defended a monolithic, Republican approach that condemns individuals to labels... How can you come together and cooperate with such a movement?” (Ibid)

For Ramazanoğlu, this orthodox attitude towards veiling in the secular feminist movement confines veiled women to a fixed, inferior position and eradicates their claims for fundamental rights, resulting in frustration and disappointment for many veiled women. Ramazanoğlu also cites KA-DER (Kadın Adayları Destekleme Derneği), a women's organization that aims to provide training for women aspiring

to take a role in politics, as another platform that had reproduced the orthodox Republican conception of veiling and refused to collaborate with veiled women for some time.

In sum, Ramazanoğlu's narrative on the secular feminist movement in Turkey clearly reflects the historical stages that the feminist movements in Turkey have gone through since the post-1980 era. Stressing both the promising developments and the pervasive exclusionary tendencies, it displays an optimistic as well as a cautious character. Taking her account into consideration, one can suggest that the current era of dialogue and cooperation in the feminist movements has not totally erased veiled women's worries about exclusion and their resentment dating back to the initial stages of the movement. While talking about their experiences with the secular feminist movement, veiled women still resort to a discourse that is alert about an elitist, exclusionary stance of the orthodox Republican understanding.

Tuksal's narrative on the initial stages of the women's movement in Turkey echoes the narrative lines in Eraslan's and Ramazanoğlu's accounts. For Tuksal, the most acute effects of the Republican conception of "ideal citizen" throughout the modernization processes in the country were observed in dispositions, mores and manners, codes of outfit and in status symbols. As a result of the promotion of the "ideal" model, a bifurcation has emerged in the psyche of citizens, leaving them trapped between their authentic selves and the ideal self. This ideal self, which is based on a Westernist understanding in each and every aspect of life, ranging from appearance to taste and consumption patterns, excluded the Islamic selves and confined them to an "inferior" set of dispositions and a different habitus. In this line of thought, Tuksal argues that the initial stages of the feminist movement has reproduced the Republican conception of "ideal" citizen and categorized veiled

women as victims of patriarchy. According to this, pious women, who fail to comply with the Republican image of “ideal” woman, are automatically associated with certain dispositions, life styles and tastes. For instance, Tuksal tells that in an article, a feminist academic whom she is acquainted with, wrote about Capital Women’s Platform by a particular reference to women’s habits in the Platform to take off shoes in front of the door:

“She felt the need to write about the shoes in front of the door because this is a cultural categorization... It’s another way of saying that they are from a certain class. It takes too much time for people to get rid of this kind of a perspective...” (April 15, 2013)

For Tuksal, this reference clearly implies the automatic association of veiled women with provincial identities. She maintains that while the “ideal” Republican woman represents an urban, liberated, high status position, veiling and veiled women’s habitus are associated with an “inferior” set of values, tastes and lifestyles in the prevailing power configuration in the women’s movement in Turkey.

On the other hand, to stress the democratic advancements in the secular feminist public, Tuksal also points out the recent attempts to collaborate with veiled women. She stresses the significance of collaborating together against headscarf bans:

“Recently we have organized a petition campaign against headscarf bans and many secular friends who haven’t supported us before have agreed to sign... This points out a positive turning point for us.” (Ibid)

Yet, Tuksal is not altogether content with the current state of the secular women’s movement. She states that there is still a long way to go with regard to enhancing the cooperation between secular and veiled women. Like other pious women writers interviewed in this study, she is quite cautious while talking about the recent advancements in the women’s movement:

“What I expect (from secular feminists) is more empathy... For God’s sake, just be curious about Islamist women. Ask whether they really generate threat for you... I expect them to ask what kind of peculiarities veiled women have, instead of saying that veiled women are obedient and submissive... We have still a long way to go...” (Ibid)

In a similar vein, Karaca also produces an optimistic yet at the same time cautious narrative like other writers do. First, she outlines the trajectory of secular feminist movement in Turkey from the exclusionary approaches in the 1980s that condemned veiled women to an inferior status to its shift towards a more inclusive stance beginning with the 1990s. Karaca denotes that as secular feminists came to acknowledge that veiled women can experience empowerment in society through religion, they revised their conception of veiling and religion:

“It has come into the open that religion may help women become more powerful actors in their struggle against the patriarchal system in society... Along with this change in perspective, feminists came to acknowledge that women who are refused to enter schools because of their headscarf, experience discrimination on the basis of their womanhood situation. Men with the same religious conviction never suffered in the same way that veiled women did... Therefore, in this power configuration, not aligning with veiled women would be equivalent to supporting the patriarchal system. Feminists have questioned this and adopted a more dialogic approach...” (June 27, 2013)

Yet, Karaca’s narrative adopts a pessimistic tone when it shifts towards the recent political climate in the country. Referring to the rise of criticisms against the current pro-Islamist government, Islamist identity and veiled women in the aftermath of Gezi protests, Karaca states that cooperation between veiled women and secular feminists cannot be as strong in the future as it used to be:

“Lately, we managed to communicate with feminists better than it used to be in the past but the recent political incidents distanced us again... The political incidents in the last month [the Gezi Park protests] revealed that the reaction towards pious people has only receded temporarily in recent years but never faded away altogether. This showed me that the will to live together is still missing in this country... Interestingly or maybe not so interestingly, the

target during the riots [the Gezi Park protests] were again veiled women...”
(Ibid)

As Karaca’s remark above clearly exposes, her relationship with the secular feminist public is to large extend shaped by her concerns/ optimism about the status of veiled women in society. The fact that the increasing polarization between secular and pious selves in contemporary Turkey casts a shadow on the enhancement of veiled women’s status in society, makes Karaca adopt a cautious stance vis-à-vis the secular feminist public.

To sum, it is clear that veiled women’s perception about their status in society is still to a great extend characterized by feelings of resentment and disappointment. Even though they have experienced relative empowerment in recent years with the rise in their public visibility, when the overall picture is taken into account, their position in the public sphere today is still marked by a struggle against marginalization, feelings of resentment and a highly cautious stance vis-a-vis the secular women’s movement.

8.5.8. The Label “Feminist”

The question as to how women columnists define their relationship to feminism constitutes a main pillar in this study. A detailed analysis of the narrative strategies that women writers adopt while reflecting on their relationship to feminism, can allow us to comprehend how women columnists perceive identity categories as well as the position they take vis-a-vis hegemonic public discourses on feminism and feminist self-identification. The interviews revealed that while some pious women columnists refuse the feminist self-identification because of ideological or strategic reasons, others may adopt this label by redefining its scope and meaning.

In this frame, Eraslan states that she does not prefer to call herself openly as “feminist”. On the one hand, she identifies the notion of family as the primary dispute among veiled women and secular feminists; on the other, she stresses that differences do not endanger the possibility of dialogue. Her narrative shifts between a stress on commonalities emerging out of women’s friendships and a counter-narrative pointing out differences inbetween. Thus, one can safely suggest that her denial of the label “feminist” does not connote an absolute distance between her position and the feminist thinking. Rather, it should be interpreted as the denial of the baggage that is associated with the label feminist in the public imagination. Eraslan explain her strategic concerns as below:

“I do not openly say that I am a feminist. But they always call me Islamist feminist. If I have to say something, I use the term ‘women’s consciousness’... I prefer this shelter against all those traditional views criticizing feminism... Together with some friends, we use this phrase to explain our sensitivity without using the word ‘feminist’. It protects me...” (January 28, 2013)

From here, it is clear that Eraslan’s refrainment from outspoken feminist-self-identification is a protective mechanism that she resorts to against stigmatization in public discourse. This protective shelter allows her to speak in a much more secure and self-confident manner in the public sphere.

When I ask her to define her relationship to feminism, Ramazanoğlu states that she is a “fragile feminist”. For her, a fragile feminist is someone who criticizes feminism in terms of many aspects but at the same time takes the feminist acquisitions seriously and interprets the world through the feminist framework:

“I can define myself as a fragile feminist but this has nothing to do with being defined as feminist from outside... A fragile feminist position criticizes feminism, acknowledges its weaknesses but at the same time makes use of its accomplishments. It even includes a better understanding of Qur’an in the mirror of feminism...” (June 4, 2013)

Ramazanoğlu stresses that she would accept to be called “feminist” only if she herself defines what “feminist” means. Her stance vis-a-vis feminism is composed of a sui generis combination of a particular critique of feminist ideas and a reinterpretation of them through Islamic lenses. In this sense, the label “fragile feminist” used by Ramazanoğlu refers to a very peculiar position in which Islam and feminism get mixed in the same pot and gain further horizons. Furthermore, this is a cautious identity position that involves certain reservations, concerns and flexible self-positionings. Ramazanoğlu elaborates on two reasons explaining this cautious stance. First, since she poses major criticisms against the secular feminist framework, her “fragile feminist” position also involves a certain distance with feminism. Second, Ramazanoğlu points out the risks involved in being defined as “feminist” by orthodox Islamists. She states that since her conception of Islamic feminism requires the patriarchal interpretations of Islamic verses to be revised, she has faced reactions, even threats in the past from orthodox Islamist figures who regard her call for revision as deviation from Islam:

“Religious scholars’ commentary on the Qur’an with regard to the issue of women is regarded so holy that people ask: ‘How can you know better, he is a great religious scholar after all’. He may be a great religious scholar but every scholar speaks from within a particular time and place. His words are not holy since they are not holy text or divine testimony... But when you say that new commentary is needed, you confront reactionary questions such as ‘are you talking about a new religion?’. Once, I gave a talk somewhere and a youngster from that meeting sent me a message full of threats: ‘You are a horrible woman... You talk about a new religion... This means you are talking about a new prophet. You make such a claim that it makes you very dangerous.’ What does this mean? He calls other believers to act... This is really frightening. We are expected to submit to certain patriarchal interpretations of Qur’an as if they were holy text. But we cannot accept this... At this point it is really dangerous to be labeled as feminist from outside, by orthodox Muslims.” (Ibid)

Similar to Ramazanoğlu, Tuksal also uses a peculiar terminology when asked to define her relationship with feminism and feminist identity. She defines her stance as

a “sui generis feminist” position and calls herself as “thinking feminist”. She states that the term “sui generis feminism” can actually be utilized by everyone because everyone appropriates feminism according to her needs and demands. Thus, Tuksal does not regard the “feminist” label as compliance to a set of fixed premises. Rather, in Tuksal’s mind-set, feminism assumes a flexible character that enables one to adjust feminist ideals to different subject positions:

“I do not like the idea that I should accept feminism as it is... It is very constraining to say that ‘Okey, I belong here, I will not search any more.’ Therefore, I keep thinking, exploring and looking over the barriers... I got to know feminism through the readings I have done in 1997... Now I know a lot more and have experienced more. But this did not prevent me from further reflecting on how I relate to feminism.” (April 15, 2013)

Before explaining what the label “feminist” means for her, Tuksal problematizes the usage of the label in the public sphere. According to Tuksal, the primary aim in the public usage of this label is to categorize subjects. In this sense, for Tuksal, the discursive connotations of the label “feminist” depend on the intentions of the user. It is very likely that this label is utilized with the aim to confine subjects to certain pre-set categories and subject positions that in return serve to the fixation of their identities. Tuksal is especially cautious about the usage of the label “feminist” in conservative circles. In an interview given to *Birikim*, a quarterly journal in Turkey, she refers to the assassination of Gonca Kuriş as the emblematic incident revealing the orthodox Islamist tendency towards feminists.¹⁴⁰ Kuriş, an Islamic feminist in radical Islamist circles, was kidnapped and murdered in 1998 by the Turkish Hizbollah because of her remarks about the need to reinterpret the Qur’an through women’s point of view. This brutal silencing of an Islamic feminist voice had generated certain consequences for the articulation of Islamic feminist identities in public. Tuksal states that before the assassination she refrained from appearing on TV

¹⁴⁰ See <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/sayi/137/kadin-bakis-acisina-sahip-olmaliyiz>.

together with Kuriş because of this violent attitude towards Islamic feminists. (Ibid) Even though the violent attitude towards Islamic feminists is by no means representative of the whole Islamic community, it resulted in discursive barriers regarding the open declaration of Islamic feminist positions.

On the other hand, despite this negative attitude, Tuksal expresses that since she has become familiar with the feminist thought and activism, she has never attempted to distance herself from feminism:

“I have benefited from feminist literature and feminist research methods a lot. In addition, I believe that the rights that women enjoy today have been achieved mainly thanks to the feminist struggles. Therefore, if someone asks me whether I call myself feminist, I do not want to say ‘No, I am not a feminist’. Because I find the feminist struggle significant...” (Ibid)

Tuksal states that the open articulation of feminist identity depends on the character of the public from which Islamist women speak. She indicates that in a public environment where the label “feminist” is used as a swearword, she calls herself feminist without further explanation or any reservation, which, for her, is an emblematic struggle against the patriarchal mind-set. Moreover, she declares that she feels comfortable to call herself feminist when she is among feminist friends. Yet, she notes that in big conferences or meetings, before calling herself a feminist, she feels the need to explain what kind of feminism she has in mind. Similarly, in occasions where the compatibility of Islam and feminism is questioned, she mentions that the audience expects her to further explain and justify her position vis-a-vis feminism. In this regard, Tuksal’s narrative reveals the fact that the declaration of an identity position cannot be limited to a fixed, stable statement but deeply varies depending on the character of the public in which this statement is made. In other words, articulation of an identity position does not simply encapsulate the negotiation of certain identity claims but also entails a positioning vis-a-vis the

public reception of the identity in question. As Tuksal states, articulation of identity positions may get stronger or weaker, as one enters into different publics with different attitudes towards the identity in question. Tuksal's following statement is quite meaningful in this regard:

“Your feminist identity is welcomed in feminist circles while it is seen as a flaw in the Islamist community. The vice versa applies to your Islamist identity. You always have to face this dilemma...” (Ibid)

From here, it is obvious that presence in multiple and even allegedly contradictory publics destabilizes articulations of identity positions. Tuksal's multiple belongings to Islamist and feminist communities and the discursive lines that accompany each identity position, make it difficult for her to use stable identity labels. Given the claim that Islamic feminists distort the Islamic tradition or that Islam and feminism are irreconcilable, Tuksal feels the necessity to adjust her discourse so as to defend her Islamic feminist position or protect herself from being labeled with negative connotations imposed on her feminist identity.

In this context, her defining of her relationship to feminism as a *sui generis* stance stems from her multiple belongings and the flexibility of her position. For Tuksal, this flexible character of identities does not damage the integrity of identity positions since identities are not fully harmonious constructs; rather, they may also involve contradictions and conflicting parts. To explain this point, she refers to an interview that she gave to a German journal related to the Green Party. She tells about this particular interview as follows:

“They cannot relate veiled women with feminism. Therefore, you have to explain them. The interviewer asked me whether this is a contradiction. I said ‘yes, it is a contradiction. He said ‘how come’. And I responded: ‘For God’s sake, does everything in our lives have to be consistent? We experience some issues in a contradictory way.’ In the end, he was not convinced...” (Ibid)

Tuksal does not claim that she has perfectly reconciled Islam and feminism. For her, it is a relentless endeavour marked by shifts, instabilities and questionings. Therefore, she defines herself as a “thinking feminist” who constantly deliberates feminist ideas.

“I think about feminist ideas a lot... Therefore, I am probably a thinking feminist. Always questioning, always in search... Since the time when I first came across feminist literature, I have always adopted this critical stance... I still try to negotiate feminist ideas and understand what good they do to me.” (Ibid)

As seen above, while explaining her relationship to feminism, Tuksal uses different terms and labels such as “sui generis feminist” or “thinking feminist”. She also denotes that depending on the character of the public she may prefer to utilize stonger or weaker articulation of her feminist position. Yet, Tuksal never refrains from revealing her profeminist position:

“I resort to various usages of the term but I have never said ‘I am not a feminist’. (Ibid)

It is obvious that Tuksal puts great emphasis on public declaration of identity positions. Unlike most of the women columnists interviewed in this study, Tuksal does not find identity labels inherently restrictive. She clearly differentiates between the discursive baggage imposed on identity positions from outside and the sui generis position that subjects themselves take by appropriating identity claims in accordance with their own needs and demands. For Tuksal, if identity labels are not used for the purpose of categorization and fixation of identities through negative connotations, they may be utilized as discursive tools to put forward our sui generis interpretation of identity claims. Having such a pro-identity stance, Tuksal is quite critical of those who strictly refrain from feminist self-identification even though they may support feminist goals. In this frame, Tuksal thinks that if one supports feminist struggles in

one way or another, one should not deny the feminist label because it is a useful tool to express awareness about feminist goals and methods.

It is quite critical that for Tuksal, commitment to an identity position does not preclude criticism of that particular identity. Her approach to feminist self-identification clearly reveals this point. On the one hand, she openly calls herself feminist since she believes that the feminist label is a useful discursive tool to articulate support for feminist struggles. However, this self-identification in her mind-set does not correspond to an absolute commitment to feminism since there are many aspects of secular feminism that she is highly critical of. The issue of family, sexuality and the elitist character of the secular feminist publics come forward as prominent themes in her critique.

Finally, unlike writers who attempt to reconfigure the hegemonic meanings underlying identity labels, Karaca strictly refuses to define her identity position through labels. She thinks that identity labels are quite restrictive in the sense that they confine the self to a particular position while ignoring other aspects of life. Upon my asking where she locates herself within the Islamic feminist framework, Karaca states the following:

“I am not a person who confines herself to a single identity position. Neither do I define myself only as a mother, nor as a veiled woman and Muslim... Therefore I would not define myself only as feminist or Islamic feminist either.” (June 27, 2013)

This stance shows us that for Karaca, self-identification with a particular identity position precludes belonging to other identity positions and thus cannot be reconciled with multiple belonging. Therefore, even though Karaca may espouse certain identity claims, she refrains from openly identifying herself with certain identity labels.

Another reason for Karaca to distance herself from Islamic feminist self-identification could be related to her critique of secular feminisms. Like other veiled writers, Karaca is quite critical of the secular feminist movements' approach to veiled women particularly in the 1980s and 90s. In her mind-set, feminism's secular character is so dominant that it leaves little room to re-interpret feminist premises through the Islamic framework. Therefore, for her, Islamic feminism is still an ideal that is not fully realized yet. Her remark below is clearly expressive of this approach:

“How can we deconstruct the pre-defined secular codes of feminism? That's the question... There is already a particular conception of Islamic feminism but its content has not been finalized yet... As a Muslim, I should try to figure out how I can appropriate feminism into my own belief system. Which feminist ideas can I incorporate into the framework that I define as just and good? I should try to find that out... There are some differences in between.... [In Islamic feminism] you do not react to the ontological consequences of being a woman, but to the negative meanings ascribed to your ontology...” (Ibid)

According to Karaca, feminist self-identification does not allow enough room to renegotiate feminist identity and appropriate it in accordance with one's values and priorities. For example, she regards secular feminism as antithetical to the understanding of disposition in Islam that defines motherhood as the distinguishing trait of women. Coding feminism as anti-motherhood, Karaca states that her alliance with feminist ideas is valid only to the extent that feminism does not attempt to disassociate motherhood from womanhood:

“I have never denied the fact that a woman is first and foremost a mother... A woman's life is not limited to motherhood but ontologically she is created with a potential to be a mother...” (Ibid)

In this sense, it is possible to argue that despite her call for revision of essentialist, exclusionary aspects of secular feminism, Karaca reproduces the very fixed identity categories she herself criticizes. Fixing feminist self-identification as monolithic and

exclusionary, she discards the possibility of coming up with hybrid, dynamic and multiple identity positions in the realm of feminist politics. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that Karaca's narrative can be stabilized as totally devoid of a potentiality to reconfigure a dialogic conception of feminism. One can suggest that her multi-layered, complex narrative encompasses essentialist and anti-essentialist tones side by side. In this sense, her remark below clearly points out the existence of anti-essentialist tones in her narrative that confront stereotypical conceptions of feminism:

“I think feminism is not anti-man. It is a reflexive approach that opposes the attempts defining societal relations over concepts like power, supremacy and hierarchy. Feminism derives its momentum from such a reflex... Feminism is supposed to say something on the relationship between powerful women and women who cannot get access to each and every sphere of life. It is already raising its voice in this regard and should continue to do so...” (Ibid)

8.5.9. Narratives on the AKP's Gender Policies and Veiled Women's Status in Contemporary Turkey

As noted earlier, veiled women columnists remind us that the improvement of veiled women's legal rights in recent years has not necessarily led to the elimination of discriminatory discourses altogether. They point out that veiled women still constitute a marginalized group under the pro-Islamist AKP administration.

Challenging the commonsensical claim that veiled women are better off under the AKP government, Tuksal underlines that only in the third period of the AKP administration (2011-present), it became possible to enter universities with headscarf. For Tuksal, until the third era, it has been understandable that the AKP did not take action with regard to headscarf bans in order not to clash with secular

sensitivities; but the refrainment from taking action in the third era, i.e, the era of consolidation, implies something else.

In an interview she gave to the press, Tuksal argues that the AKP administration is aware of the fact that they are the only alternative for veiled women and they can take their votes in any case:

“Unless the issue of headscarf is resolved, veiled women would not vote for another party. But when the problem is resolved, votes may disperse and the AKP may cease to be the only option.”¹⁴¹ (April 15, 2013)

As this remark reveals, in addition to the orthodox Republican understandings deeply embedded in Turkish politics and the elitist character of the feminist movements, Tuksal identifies the inertia of the AKP government regarding the headscarf problem as another serious barrier in front of veiled women’s rights and liberties. In this frame, for her, even if veiled women today have a greater say in the public sphere today, they still feel confined and unliberated. To stress this point, she uses the following allegory:

“A flea that is kept in a bottle can jump only as much as the bottle’s height. It can jump only this much even after it is released.” (Ibid)

On the other hand, despite her harsh criticisms against the AKP regarding the patriarchal party politics and the secondary status ascribed to veiled women’s rights and liberties in the party mind-set, Tuksal does not categorically oppose all AKP policies in the realm of gender politics. For example, unlike many secular feminist groups, she states that PM Erdogan’s pronatalist call for three children in every family should not be read as an imposition on women:

“...why do we always imagine the ideal family with a single child or two children? ... I don’t find it right to define this family ideal as normal and

¹⁴¹ See “Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal: Ak Parti’de Etkili Üç Cemaat Var”, 2012, *Taraf*, September 29, <http://arsiv.taraf.com.tr/yazilar/nese-duzel/hidayet-sefkatli-tuksal-ak-parti-de-etkili-uc/23749/>

labeling everything outside it as abnormal... If I can choose to give birth as many children as I want, then I don't see a problem here... We don't have to impose on women a competitive model where she constantly competes with men... I believe that the AKP tries to produce pragmatist, capitalist policies that also take into account women's motherhood conditions and I don't regard it odd." (Ibid)

Here, Tuksal clearly declares her support for some of the conservative policies of the AKP which prioritize motherhood and family values. Before, we have seen that despite the criticisms she posed against the AKP's anti-abortion initiative in 2013, she distanced herself from the secular feminist movement in opposing this initiative. Although she is critical of any ban imposed on women's reproductive capacities, she states that she does not approve of the idea of abortion. Thus, she does not agree with the secular feminists defending the right to abortion through slogans such as "my body, my decision". In this frame, it is possible to suggest that her peculiar Islamic feminist perspective positions Tuksal in-between the conservative AKP gender politics and the secular feminist camp. As a result, Tuksal's Islamic feminist position make her appreciate some of AKP's conservative gender policies, while criticizing others.

It is obvious that recent abortion debates represent a critical juncture that mobilized both secular and Islamic feminists against AKP's anti-abortion initiative. Like most of other women writers in this study, Ramazanoğlu clearly expresses her criticisms against the anti-abortion initiative. Yet, similar to Tuksal, she does not approve of the idea of abortion and criticizes AKP's conservative gender politics from a pro-feminist Islamic position that does not necessarily oppose AKP's policies in a categorical way. On the other hand, one should also keep in mind that this peculiar position does not alleviate her critical stance vis-a-vis the patriarchal tones in AKP's gender politics. She openly states that AKP's conservative policies should not limit women's status in society to familial and maternal roles:

“...AKP’s discourse has always been a very male discourse. Even at times when it seems to be protecting women, it deals with women within the confines of family. Yet, it is not necessary to define women within family. First and foremost, women have an individual existence; they don’t have to get married or form families. One should first acknowledge woman as a free individual with rights and liberties...” (Ibid)

In discussions so far, it has become clear that pious women writers acknowledge the democratic advancements in the women’s movement in Turkey in recent years. Moreover, they state that veiled women’s status in society has improved in the last decades and veiled women have become much more visible when compared to the past. However, in their narratives they also feel the need to emphasize that despite a pro-Islamist government’s being in power for the last decade, veiled women’s position in the public sphere is still a marginal position. Pointing out the ongoing marginalization of veiled women’s status in society, Karaca expresses her concerns as the following:

“Veiled women still have not acquired their fundamental rights and liberties... Legally it is possible that a veiled lawyer can enter the courtroom... But still some judges do not let in the women who want to perform their profession as lawyers with their headscarves. Interestingly, this happens under the AKP administration that has allegedly got too strong... Given that veiled women lawyers cannot perform their profession despite the fact that there is no legal barrier in this regard, I cannot ignore this discrimination and use a softer, unifying discourse...” (June 27, 2013)

Karaca states that it is even more necessary today to articulate the marginalization that veiled women face. I have talked to Karaca after the Gezi protests have broken out. Therefore, her narrative is much more directed against the orthodox Republican reflexes regarding veiled women, rather than being a critique of the AKP government’s gender politics or its inertia with regard to veiled women’s rights and liberties.¹⁴² Even though my questions did not specifically refer to Gezi incidents, Karaca frequently told about the implications of these protests. Her narrative

¹⁴²Karaca reads Gezi Park protests as an orthodox Republican attempt directly targeting at Islamic selves, especially veiled women and aiming to overthrow the pro-Islamic AKP government.

includes references to the recent physical and discursive attacks to veiled women that were reported to have taken place during the protests. In this sense, the overall tone of Karaca's narrative discourse is resentful.

When compared to Tuksal's or Razamanoğlu's narrative and their stance during the Gezi protests, Karaca is more pessimistic about veiled women's status in society and the secular front's approach to veiled women.¹⁴³ Her concerns about the Republican orthodoxy and veiled women's status in society can clearly be seen in the following statement:

“The lives of people who have a religious lifestyles are shadowed again by the question as to whether we are going back to the times of 28 February. These kind of problems never end in this country. The struggle between the ones who claim that they are the constitutive block in this country and others who say that they represent the people's will never ends. Veiled woman as a symbol because of her outfit is placed at the very center of this struggle...”
(Ibid)

From here, it is clear that Karaca interprets the recent Gezi park protests as a new attempt of the Republican orthodoxy to suppress the Islamist rise in Turkish politics. Her concerns mainly focus on the status of veiled women because she thinks that veiled women are utilized by political actors as symbols of Islamist politics and thus are treated as scapegoats. In this vein, Karaca's priority is to draw attention to the

¹⁴³While Karaca chooses to utilize a much more resentful narrative tone to combat against the ongoing marginalization of veiled women, Ramazanoğlu and Tuksal imply that it is necessary not to further agitate the clash in society between veiled women and the secular front. Ramazanoğlu states that instead of relentlessly underlining the discriminations and the victim position that veiled women have experienced so far, she prefers to use unifying statements and stress possibilities for collaboration and common experiences. Similarly, Tuksal points out the barriers that she has come across as a veiled women writer throughout her career but at the end of her narrative, she says the following: “Anyway, these are small things...” This statement could be seen as a discursive tool to refrain from perpetuating the victim position, to open a space to foster dialogue and find a resolution. In this frame, veiled women writers utilize different discursive schemas to struggle against the ongoing violations of veiled women's rights and liberties. While some prefer to put the stress exclusively on veiled women's victim position, others resort to more reconciliatory and accomodating discourses.

danger of stigmatization of veiled women as scapegoats in the dispute between the Islamist and secularist camps.

For Karaca, the ongoing conflicts between the secular and Islamist camps disadvantages veiled women the most because the reallocation of public roles along with the rising visibility of veiled women generates a feeling of victimization and unjust treatment in secular camps and turns veiled women into targets of secularists' anger. To oppose this, Karaca constructs her narrative discourse with a particular emphasis on the critique of the Republican front and does not allocate much space for the critique of the AKP's gender discourses. Yet, from her articles in *Habertürk* newspaper, we know that she is in fact quite critical of the AKP government's ignorance towards veiled women.

With regard to the AKP's pro-natalist policies and attempts to restrict abortion, Karaca reminds us that the AKP has neither abolished the right to abortion nor enforced policies enforcing pro-natalism and thus it is not possible to call the AKP authoritarian in this regard:

“Since the regime in Turkey relies on Islamophobia and generates a particular type of intellectual whose line of thinking is orientalized, the discourse encouraging families to have three children is presented as a massive initiative... As if there is an order for three children and abortion is forbidden... While women protested AKP's abortion discourse, arguing that their private lives are under surveillance, we said ‘one minute... the PM only wants to put the issue of abortion into debate...’ (Ibid)

Referring to the recent feminist critiques posed against the anti-abortion initiative and Erdoğan's recommendations to have at least three children, Karaca further declares that the political agenda should not be dominated by feminist concerns since gender mainstreaming or feminist consciousness may turn into obstacles hindering

the democratic public debate. Her following remark is quite explanatory of her position:

“Women’s consciousness should not block reasonable thinking. Gender may be a useful concept but we see that looking at social and political events only through gendered lenses could be extremely blinding... Unfortunately some women intellectuals have gone blind today. They label everything they see as sexist... Justice is to pay the attention that you show to a particular subject to other phenomena as well... I would not let my feminist identity to absorb the economic and political aspects of events... I cannot agree with the fact that feminist politics may abolish other rights and freedoms...” (Ibid)

Stressing that feminism should not mean superiority of women, Karaca opposes the current feminist critique against the AKP government in many respects. One can suggest that Karaca’s critique of feminist consciousness is closely related to the contemporary social and political context. In a political environment in the aftermath of Gezi protests, in which veiled women have been turned into political symbols of Islamist politics at some occasions, Karaca feels the need to emphasize her critique of feminisms vis-à-vis her critique of Islamist community and the AKP government. In this sense, the point of emphasis in her narrative varies considerably depending on the context, feminisms’ approach to veiled women and Islam. Thus, it is possible to claim that when the threat perception against the Islamic selves and veiled women’s position in society rises, then a pious woman writer may curb her critique of the Islamist community and politics.

8.5.10. Concluding Remarks

Every subject in the public sphere speaks from a particular location, experience and context. (Alcoff 2006) In return, the frame of reference in which the subject is embedded influences how she sees and interprets the social facts around her. Thus, the situatedness of a subject position makes it necessary to unfold the complexities of

public discourses operating on this particular position and how the subject in question negotiates her position vis-a-vis the existing discursive framework. In this sense, as seen in the discussions so far, the study of pious women columnists' negotiation of feminism, Islamic feminism and feminist identity first requires one to map out the contours of their position in the public sphere.

Pious women columnists' narratives revealed that they are pioneer women in the social and political life in Turkey. In their narratives they frequently make generational analysis, positioning themselves as the first generation of pious women intellectuals in the public sphere in Turkey who have publicly articulated the discriminations against veiling and veiled women in the post-1980 period. This pioneer role renders their position in the public sphere extremely significant yet at the same time quite vulnerable. One can suggest that their vulnerability stems from their critical standpoint with a dual focus. Since they criticize both the secular front for its exclusionary discourses and the Islamist community for its patriarchal viewpoints, pious women columnists' position in society constantly shifts between different critical standpoints and is hard to pin down. While their veiling is seen as a threat in the secular front, their critical, pro-feminist stance is harshly criticized in the patriarchal Islamist community. This dynamic, hybrid critical position subjects pious women writers to different vulnerabilities in different contexts.

As pioneer women in the public sphere who have struggled against the discriminatory state policies since the 1980s, pious women columnists produce quite cautious narratives that remind us that the marginalization of veiling and violation of their rights is an ongoing phenomenon in contemporary Turkey. Although they acknowledge that many promising legal steps have been taken recently to improve veiled women's status in society, they underline that these legal achievements do not

guarantee the elimination of discriminatory discourses from society altogether. Their narratives point out the fact that the coding of veiling as inferior is deeply embedded in the public imagination. Thus, one can safely argue that this cautious tone in pious women columnists' narratives obviously has an impact on their approach to identity labels and negotiation of identity positions.

Moreover, their pioneer roles as pious women writers in the cultural/intellectual field in the post-1980 period further reinforces the cautious narrative tone in their accounts. As discussed earlier, the entrenched secular-Islamic divide in Turkey positions pious women writers hierarchically vis-a-vis the norms and values of the secular cultural/intellectual field. Pointing out the binary opposition established between Islamic norms and lifestyles and the secular literary public, pious women writers declare that powerful agents in the secular literary field do not grant them intellectual legitimacy and thus their voice is usually omitted from secular literary platforms. However, as their accounts disclose, not only the secular literary public but also the Islamic public may regard their writing as the violation of the norm.

Taking into account these myriad axes of vulnerability, one can argue that when speaking in public, veiled women columnists develop certain discursive strategies to avoid pejorative meanings ascribed to their vulnerable position. In addition, beyond strategical tactics, this state of vulnerability provides veiled women columnists a frame of reference within which they negotiate their position in society and the identity categories associated with it. In this sense, their negotiation of identities does not merely consist of tactical strategies but also encapsulates a particular commitment to certain identities as well a disavowal of others, which can be interpreted as a repercussion of their situatedness.

As seen throughout this chapter, veiled women columnists' approach to identity positions is quite dynamic, hybrid and exceeds any fixed categorization. This dynamic approach is quite visible in their ideas on the coexistence of Islam and feminism. When asked about their approach to feminism, pious women writers' first reaction is to differentiate between feminism as a Western ideology and feminism that is motivated by a critique of essential categories and highly informed by concepts such as positionality, context and difference. For them, the latter conception of feminism can open a space to reinterpret gender equality through the Islamic framework.

It is quite clear that pious women columnists engage in a challenging attempt to figure out their position vis-a-vis the Islamic feminist discourse and reconcile the Islamic faith with feminist thinking. The reconciliation between Islam and feminism in their mindset is constantly reconstructed, depending on the issues at stake. For example, while criticizing the patriarchal thinking of some leading intellectual figures in the Islamist community, the feminist framework overweighs in their narratives. On the other hand, when political debates about family, sexuality or abortion are at stake, they may prioritize certain Islamic concepts over the feminist line of thinking. In short, one can safely conclude that pious women columnists' conception of Islamic feminism is never a static intersection point but is highly contingent and contextual.

Pious women columnists' narratives about Islamic feminism is promising and refreshing in the sense that they point out novel ways as to how to reconfigure the official narratives about women's history, challenge the essentialist categories in feminist thinking and acknowledge dynamism, hybridity and multiplicity in identity categories. However, it is interesting to note that despite their deconstructive

approach to essentialist categories, their narratives may reproduce stereotypical assumptions labeling secular feminist discourses as extremist, anti-family and anti-motherhood. In this respect, at certain points they fall short in providing a truly deconstructionist approach to essentialist categories.

With respect to feminist self-identification, their approaches constitute a wide, heterogeneous array of identity positions, ranging from disavowal of identity categories to strategic tactics, from differentiation between being defined from outside and self-definition to acknowledgment of contradictions embedded in multiple belonging. In this frame, it is possible to claim that different concerns and frames of reference influence pious women columnists' negotiation of feminist self-identification. All pious women columnists resort to various strategic tactics in their narratives to avoid stigmatization and negative labeling. Yet, while some openly declare themselves as Islamic feminist, others rigidly deny any such labeling.

As seen in the analysis of their weekly newspaper columns, pious women columnists cooperate with the feminist subaltern public on certain issues. While criticizing the exclusionary tendencies of secular feminisms on the one hand; on the other, they call for dialogue and cooperation. Yet, the idea of cooperation as a main narrative theme does not display a linear, steady trajectory in their accounts. At some points, pious women columnists may choose to distance themselves from any association with the secular feminist public. In a nutshell, their highly contingent and contextual narratives evidently indicate that negotiation of identity categories and collaborative politics of identity always take place within a specific frame of reference, the contours of which is mapped out by subjects' position in the power configuration in society.

CHAPTER IX

INTRICATE IDENTITIES/ VULNERABLE POSITIONALITIES: FINAL ANALYSIS ON WOMEN COLUMNISTS' NEGOTIATION OF FEMINIST SELF-IDENTIFICATION

9.1. Feminist Scholarship and Puzzling Identity Narratives

As women columnists' negotiations of feminist identity exemplified throughout this study, identities involve multiplicities, contradictions, strategic elements, constantly shifting belongings and contextual positionings. When asked to elaborate on their relationship with feminism, women columnists construct intricate narratives which do not necessarily entail a fixed position that can be clearly pinned down. Therefore, the unstable, always in process, contingent character of identity positions in women columnists' narratives requires a dynamic approach to politics of identity that delves into identity formations and identification processes without surrendering to essentialism.

As discussed previously at length, "identity" has turned out to be a thorny issue in feminist scholarship and activism in recent decades. The poststructural critiques of identity suggesting that any claim to a unified and coherent self signifies violence to the possibilities of self (Butler, 1990, 1997), dismantled the essentialist

conception of identity as a fixed, stable and monolithic entity. Yet, on the other hand, feminist scholars draw attention to the fact that the absolute dismantling of the concept of identity may result in the impossibility of feminist politics since it would annul feminist demands arising from womanhood experiences. (Hekman 2004, Alcoff 2006) They have attempted to develop new accounts that acknowledge the poststructural critique of essentialist notions of identities without abandoning the concept of “identity” altogether. According to this new cohort of theories seeking a third way between essentialism and poststructuralism, the politics of identity should be reconfigured by keeping in mind that there is no identity prior to politics and that each and every identity claim is produced within a particular power configuration. These theories stress that the acknowledgement of power dimension should not necessarily lead to the absolute dismantling of “identity” as an analytical concept. In this regard, at certain moments identity positions may be stabilized to make political demands and articulate certain identity claims, which should not mean that identity is stabilized once and for all. Gillis, Howie and Munford (2004: 69) explains this point quite well:

“It is that we do always speak from some identifiable position, albeit provisional and contingent, and more importantly that that position is both undecidable and subject to the governmentality of iteration, which at the same time is endlessly transformative. In short, to repeat ‘I am x’ is always to subtly change the nature of the claim, as though in a game of Chinese whispers... Rather than providing a foundational position, identity is always at stake but not, thereby, without valency. The point is to contest the givenness and persistence of any identity claim – including those that are transgressive – without denying its substantive import.”

The interpretation of identity as a dynamic source of meaning is quite crucial in grasping the gist of the shifts in the narrative line, the coexistence of belonging and disarticulation of identity, the resistance towards fixation and the pendulum-like character of identity negotiations in women columnists’ narratives in this study.

Henceforth, the new cohort of feminist theories mitigating between essentialism and poststructuralism have been quite helpful in exploring the complexities of these narratives. Throughout the interviews women columnists have produced intricate narratives wherein they fiercely contest the essentialist fixations of identity positions and deny to be positioned under stable identity categories. On the other hand, one can detect other moments in these interviews where women columnists feel the need to articulate certain identity claims and openly align with the feminist subaltern public.

In these janus-faced narratives, women columnists' critiques of essentialist approaches to identity entail a cautious stance vis-a-vis stable identity labels imposed from outside. Yet, one should also bear in mind that this cannot be viewed as an identical replica of the poststructuralist dismissal of identity. Unlike the poststructuralist accounts that regard identities as a form of subjectification to existing power structures in a particular field of discursivity that name the subject and in doing so categorize her once and for all, women columnists' narratives rely on concepts such as agency, choice and intentionality. In this sense, they do not regard subjectivity as merely subjectification but read it through an explicit stress on agency. Many times during the interviews they elaborate on their professional careers with a particular reference to their gendered agencies marked by a complex web of subjective choices and intentions. In this sense, one can suggest that women columnists' narratives entail the possibility of reconfiguring identity as an interpretive horizon that operates as a source of meaning.

Alcoff (2006: 42) argues that "identity is the product of a complex mediation involving individual agency in which its meaning is produced rather than merely perceived or experienced". Accordingly, identity is not a pre-given essential construct

but it is worked through a particular social location. This perspective challenges the poststructural view that identity is inherently repressive and constraining as it is always imposed from outside. Opposing this argument, Alcoff (Ibid) stresses agency in identity positions by defining identity as articulation of knowledge derived from the material conditions, lived experience and social location of participants. Accordingly, both subjective experiences and meaning making processes as well as the contextual framework in which these experiences are interpreted have an effect upon the subject's narrative on her subjectivity. Adopting this dynamic approach, Alcoff (Ibid) defines identities as "positioned or located lived experiences in which both individuals and groups work to construct meaning in relation to historical experience and historical narratives".

This understanding of identity as a source of individual and collective meaning renders the self intelligible through dynamic processes of interpretation and negotiation, which take place as a result of participation in communities, institutions, systems of meanings and intersubjective interactions. From here, it is clear that one's identity is constituted through taking up communicative positions and negotiating claims in the public sphere. (Alcoff, 2006: 19) By taking into account both subjective and contextual aspects of identity positions, Alcoff's approach provides us a complex account that makes it possible to explore the effects of hegemonic discourses on identity formation without abandoning the idea of agency and subjective meaning making processes.

In this frame, this conception of identity and identification draws on the premise that identity positions go beyond any pre-given checklist of identity claims; rather they are constantly reconfigured along with one's needs and commitments.

Taylor's following quote clearly explains the gist of the idea of identity and identification in Alcoff's account:

“The question ‘who am I?’ can't necessarily be answered by giving name and genealogy. What does answer this question for us is an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good or valuable, or what ought to be done.” (Taylor, 1989: 27)

This stress on the importance of subjective commitments also plays a key role in theories that replace the concept of identity with the idea of “identification”. Hall utilizes the term “identification” to avoid the reifying connotations of identity, arguing that identities are points of temporary attachment to subject positions constructed by discursive practices. In a similar vein, Weir (2008: 115) points out the subjective character of identifications by employing the idea of “identification-with”: “identification with others, identification with values and ideals, identification with ourselves”. This vision implies a shift from identity politics to politics of identification or from a static to a relational model of identity that takes into account subjects' attachments and commitments.

A similar stress on subjective aspects of identity positions stands out in some of the narratives in this study. Some women columnists clearly engage in an attempt to reconstruct the meanings of identity labels and redefine them in accordance with their attachments and commitments. In this sense, they challenge the stereotypical conceptions pertaining to identity by employing the idea of *identification*. For instance, Aldoğan states that identity categories do not perfectly fit into stable identity claims but rather take new forms in accordance with one's worldview:

“I have an approach of my own within the limits of my own lifestyle... I don't want to be included within stable lines. I should say, ‘I'm pink, not red.’”

In a similar vein, Tuksal denotes that she constantly negotiates feminist ideas and appropriates her position vis-a-vis feminism accordingly:

“Since the time when I first came across feminist literature, I have always adopted a critical stance... I still try to negotiate feminist ideas and understand what good they do to me.”

In addition to the idea of identification, Hekman’s understanding of identity as “ungrounded ground” could be regarded as another prominent contribution to the revision of politics of identity. Differentiating between private and public aspects of self, Hekman puts forward that selves are not totally subsumed under public identity categories since the complex character of personal identities far exceeds the scope of public categories and public identity categories are reinterpreted through unique aspects of personal identity. In this way, she argues that public identity categories do not constitute an obstacle to the multiple aspects of the self. Hekman’s argument about the reinterpretation of public identity categories in line with personal aspects of identity positions is in tune with the reformulation of identity politics as politics of identification and can be utilized to examine the anti-essentialist call in women columnists’ approach to identity labels. Yet, her reconciliation of multiplicity of self with belonging and identification cannot really find place in most of the narratives in this study because they regard open articulation of identities as an obstacle to multiple aspects of being. This point will be elaborated on further in next parts.

In addition to the reformulation of identity as “interpretive horizon”, “ungrounded ground” and “identification”, there are other “third way” theories in feminist scholarship that attempt to capture the dynamic character of contemporary identities and thus are quite useful in analyzing women columnists’ intricate narratives. For example, Andalzua’s concept of “mestiza” provides a helpful analytical framework to examine the narratives on identity that resist fixation.

“Mestiza” emblemizes the contradictions, the ambivalent character and plurality in marginal identities. It refers to a subject position beyond borders and signifies being at the crossroads of multiple differences. As such, mestiza identity clearly discloses how intersections of different aspects of identity render it futile to fix subject positions.

The resistance to fixation and self-positioning on borderlands are prominent themes in women columnists’ narratives. For instance, to oppose marginalization of their identities, pious women writers refuse to stabilize their position through identity labels that pin down their identities through hegemonic codes of what is “normal” and “marginal”. With the aim to underscore the impossibility of containing identity positions within static borders, they position themselves on the borderland through flexible, intricate labels such as “fragile feminist” or “thinking feminist”. Such terms help them move across borders by opposing the binary between Islam and feminism and challenge the essentialist categorizations imposed on them from outside.

Braidotti’s idea of nomadic subjectivity also provides a useful insight to grasp the deterritorialization of self in some of the narratives in this study. Allowing for interactions of various axes of differentiation such as class, race, ethnicity, gender or age, this concept endorses entangled relationships in the foundation of the self, signifies constant movement and a detachment from fixed identity categories. (Benhabib, 1999: 25) Considering this, one may suggest that pious women columnists’ narratives with constantly shifting belongings between Islam and feminism, rely on a nomadic understanding of self that is tolerant of ambiguities, multiplicities and hybridity.

In a similar vein, some secular writers also build their narratives on the idea of borderland and nomadism, shifting between different standpoints and refusing to be contained in a stable identity position. Their narratives on feminist self-identification fits into the mestiza way of thinking in the sense that in settling accounts with different meanings of feminism, they acknowledge the interlockings of different aspects of their identity positions. In this regard, Tınç states the following:

“I am someone who believes in feminist ideas and principles. But there are many other components of my identity other than feminism... I am a feminist, an egalitarian, a socialist...”

Tınç’s remark implies a particular identity position in which different axes of identity intersect, moving the subject position beyond borders. A similar tone can be also found in İplikçi’s narrative where she points out the dialogic character of the feminist position, defines feminism as a junction point with a possibility to acknowledge the multiplicity of subject positions and the dialogue between them. For instance, she refers to class as one of the major components in capturing the multiplicity of womahood experiences:

“You tell women to go out at night and wander the streets. But which class perspective are you relying on while saying this? Women can maybe go out at night in Beyoğlu but what about Sultanbeyli?”

This dialogic approach entails the potential to recognize intersections of different aspects of selves, entangled belongings and how they transform each other as well as other subject positions as they interact with them. In this sense, this potentiality to appreciate intersections of different aspects of identity in the foundation of the self render some narratives lines in women columnists’ narratives suitable for cultivating mestiza way of thinking and the nomadic approach to identities. However, one

should also note that some of these narratives are marked by serious limitations in this regard as they cannot appreciate the multitude of identity positions, their intertwinings and the transformative effects of this multitude detaching the subject from the rigidity of borders. For example, the failure to endorse the interaction between Islam and feminism in veiled women's negotiation of feminism and its dynamic, constantly changing character, make some secular narratives move away from a nomadic and mestiza approach.

To sum up, during the interviews both secular and pious women columnists clearly state that they are critical of any attempt that categorizes themselves under fixed labels. Some secular columnists challenge fixed conceptions of feminism and ask for a flexible understanding of feminism that takes into account one's needs and demands. In a similar vein, pious women columnists challenge identity labels in public discourses utilized to discriminate against themselves. They criticize the binary opposition between Islam and feminism and stress the dialectical transformation of both Islam and feminism through dialogue and mutual empathy. One can claim that the critique of essential identity categories imposed from outside constitutes the linchpin of women columnists' narratives on feminist self-identification. It is also important that women columnists do not dismiss agency and intentionality altogether while calling for an anti-essentialist reconfiguration of identity labels. This renders their narratives in tune with third way theories in feminist scholarship mitigating between essentialism and poststructuralism.

Nonetheless, while women columnists' narratives encompass many possibilities to come up with a new understanding of identity as a dynamic entity formed within a particular social location as a result of subjective negotiations and interpretations, they also include serious limitations in this regard. At certain points

they are highly prone to essentialist fixation of feminism and feminist identity. Two concluding remarks are noteworthy in this regard:

1. Women columnists may articulate certain identity claims without necessarily endorsing identity labels accompanying these claims.
2. To distance themselves from identity labels, they may resort to essentialist accounts, interpreting identity positions in question through stereotypical readings.

From above, one can conclude that identities are never monolithic entities in black and white but entail grey shadows. As such, they encompass quite intricate processes of interpretation and negotiation marked by a myriad of ambiguities. Below, I will elaborate on the ambiguities and limitations of women columnists' narratives in detail. Yet, before going into this, first I would like to dwell on the idea of narrative as another useful theoretical tool to capture the dynamic aspects of women columnists' narratives.

9.2. The Idea of Narrative and Narrative Tools for Exploring Feminist Self-Identification

Narrative analysis allows one to move away from the search for essential identities and puts the stress on the creative processes of identity construction. (Byrne, 2003) In this sense, it can serve as a useful analytical framework to capture the complexities of narratives with shifting narratives lines. As women columnists' narratives have demonstrated, it is through narration that different axes of identity and subjectivity become explicit. Therefore, a careful analysis of the idea of narrative

can shed light on how women columnists negotiate identity positions and narrate their approach to identity labels.

Narratives require a constant work on narration of identities; they involve uncertainties of representation and may never reach closure. They are fertile sites for subjects to discover, thoughtfully reflect on and work through their subjective experiences, intersubjective relations and positionings in the public sphere. In this sense, they provide a space for subjects to go beyond the limitations of the statements such as “Yes, I am a feminist” or “No, I am not a feminist” and put forward the complexities of their shifting belongings.

Narratives stress the uniqueness of individual positions and avoid the poststructural denial of agency. Yet, this does not mean that they are produced solely as a result of subjective meaning making processes that take place in isolation. Rather, the construction of narratives always take place in a particular contextual setting. In this regard, Sommers (1994: 606) alleges that we come to know who we are by locating ourselves within wider social narratives. The concept of “public narrative” as a mirror of the existing social and political order enables Sommers to locate individual stories within a larger repertoire of already emplotted meta-narratives available in a particular context. In a similar vein, Benhabib (1999) points out the contextual and also dialogic character of identity narratives. Revising the Habermasian concept of the public sphere through the idea of narrative identity, she states that we construct identity positions by taking part in public, social and intimate conversations. According to her, one adopts an identity position by telling one’s stories and learning to become a conversation partner. In line with this, Weir (1995: 263-283) argues that the capacity for interaction with others invests the self with meaning. According to Weir, identities become subject to constant change as others’

existence prevent their closure. This relational model of identity formed through engagement in relations with others is political in that it takes into account the power dimensions underlying the negotiations of meanings and values.

In this frame, this emphasis on narratives and interrelational dialogue can never be detached from a thorough analysis of power relations. Interrelational and narrative accounts involve the capacity to introduce an analysis of power relations into the picture as both the interrelational dialogues and acts of narration take place within the limits of public narratives. Accordingly, the construction of identity narratives always signify an act that is subject to the webs of power embedded in interrelations taking place in the public sphere.

In this frame, the study of women columnists' narratives on feminist identity reveals that negotiations of identity positions should be read as acts of narration that insert the self into the web of public narratives in the social imagination. Especially when it comes to marginalized identities, the relative positioning vis-a-vis public narratives may involve strategic action, self-censorship and subjectification through hegemonic discourses.

Another important point to consider here is that women columnists' narratives on feminist identity display unstable, always in process, contingent identity positions. Narrative as a way to weave disparate facts together provides a fertile site for unstable identities to come into the open. Making it possible for subjects to work through their subjective experiences, intersubjective relations and positionings in the public sphere, narratives provide a space to go beyond the limitations of fixed identity claims.

The constructive effect of narratives is quite visible in Tınç's narrative. During the interview, she first denied the label "woman columnist" because of its

patriarchal connotations but later when she had enough time to reflect on it thoroughly, she revised her position and declared that she would rather espouse the label in order to point out the gendered inequalities in the media sector. This constructive character of narrative can also be detected in Aldoğan's shifting narrative lines. The shift in her narrative from affirmation of the feminist label to disassociation from it clearly reveals how different, even contradictory narrative lines may come out at different moments in a narrative, preventing narrative lines from closure.

Another important narrative element that plays a key role in the articulation of unstable identity narratives is time. The time factor in narrative clearly reveals that identities are not fixed positions that are prior to action but rather are constituted over time in response to the changing contextual conditions. Mishler (1999: 5) states that one continually recasts the past, weaves events together in different ways, discovers connections that have been invisible before and as a result, positions the self differently. The time factor may allow the narrator to discover connections that she had previously been unaware of. As a result of the reconfiguration of the past and present, the narrator repositions herself and others in her network of relationships.

The constitutive effect of time in narrative is clearly visible in women columnists' narratives. For example, Aldoğan recounts that as she has become more conscious about feminist thinking, she came to realize that she has written her articles always through women's point of view. Similarly, Evin states that as she gained more experience in the media sector and witnessed discrimination against women, she revised her stereotypical conception of feminism that she had during her university years and began to see the position of women in the media through gendered lenses. In a similar vein, Tuksal denotes that she had reconsidered her

prejudiced conception of feminism after she had thoroughly read the feminist literature in the late 1990s and shifted towards a pro-feminist position. In this frame, one can safely maintain that women columnists' narratives on feminist identity positions depict how identity positions come into being as dynamic positionings that are adopted in line with lived experiences.

Narratives help individuals make sense of the social world through different narrative tools and a particular narrative logic. Sommers (1994) indicates that in narrative certain events/parts in social reality are selectively appropriated and the relations among these parts are rendered clear. Moreover, the causality keeping the parts intact is clearly established and as a result the plot explaining why the parts are brought together in this particular way is constructed.

Using these narrative devices, women columnists construct narratives that in the end signify a profeminist position. At certain points in their narrative, they deny the feminist label or reproduce hegemonic narratives on feminisms and feminist identities. Yet, it is important that when it comes to issues such as women's participation in politics, women's employment or struggle against violence against women, they all collaborate with the feminist subaltern public and display a profeminist position. They bring the parts in their narratives together in such a way as not to overshadow this issue-based, contextual profeminist tone. This profeminist position allows them to make sense of their experiences and become aware of the web of power affecting the positioning of gendered selves. However, we should also keep in mind that this is a conditional, contextual and issue-based profeminist position that is not always accompanied by an explicit feminist self-identification. Thus, it is possible to read it as a strategic alliance with the feminist subaltern publics

that comes into being when certain issues such as violence against women or women's participation in politics are at stake.

As noted earlier, narratives on subject positions are formed through participation into systems of meaning and engagement in interrelations with others in a public setting. One may suggest that narration of a subject position in a public setting is a reciprocal event between a teller and an audience. (Riessman, 2001: 12) Thus, the focus point in the analysis of narrations on subject positions should be the interactions and the public setting in which the act of narration occurs. Plummer (1995: 26) argues that certain power structures may lead the way for certain stories to be told while silencing others. Considering the modalities of power structures, the narrator may also act as an editor who constantly monitors, manages, modifies, and revises her narrative. Gubrium (1993) notes that through narrative editing, narrators attend to the ways they will be heard in a public setting.

She believes that this provides her a protective shelter where she can perform freely without being marginalized by th“Narrative editing” is a major narrative tool that women columnists frequently resort to during the interviews. Keeping the audience in mind, they edit their narratives on feminist identity with the aim to avoid stigmatization and negative labeling. For example, pointing out that feminist identity is associated with extremism in hegemonic public discourses, Eraslan utters that she avoids explicit identification with feminism and instead prefers terms such as “women's consciousness” while explaining her position on gendered issues in a public context. e audience.

Moreover, some women columnists present a more nuanced understanding of audience by pointing out that their narratives vary depending on the character of the public context. For instance, Evin states the following:

“When you talk about feminism during a visit in a village, you can face resistance from native women but talking about life in general will enable you to touch upon that topic.”

Similarly, Tuksal denotes that she may revise or edit her narratives on feminist identity as she enters into different public contexts with different conceptions of feminist identity. In this sense, she states that she may tone down or bolden her narrative on feminism depending on the character of the public context in question.

As seen from the discussion so far, the idea of narrative proves to be a useful analytical tool to explore the dynamic character of women columnists’ narratives on feminist identity. It sheds light on the meaning making processes in these narratives marked by shifts, ambiguities and pendulum-like movements. During the interviews, women columnists weave the parts into a whole in such a way that in the end they want to make sure to display a profeminist position about certain public debates on gender regime in Turkey. Yet, as noted above, most of the time this does not appear as a position that is related to feminist identity politics but rather takes the form of a contingent strategic alliance with the feminist subaltern public. Last but not least, the narrative analysis in this study also revealed that women columnists as vulnerable actors in the patriarchal media sector take into account the reactions of the audience when they construct their narratives on feminist identity and arrange their narratives accordingly. This narrative editing in return results in the deployment of many tactical strategies and multiplicity of meanings in women columnists’ narratives.

9.3. Profeminist Tones in Women Columnists’ Narratives

The profeminist position in women columnists’ narratives is worth elaborating on further. As noted above, this contingent, contextual alliance with the feminist

subaltern public comes into being in response to the rise of patriarchal discourses or an urgent need for feminist mobilization regarding a hot public debate on gender issues. When women columnists' articles in newspapers are analyzed, one can detect that they choose to cooperate with the feminist subaltern public particularly on the following topics: violence against women, women's participation into politics and misogynist statements of male politicians.

The post-Habermasian feminist conception of public sphere has put forward that the public sphere is not a monolithic block where power flows in a unidirectional way; rather, heterogeneity is constitutive of each and every public sphere, including the counter publics. Relying on this, one can suggest that the feminist subaltern counter public in contemporary Turkey is composed of various discourses, each of which draws attention to a different point in their critique of the discursively created gender regime. Given different political agendas of secular and Islamic feminists, it would be reductionist to assume that the "counter" in the feminist subaltern counter public in contemporary Turkey corresponds to a monolithic set of universal validity claims. Along this line, it is important to note that women columnists' collaboration with the feminist counter public on certain issues entails a variety of different profeminist tones. It does not designate a monolithic pattern, unifying women columnists' narratives under the same rubric. In this sense, the label "profeminist" here does not connote a unified political stance but entails quite varied commitments, priorities and concerns with regard to gender politics in contemporary Turkey. As discussed at length, the Islamist/ secularist divide as well as the differences between orthodox and reformist writers both from the Islamist and secularist camps appear as the main line of fraction in this profeminist alliance.

It is obvious that women columnists' collaboration with the feminist counter public is of tantamount importance for the articulation of feminist demands in the public sphere. Ferree et al. (2002: 16) argue that in the contemporary world, mass media has a pervasive influence over the trajectory of public debates since social actors evaluate the effectiveness of their own discourses by looking at the coverage in mass media. Given that coverage in the mass media is key for public discourses to display efficacy in public deliberation, one can safely suggest that women columnists' profeminist coverage of gender debates in their articles enhances the standing of feminist discourses in hot public debates on the gender regime.

Women columnists' collaboration with the feminist subaltern public becomes explicit when the rise of patriarchal discourses in public debates generates a considerable threat perception. The recent expansion and wide circulation of patriarchal discourses under the AKP rule has surely provided an incentive for women columnists to openly declare a profeminist position in their newspaper articles. The contingent profeminist alliance that they form in response to the patriarchal features of public debate indicates that their positionality evolves as they enter into public deliberation. In this sense, they don't have a profeminist identity ready at hand; neither of their positions, i.e., profeminist and non-feminist, are permanent. Calling for policies to end violence against women, supporting women's participation into politics or challenging politicians' or other public figures' misogynist statements, they take a profeminist position that is triggered by the acknowledgement of the need for a counter discourse challenging the patriarchal gender regime.

On the other hand, one should denote that this contingent profeminist alliance also has serious limitations that hinder the promising features in women columnists'

narratives. At certain points, women columnists' contingent profeminist positions may be prone to essentialism, which in return leads to a highly static and exclusionary gender discourse. For instance, when some secular women columnists argue for the enhancement of women's participation into politics, their call addresses a limited target group that does not include veiled women. The conception of veiling in this ultrasecularist, essentialist approach further reproduces the binary opposition between secular and Islamist women, confining veiling to submission to patriarchy and fixing it as essentially misogynist. One can suggest that this essentialist approach vis-a-vis veiling prevent them from adopting an all inclusive profeminist position.

In a similar vein, pious women columnists' narratives also display limitations in certain aspects. As discussed before, the dialectical character of their approach to the relationship between feminism and Islam renders their narratives quite dynamic and open to change as this dialectical interaction transforms both Islam and feminism in their mindsets. However, when certain issues are at stake, their narratives cease to employ this dialectical perspective and shift towards an Islamist frame of reference that does not allow space for some key feminist ideas. The recent abortion debates in Turkey proved to be a good example to demonstrate this shift of reference. Some of the pious women columnists explicitly opposed politicians' attempts to intervene in women's reproductive rights yet the motives of their opposition against the anti-abortion initiative did not stem from the feminist idea of women's autonomy on their bodies. Since bodily autonomy is not in line with the Islamic thought, they opposed the anti-abortion initiative by referring to imperatives that make abortion necessary such as rape, poverty or health risks. In other words, their Islamic position in this regard does not incorporate the secular feminist idea of women's choice into the analysis. This disassociation of the right to abortion from women's bodily autonomy

is difficult to reconcile with the secular feminist approach to abortion. Yet, the main obstacle hindering transitivity and dialogue between these two positions stems from the disinclination to engage in transformative communicative action geared towards collective action without ignoring differences in between.

The confrontation between Islam and feminism in pious women columnists' mindset also comes to the foreground with regard to the issue of violence against women. For example, in a newspaper article where she criticizes the patriarchal gender regime resulting in violence against women, Eraslan feels the need to make clear that her profeminist critique does not connote an opposition against family unity.¹⁴⁴ This need to stress the differentiation between the opposition against male violence and the anti-family stance is quite telling with respect to the limits of Islamic feminism in pious women columnists' mindset. One can argue that this note is reflective of an essentialist approach fixing feminism and the feminist critique as anti-family.

From the limitations portrayed above, it becomes clear that at some points, the profeminist narrative line in women columnists' narratives is enmeshed with hegemonic discourses. Thus, it is possible to suggest that women columnists take an "in-between" position in the public sphere, oscillating between the hegemonic public discourses and the feminist subaltern counter public. At times, the feminist counter publicity in their narratives shifts towards the hegemonic public, reproducing essentialist or exclusionary discourses. Fraser (1990), Felski (1989) and Fenton and Downey (2003) note that counter publics are not enclaved clusters but may display a publicist orientation in order to appeal to wider audiences. One may maintain that

¹⁴⁴ "Fatma Şahin BM'de: İstanbul Sözleşmesi", *Star*, 6 Mart 2013, <http://haber.stargazete.com/yazar/fatma-sahin-birlesmis-milletlerde/yazi-733308>.

women columnists' profeminist narratives come into being at a liminal point where counter publics engage in dialogue with wider publics. As a result of being positioned at an intersection point, women columnists' narratives encompass elements both from hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses. Their unique positionality displays a nuanced, multi-layered understanding of public sphere, complicating the two-polar structure constituted by hegemonic and counter hegemonic publics. It also offers space for comprehending the internal variations and multiplicities of counter publics. To avoid homogenizing, inattentive accounts, Squires (2002) underscores that the use of vocabulary is a key tool in capturing the multiplicity of counter publics. In this vein, women columnists' *in between positionality* as a new terminology can contribute to scholarly attempts aiming to grasp the complexity of the relationship between hegemonic and counter hegemonic publics and shed light on the ways in which the publicist character of counter publics engage in dialogic activities.

Discerning the multiplicity of public sphere has been a key move in critical public sphere theory after Habermas. A crucial part of this move was the recognition that "counter" in counterpublics is multi-layered and complex. It does not have to be necessarily located in the identity of persons who articulate oppositional discourses; it may also have a topical orientation, circulating neglected social and political concerns into wider publics. (Asen and Brouwer 2001, Fraser 1990) In this sense, one can argue that the *counter* underlying the *in between positionality* that women columnists take, cannot be explicated only by seeking the meanings of counter in the identity markers of the social group in question. It would be more appropriate to suggest that the *counter* here has a topical orientation crystallizing around certain themes such as violence against women or women's participation in politics. In this

sense, as a thematic counter discourse, its major contribution to the public sphere theory lies in its deconstruction of the fixed separation between the hegemonic and counter publics. This key move designates the permeability of borders in the public sphere and further sophisticates the theories elucidating the composition of counter publics.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that despite its limitations, women columnists' unique *in between* positionality is of crucial importance in the current era in Turkey marked by increasing visibility and efficacy of patriarchal discourses in the public sphere. It does not only enhance the efficacy of profeminist discourses in public deliberation but also contributes to women's media activism, opening up an alternative discursive space in media where counter hegemonic attempts can be recognized. Women's media activism can be considered as a key tool that helps feminist activists reinforce the feminist component in the hegemonic public sphere. (Byerly and Ross, 2006: 100) Speaking from within/ through established media enterprises, women's media activism aims to expand the boundaries of the profeminist discursive space in the dominant public sphere, thereby transforming both the hegemonic gender discourses and the patriarchal media language itself. This form of activism may take different forms such as pressuring the media to stop sexist coverage of women in their content; demanding gender equality for female media professionals; and collaborating with journalists in campaigning for feminist causes. (Minic, 2014: 134) In this frame, although most of the women columnists do not declare active participation into the women's movement, their unique positionality has an activist component as their profeminist writings provide a useful venue for disseminating feminist activist attempts.

This alliance with the women's movement points out that the alternative media domain composed of profeminist women columnists in contemporary Turkey offers a space for women's movement to pursue publicist goals and engage in a more relational approach to media. This possibility for active engagement with the media domain does not preclude employment of a critical approach disclosing the limitations and problematic aspects of the profeminist media domain in question. While acknowledging the limitations of women columnists' position on the one hand, on the other, the publicist impetus in the feminist counter public may incite active dialogue and engagement with this alternative media domain. This alliance in return may provide the feminist counter public useful tools to bolster its media activism and circulate feminist goals and ideas into wider publics. It is significant to be aware of these useful tools and possibilities geared towards enhancing feminist media strategies, since in this way one can get a more complete picture of the contemporary feminist discursive space in Turkey.

9.4. Generic Existence: Profession Instead of Identity

When asked about their public self-identification, most of the women columnists aspire for gender neutrality by avoiding being treated as a gendered subject. In some of the accounts, gendered subjectivity is associated with patriarchal bargain that provides women certain benefits in return of their collaboration with the patriarchal gender regime. In this sense, stress on gendered aspects of identity in public self-presentation is regarded in contradiction with a profeminist position. Evin states that a real feminist should avoid gendered identity labels such as the term "woman writer" since such terms are highly loaded with hegemonic discourses.

In the patriarchal intellectual field, the woman intellectual/writer has always been a marginal actor. (Moi 1994) Even though she gets access to the intellectual arena, she is always in a vulnerable position and lacks a secure platform from which to speak. (Eagleton 2005) As for the social and political context in Turkey, the intellectual field in general and the media sector in particular constantly reproduce patriarchal discourses that position women hierarchically vis-a-vis male actors. In this frame, it is not surprising that in most of the interviews women columnists' profeminist and gender conscious position is not accompanied by a stress on their gendered subjectivity. Hegemonic discourses that fix women's gendered existence as inferior lead both secular and pious women columnists to speak in the public sphere as generic beings.

To analyze the negotiation of gendered subjectivity, it is useful to take into account the working mechanisms of the power structures in which subjects in question try to achieve legitimacy and recognition in the public sphere. As discussed earlier with regard to pious women writers' marginalized positionality in the secular literary field, Bourdieusean concepts of field and capital can be of use to unmask the terms in which power, legitimacy and capital are granted to subjects. In the Bourdieusean thinking, agents in a particular field who are motivated to seek maximum power and dominance, resort to various strategies to achieve legitimacy. Given that the field grants legitimacy only to those who conform by the rules of the field, subjects choose to act in accordance with the immanent laws of the field in question. Bourdieu suggests that "for a field to work, there must be stakes, and people ready to play the game, equipped with the habitus which enables them to know and recognize the immanent laws of the game, the stakes and so on." (cited in Moi, 1991: 1021) In this sense, women columnists' generic self-presentation in the

media sphere should be interpreted by bearing in mind the terms in which intellectual legitimacy is granted to women professionals in the media field in Turkey. According to the Bourdieusian framework, if actors do not enact the rules of the field, they may risk exclusion or experience the field as a form of censorship. As Moi (1991) argues, actors in the field are endowed with the right to speak only if they are acknowledged as powerful possessors of capital. In this frame, women columnists' generic self-presentation in this study points out that avoidance from gendered subjectivity is among the constitutive components of the media field that are widely internalized by pioneer women columnists in the field.

One can argue that women columnists' aspiration for gender neutrality is closely related to the trajectory of hegemonic discourses on gendered subject positions in Turkey. Since the modernization period at the beginning of the 20th century, the category of woman has always been incorporated into broader ideological projects as a discursive tool to be utilized for political purposes. This discursive utilization in the social and cultural imagination has precluded women's autonomous gendered subjectivities, defining ideal womanhood with a stress on women's modesty and asexual existence in the public sphere. (Durakbaşı 1998, Kadioğlu 1998) The narratives of the first generation Republican women reveal that their identities in the public sphere rely on a particular logic composed of a strong commitment both to the Kemalist revolution and their occupational identity. (Toktaş and Cindoğlu 2006, Özyürek 2006) Despite the emphasis on their symbolic role as the first generation professional women of the new Republic who represent the country's belonging to the West, their public self is refined from gendered identity positions. Since a gendered public self and professional identity are seen at odds with

each other, the first generation Kemalist women declare that they have performed their profession as a generic being, not as a woman.

The repercussions of this age-old notion that ascribes gender neutrality to successful professional women in the public sphere in modern Turkey, can be still strongly felt in professional women's narratives today. Women columnists's narratives in this study provide a useful ground to examine the contemporary modalities of the discourse on gender neutrality in women's professional lives in Turkey. During the interviews women columnists construct narratives that remind one of the Republican modernization discourse that stresses women's professionalism but refrains from acknowledging their gendered public self. At certain points, women columnists stress women's positive qualities in professional career by underscoring the importance of their existence in the media sector. Benmayor praises women journalists' diligent work ethics, while Kırıkkanat refers to their excellent educational and professional qualifications. However, this appreciation of gender difference in the working environment is not accompanied by an espousal of gendered professional identity. Benmayor's statement clearly puts forward the gist of the puzzle here:

“I am a journalist first, not a woman journalist...”

The ideological component in women's professional identities in the early Republican period has long left its place to commitment to occupation. Especially in the post-1980's period, the image of the ideal Republican woman who is expected to devote herself to the advancement of the nation, has been already replaced with individualistic values such as self-interest, personal success and advancement. (Kabasakal 1998; Kabasakal et al, 2011) Yet, the genderless presentation of the

professional self in public still remains intact. I will try to explore this generic notion of public self in women columnists' narratives along two lines: 1. Neoliberal individualistic logic 2. Being a pioneer woman in the media sector.

9.4.1. Neoliberal Individualistic Logic and Women Columnists' Narratives

When reflecting on women journalists' positionality in professional life, women columnists employ a gender conscious approach that allows them to reflect on unequal gender relations in the male dominated media sector. In most of the narratives, one can find examples about different forms of gender discrimination in the media. On the other hand, in some narratives this critique is immediately followed by an emphasis on success stories. Hard work and strong personal qualifications are presented as a safety belt against discrimination based on gender. This shift of focus allows women columnists to avoid victim's discourse and underscore women's agency, success and powerful position in the media. The downplaying of systemic factors and the stress put on personal efforts is a key neoliberal narrative line that make it possible for women columnists to establish "empowerment" as a main theme in their narratives.

The liberal understanding of neutral, abstract and disengaged individual rests on the premise that particularities should be left behind before entering the public sphere in order to ensure equality before the law. Alcoff (2006: 38) points out that in the Western thought identities as the most overt expression of particularities have always been seen as an obstacle that blocks the way for rational reasoning. This notion that the substantive content of identities constitutes a counterweight to rationality, precludes reasoning through the interpretive framework provided by

one's particularities. As a result, the public and the private are defined in binary oppositional terms and the public sphere is associated with a certain kind of discourse that is distinctive to that sphere: A discourse of abstraction, rationality, and universality. Despite the paradigm shift in the 20th century from generic existence to the plethora of identities, the liberal polity still defines rationality as a disengaged endeavour detached from one's particularities. (Ibid) As a result, it is concluded that womanhood as a prefix in the public self-presentation hampers objective reasoning. This logic becomes crystal clear when women columnists covered in this study state that downplaying their identity as women and acting as "individuals" will ensure their fair treatment.

In the contemporary neoliberal era, the liberal differentiation between reasoning and particularities is further accompanied by a strong stress on self-entrepreneurship, success, choice and empowerment. As a form of governmentality, the neoliberal logic produces self-interested subjects who are expected to act as individual entrepreneurs in every aspect of life. (McRobbie 2010, McNay 2010) This notion of subject who makes free choices based on rational economic calculation, eradicates the border between the social and the economic along with the fact that market rationality is extended to all social practices. (Oksana 2013) Accordingly, this overarching character of the neoliberal logic eliminates structural social forces from the picture, replacing them with an individualistic approach to self through a strong stress on economic-calculation, self-interest and choice.

In recent years, many empirical studies have been conducted, disclosing the organic link between women's downplaying the effects of structural constraints of the patriarchal regime and their orientation towards values such as choice and freedom. (Budgeon 2001, Scharff 2013) Relying on this, one can safely suggest that

the neoliberal rhetorics of choice and individual agency is a powerful discursive tool in the contemporary gender regime that is utilized to shift the narrative line from a victim's discourse towards individual achievement. This neoliberal rhetorics marked by an individualistic approach also characterizes some of the narratives in this study. The individualistic motifs in these narratives connote a strong motivation for power and success in the media sector. The stress on success and empowerment is further accompanied by a disarticulation of gendered subjectivity and underestimation of the effects of systemic gender inequalities. This neoliberal individualistic logic regards identification with gendered subjectivity as a fixed position that suppresses one's personal qualifications and condemns one to the unifying force of the category of woman. As such, it closely collaborates with the anti-identity trend that perceives identities as fixed, unifying entities.

In this frame, the following anti-identity assumptions accompany the individualistic logic in question here:

1. The assumption that the public reasoning requires a transcendence of particularities
2. Interpretation of identity labels as inherently repressive and stigmatizing

This line of reasoning coupled with the neoliberal stress on the individualistic notions of self constitutes the ground upon which the generic thinking comes into being. In a nutshell, the generic thinking contends that unless one gives up gendered existence, one is doomed to be fixed into a stereotypically defined feminine realm. Pointing out the perils of generic thinking for feminist politics, Friedman (1998: 32) warns that the displacement of gender identity in the public sphere only serves to the reproduction of patriarchal discourses that blur gendered inequalities by representing them as natural. In a similar vein, noting that the generic, universal human individual

is a patriarchal category, Hekman (2004: 37-81) asserts that in order to escape this imposition, women should enter into the public sphere as embodied beings.

The antithesis between public reasoning and one's particularities, which is a prevailing rule governing the intellectual field, particularly the media sphere, is clearly felt in women columnists' narratives. Bearing the perils of generic thinking in mind, one should note that the disarticulation of gendered subjectivity and professional identity deprives women columnists of the means to articulate their situatedness and lived experiences as a woman.

On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that neoliberalism as a universally applicable term cannot account for the specificities of women's professionalism arising from the symbolic gender codes in the local context. In this sense, the fact that women's professionalism in the post-1980 Turkey has been greatly shaped by neoliberal discourses, requires a further analysis explaining the peculiarities underlying the neoliberal logic that applies to women's employment. Cindoğlu's study on headscarved women's employment is a good example in this respect that sheds light on how the terms of women's employment and professionalism is negotiated within the confines of the prevailing gender codes. In her study on the employment of headscarved women, Cindoğlu (2011) puts forward that headscarf bans in the public sector in Turkey generate "spillover effects" on headscarved women's employment in the private sector, causing discrimination in terms of recruitment, wage policies and promotions. Given the marginalized position of veiling in the public sphere, headscarved women are less likely to succeed in the secular job market and may be subject to discriminatory policies irregardless of the neoliberal logic that operates on values such as efficiency, merit, profitability, rather than on ideology. In this vein, one should note that women columnists'

professionalism in the post-1980 period is shaped not by a universally applicable, generic conception of neoliberalism. Rather, it is defined over a particular neoliberal discourse that is informed by gender neutrality, symbolic value attributed to women's professionalism, male dominated work ethics and women's social roles primarily defined within the familial realm. This form of neoliberal logic arises from the hegemonic codes defining gender relations in the Turkish context. Henceforth, one should bear in mind that the post-1980 rise of the neoliberal logic in Turkey is to a large extent situated within the particularities of the Turkish context. In this sense, women columnists' professionalism displaying highly individualistic tones is a product and a constitutive part of this peculiar neoliberal order that is marked by a patriarchal gender regime. Neither neoliberal individualistic positions nor the conceptions of professionalism connote a readily defined set of values. Women columnists as professionals in the media sphere appropriate the meanings of professionalism in line with their situatedness and the symbolic codes applying to it.

9.4.2. Women Columnists as Pioneer Women in the Public Sphere

As noted earlier, hegemonic gender discourses in modern Turkey has conventionally ascribed gender neutrality to women's professionalism. The trajectory of Turkey's modernization processes at the beginning of the 20th century has been overwhelmingly characterized by the silencing of gendered aspects of women's professional selves. In the new Republican regime, women could gain access to social, civil and political rights and were highly encouraged to excel in education and various professions such as science, law and medicine. (Arat 1998) However, while encouraging the active participation of professional women into the public sphere, the Republican project relied on an ideology of "sameness" that erased all

particularities and differences including gender. (Acar and Altunok 2012: 35) Promoting a notion of dutiful citizenship and strong commitment to the ideals of the new Republic, the Republican gender equality project disassociated women professionals' symbolic role in the public sphere from gendered public self-presentation. As a result, first generation Republican women's professional achievements in the public sphere were not accompanied by an acknowledgement of gendered subjectivity. Rather, their narratives clearly assume a generic existence and prioritize their occupational and ideological commitments that are thought to be in contradiction with gendered public self-presentation.

Looking at the narratives of women columnists under consideration in this study, one may argue that women's genderless presentation of their professional self still remains intact today especially in the accounts where women appear as pioneer figures in their fields. Most of the women columnists that I interviewed are pioneer women journalists who declare that they had no role models when they started the profession. Having started their journalistic careers in the 1980s, on the one hand, they benefited from the liberalization of the era and gained access to the male dominated media sphere; on the other, they had to confront the male dominance and the patriarchal elements of the journalistic profession.

In the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, globalism and neoliberal discourses have had a considerable effect on economy, politics and society in Turkey, permeating into each and every sphere of life and radically transforming social and cultural codes. Along with Turkey's increasing integration into the world economy, the media sphere witnessed a striking proliferation as well as privatization of communication channels in the 1980s. (Algan 2003) The economic liberalization in Turkey has dissolved the state monopoly over the media, leading to the flourishing

of autonomous media networks. This, in return, has generated new “opportunity spaces” for meaning construction. Opportunity spaces can be regarded as new social sites where cultural codes can be revisited through the emergence of new social actors and their value systems. (Yavuz 2004) Since these spaces can generate transformation by rendering previously inaccessible arenas open for transmission of values, they may operate as sites of empowerment for social actors who benefit from the ongoing transformation. On the other hand, these opportunity spaces may also connote restraintment as they do not always operate in an ideal way. It is likely that these spaces may favor certain subject positions, while excluding others.

In this frame, as a result of the privatization of media in Turkey, new media platforms have appeared on the media scene and allowed new actors to intervene into the meaning making processes in the media. Women journalists/ columnists were among these actors who gained access into the media scene and took part in the transformation wave in the media sphere. On the one hand, the fact that they could enter the male-dominated media sphere, may be read as an empowerment story. However, considering that women journalists’ position in the male dominated media field was restricted to the lower echelons of the professional hierarchy, one can suggest that the proliferation of media platforms in the post-1990 period also exposed their vulnerability and marginalization in the media.

Pointing out the uniqueness of their position, most of the women columnists in this study state that they have struggled a lot to prove their qualifications as a columnist in the male dominated mass media. One strategy that they employ to cope with the gender discrimination in the media is to disarticulate the gendered aspects of their professional identities. The binary opposition between womanhood and professional merit, which is deeply embedded in the operating mechanisms of the

media sphere, leads women columnists to assume a generic existence when they talk about their professional identity in public.

One could suggest that women's disarticulation of the gendered aspects of their professional identities in the early Republican era and pioneer women columnists' generic self-presentation in the contemporary media display striking similarities. Women columnists declare that the media field in the 1980s appreciated their professional contribution due to their symbolic existence in the field. Yet, this encouragement, similar to the support for women's professionalism in the Kemalist era, was conditional in the sense that the male supporters expected women to assume a generic existence. This conditionality, in return, has generated a discursive terrain that results in women columnists' employment of generic thinking as a strategical and/or ideological position. In this way, professional success and gendered subjectivity are clearly disassociated from each other.

Being a pioneer woman in a male dominated professional field means that the woman professional engages in a struggle to push the discursive boundaries further or forms a subjectivity in line with the expectations and conditionalities of the discursive terrain from which she speaks. This struggle takes a different form in the case of pious women columnists. Similar to secular women columnists' narratives, pious columnists' narratives operationalize a generational thinking in which they situate themselves as the first generation pious women in the post-1980 period, who pioneered in the struggle to enhance the social, cultural and political status of veiling in the Turkish context. Not surprisingly, the main narrative line in their accounts is based on the struggles fought against the secular exclusionary discourses with regard to veiling. Yet, the gendered struggles that they have fought within the Islamist

intellectual sphere or the media sphere as pioneer women columnists/writers is not so comprehensively narrated.

To sum up, in addition to the neoliberal logic that characterizes the processes of subject formation in the contemporary era, another factor that can explain women columnists' disarticulation of gendered professional identity could be the peculiarities of their positionality as professional pioneer women in the male dominated public sphere.

9.5. Women Columnists' Reflections on their Relationship with Feminism

The fixation of identity as obstructive, which is one of the main themes in women columnists' disarticulation of gendered self-presentation, recurs in their accounts on feminism and feminist identity. Most of the narratives that women columnists construct on feminist identity rely on the assumption that identities and identity labels may operate as sites for hegemonic articulation of subject positions. In this sense, the act of "naming" in general and the discursive terrain in which naming takes place come forward as critical elements in women columnists' reflection on their public self-presentation.

When women columnists' approach to labels, self-labeling and being labeled from outside are carefully analyzed, the following themes map out the contours of their narratives on feminist identity:

- 1.) Strategic diasarticulation of the feminist label
- 2.) Stereotypical/essentialist fixation of feminism and feminist identity as a discursive move to disarticulate close association with feminism

- 3.) Lack of differentiation between labeling oneself and being labeled from outside
- 4.) Contingent alliance with the feminist subaltern public on certain gender issues
- 5.) Janus-faced, intricate narratives on the feminist label both affirming and denying feminist self-identification

First, it is worth further elaborating on women columnists' accounts on the act of "naming" and subject formation through labels. Butler (1997: 31-38) explicates that subjectivity is first constructed in language. For her, individuals come to occupy the site of the subject through the constitutive possibility of addressing others and being addressed by others. Therefore, subjects always have this linguistic vulnerability since they are constantly addressed by one another. (Cavarero, 2000: xviii) In this regard, Butler (1997: 28) states the following:

"Vulnerable to terms that one never made, one continues as a subject through categories, names, terms, and classifications that mark a primary alienation in sociality."

This understanding sees categories and identity labels as imposed from outside to render the self intelligible. Accordingly, it is through this linguistic vulnerability that one is subjected to hegemonic discourses. In this line of thinking, identity categories and labels constitute a form of regulation; both the act of naming others and any activism in the name of identity politics reify hegemonic discourses. Along similar lines, most of the women columnists in this study interpret identity labels as imposition from outside. Thus, they respond to the acts of labeling by employing a defensive strategy vis-a-vis the hegemonic discourses underlying the labels in

question. In this sense, they detach identity labels from subjective meaning making processes and limit their meaning to hegemonic articulation.

As discussed earlier, Alcoff (2006) argues that both subjective experiences and meaning making processes and the contextual framework in which these experiences are interpreted, have an effect upon the subject's narrative on her subjectivity. She defines identities as "as positioned or located lived experiences in which both individuals and groups work to construct meaning in relation to historical experience and historical narratives". (2006: 42) In this sense, identities are neither solely imposed from outside, nor do they have a pre-given, essential character. Alcoff's account clearly puts forward that public self-presentation may involve a space for subjective interpretation and meaning making. Henceforth, there is a difference between being labelled from outside and one's own attempts to define the self through self-identification. While the former may reproduce hegemonic discourses, the latter enables one to reflect on identity categories and redefine them in the light of one's interpretive horizon. In this frame, one can suggest that women columnists' failure to differentiate between self-labeling and being labeled from outside overlooks the possibility of redefining identity labels through subjective reflection.

Women columnists' narratives on the label "woman writer" clearly displays a defensive strategy adopted as a protective shelter against stereotypical labeling from outside. Except for a few writers who point out the need to differentiate between self-labeling and being labeled from outside (Müge İplikçi, Ferai Tınç, Yıldız Ramazanoğlu), most of the women columnists interpret the label "women writer" as a discriminatory term that is imposed on them from outside to degrade their writing. They prefer to present themselves in non-gendered terms in order to avoid being

stigmatized by hegemonic discourses. This denial of gendered authorship can be read as a defensive speech act employed to avoid the fixation into the limits of a stereotypically defined “feminine” realm.

Women columnists resort to the same defensive strategy when they explain their approach to the label “feminist”. Most of them state that the hegemonic articulation of subject positions through labels such as “feminist” renders them highly vulnerable to stigmatization. Thus, in some narratives one can clearly detect that statements such as “all women need feminism” are followed by a denial of the label “feminist”. In this sense, concerns about the stereotypical labeling from outside and disarticulation of the feminist label may be accompanied by affirmation of a feminist standpoint and vice versa. This multiplicity of meanings complicates the plot of women columnists’ narratives in a puzzling way.

Considering this multi-layered character of women columnists’ negotiations of feminist identity, one can safely note that identity narratives, particularly narratives on feminist identity do not necessarily entail a fixed position that can be clearly pinned down. They are dynamic and flexible; they resist fixation and shift in line with needs, expectations, demands and strategic concerns. Such narratives connote ambiguous, messy “mobile selves” that do not stick consistently to one stable identity claim. (Braidotti 1994, Ferguson 1993) The shift in narrative lines demonstrates that various axes embedded in the construction of identities and the continual state of flux in positionality prevent subjects from constructing stable narratives on their subject positions. While at one point subjects may affirm a particular identity to express certain needs and demands, they may disclaim the identity in question at another point to strategically avoid stigmatization or fit into the discursive regime in a particular context.

It is also not surprising to discover that progressive identity narratives with an anti-essentialist approach to identity claims may be intertwined with essentialist discourses that situate identity labels into a fixed, stereotypically defined terrain. The discussion so far has clearly put forward that the call for dynamic, flexible conception of feminist identity in women columnists' narratives may be coupled with an essentialist fixation of feminism. In this respect, one could safely argue that shifts in identity narratives may connote both a progressive, anti-essentialist critique of the fixation of the meanings of identities and a puzzling essentialist tone that falls short in providing a dynamic approach to identification. As women columnists' narratives have exposed, this puzzling coexistence may have to do with the following factors: 1) hegemonic discourses reproducing negative labeling and stigmatization, 2) vulnerabilities underlying subjects' positionalities in the public sphere, 3) subjects' failure to differentiate between stereotypical labeling from outside and redefinition of identities in line with one's needs and demands.

The anti-essentialist, interpretive approach to the feminist label in women columnists' narratives challenges hegemonic discourses and practices as it draws on a resistance to fixation of boundaries and being included in the pre-set, fixed identity categories. Throughout the interviews, some women columnists frequently point out the potential for flexibility in feminist identity that allows one to adjust feminist claims in line with one's needs and demands. It is important to note here that this resistance to hegemonic categories and social structures in women columnists' narratives does not preclude the articulation of concrete identity claims, which clearly differentiates it from the poststructural abandonment of identity. As previously discussed, women columnists' articulation of certain feminist identity claims provides the ground for forming a profeminist alliance with the feminist

subaltern public. The contingent and highly contextual character of this alliance in women columnists' narratives replaces the conventional identity politics with a coalitional politics marked by networks and coalitions that are organized around specific issues, struggles and goals. In this sense, women columnists' narratives can be seen as a testament to a strategic, highly volatile alliance that avoids stable identity claims for various reasons and sides with the feminist subaltern public on a contingent, contextual basis.

9.5.1. Islamic Feminism in Women Columnists' Narratives

The promising openings of the antiessentialist strand in women columnists' narratives come to the forefront most visibly in pious women columnists' reconfiguration of feminism through a reading of Islam and feminism in the light of each other. Pious women columnists' dialectical reading of Islamic feminism puts forward an overt form of mobile selves engaging in resistance against fixed boundaries and stable, predefined categories in identity narratives. The dialectical conception of Islamic feminism in women columnists' accounts relies on a constant attempt to revise both Islam and feminism through continually working on their meanings. The terms that pious women columnists use to denote their feminist self-identification clearly reveal the flexibility of this position. For example, while Ramazanoğlu call herself a "fragile feminist", Tuksal states that she is a "thinking feminist".

Destabilizing both Islam and feminism, pious women columnists point out that when formed as a result of subjective meaning making processes, identity positions do not impose on subjects a predetermined, fixed set of values. In this

sense, their conception of Islamic feminist position is based on a process of negotiating and interpreting socially given meanings. In line with Alcoff's claim that identity positions are articulations of knowledge derived from the material conditions, lived experience and social location of participants, pious women columnists interpret the feminist identity position in line with their needs and experiences based in their embeddedness in a particular social location.

Furthermore, the intersectional thinking characterizing pious women columnists' narratives, contributes to their resistance to fixed, monolithic identity categories. This intersectionalist tone points out different aspects of the self and multiple axes of belonging, thereby opposing that identity positions are monolithic and reduce the self to a single dimension. As Anzaldúa (1987) and Lloyd (2005: 49) suggest, the idea of borderland is pivotal to the intersectionalist thinking. Refusing fixed boundaries, intersectional thinking replaces fixity with permeability in borderlines that allows subjects to freely move between different positions and articulate multiple and intricate identity positions. Pious women columnists talk about their social location and self identification always by incorporating the intersection points of their womanhood and veiling into their narrative, which in return reinforces their critique of essentialist, frozen categories and displays a potential for transformation through dialogue and intersubjective exchange. Dialogue and empathy are among the key themes in pious women columnists' narratives. The call for dialogue and cooperation represents an intersection point where Islamic references can intermesh with secular feminist ideals.

Pious women columnists also reveal that the intersectionalist thinking operates in tune with the idea of situatedness. Although the idea of crossroads in intersectional thinking signifies a constant movement and transformation, it also

entails the idea of embeddedness. Opposing generalizations and fixed categorizations, pious women columnists' narratives acknowledge differences resulting from the positionality of subjects and their peculiar narratives. In this vein, the idea of localization of feminist movements lies at the very center of pious women columnists' understanding of feminism. In sum, intersectional thinking, acknowledgement of situatedness and positionality and narrative approach enable pious women columnists to produce identity narratives that incorporate multiplicities, dynamism and hybridity into the analysis.

Nonetheless, despite these promising features, pious women columnists' narratives are also prone to reproducing stereotypical approaches to feminism. Especially when it comes to the critique of secular feminisms, their approach may shift towards a position that replicates hegemonic discourses on feminism. This essentialist approach leads pious women columnists to interpret secular feminism as inherently anti-family or extremist with regard to sexuality, which clearly contradicts with their attempts to deconstruct fixed categories and impermeable boundaries. Fixing secular feminisms' meanings into stereotyped conceptions, pious women columnists aim to stress the uniqueness of their position vis-a-vis secular feminists. Ironically, it is this very fixing and unifying discourse that they attempt to oppose in their narratives. In this sense, their project of deconstructing secular feminisms and constructing an Islamic feminist position that challenges fixed categories, falls prey to hegemonic discourses at certain points.

9.6. The Implications of the Public Context

As noted earlier, the anti-essentialist, interpretive approach to identities puts forward that both the subjective meaning making processes and the public context in which the subject makes sense of her experiences and the social world, map out the contours of identity narratives. (Alcoff 2006, Lloyd 2005, Hekman 2004) Having elaborated on the promising openings underlying subjective interpretive processes, it is also necessary to delve into the repercussions of the public context on the construction of identity narratives.

Sommers (2002, 2004) stresses that subjects construct narratives in line with how they read their positionality, i.e. their unique place in public narratives. In a similar vein, Benhabib (1999: 344) suggests that “we become who we are by learning to be a conversation partner in public narratives”. This understanding of identity narratives relies on the assumption that the self weaves an identity narrative within the limits of public narratives available to her at a particular time and place. Accordingly, subjects constantly monitor and revise their identity narratives to make them in tune with the changing conditions of their positionality and the public narratives.

In this frame, since identity narratives in the public sphere are always constructed by bearing in mind who the audience is, they signify a reciprocal event between the teller and the audience. Each public context with its peculiar audience may lead to a different configuration of narrative lines. As a result, depending on the character of the public context, the audience and the dialogue that she expects to emerge out of her interrelations with the audience, the subject may perform the self in different ways.

One can suggest that the shifts and revisions in women columnists' narratives on feminist identity is closely related to the patriarchal public discourses in circulation and their linguistic vulnerability in the public sphere. As seen so far, both secular and veiled women columnists strategically revise their identity narratives in order to avoid stigmatization of identity labels such as "feminist". They denote that they feel the need to modify the tone of their narratives depending on the character of the public context in which they produce these narratives. Accordingly, while in a feminist meeting they may be more willing to affirm their feminist self-identification, they may refrain from doing so when they address a general public.

One can find a striking example of this strategic modification of narratives when one compares some of the pious women columnists' newspaper articles before and after the Gezi Park protests. For example, Karaca has alligned with the secular feminist movement in her critique of the AKP's patriarchal discourses before the Gezi protests broke out; yet, she toned down this critique in the aftermath of the protests. Since the AKP, the main guarantor of veiled women's rights in the political realm in Turkey, faced a serious political challenge, she felt the need to curb her critique against it.

In addition, while reflecting on women columnists' positionality and engagement in interactions with a public audience, it is important to keep in mind the repercussions of being a pioneer woman in the media sector. As noted earlier, most of the women columnists have had a pioneering role in the media, which subjects them to patriarchal bargains, generic thinking and denial of gendered subjectivity. In this sense, vulnerabilities related to their pioneering role further bolster their motivation to strategically disclaim the feminist identity or fix its meanings in a conventional way. As a result, one can safely argue that despite the rise in their

visibility since the 1990s, both secular and pious women columnists in contemporary Turkey have experienced a certain linguistic vulnerability, especially when they attempt to display a profeminist position and speak as a gendered subject in the public sphere.

This linguistic vulnerability renders women columnists' narratives quite intricate not only because women columnists adopt strategic thinking to secure a platform from which to speak. Given this vulnerability, some of the women columnists also align with hegemonic discourses on feminism, contradicting their profeminist and gender conscious perspective. At this point, one can note two important conclusions from the discussion so far. First, the hegemonic discourses on feminism and feminist identity that stigmatize profeminist positions lead to strategical manoeuvring in women columnists' narratives on feminist self-identification. Second, since subject positions are never isolated from the contextual setting in which they are formed, there is no modality of subjectivity that is totally immune to the hegemonic public discourses that are dominant in that contextual setting. (Foucault 1980, Oksana 2013) Thus, at certain moments women columnists' narratives may intertwine with hegemonic discourses, adopting an essentialist, stereotypical approach to feminism.

9.6.1. AKP's Patriarchal Gender Politics and Its Implications for Feminist Identity

Ferree et. al (2002) state that a change in the discursive regime may lead to a new discursive terrain where certain ideas can be articulated more overtly. According to them, the governing rules underlying a particular discursive regime provide speakers with certain opportunity structures that enhance or diminish political

acceptibility of certain ideas and demands. In this regard, Ferree et. al (2002) underline that there is an interactive relationship between the discursive context and the speaker's strategic choice to formulate certain discourses.

The idea of discursive opportunity structures may connote a tactical strategy to adopt certain rhetorical tools that would render a public claim in tune with hegemonic discursive codes. In opposition to this, it may also connote a critical stance adopted to render subjugated identities and demands more visible. In this case, the hegemonic codes of the discursive regime marginalize certain identity positions to such an extent that the adoption of a critical stance vis-a-vis the escalating marginalization goes beyond the subaltern publics and acquires a broad appeal in the public.

The conservative AKP rule since 2002 has resulted in the proliferation of the patriarchal gender regime and unequal gender relations in contemporary Turkey. In the AKP's conservative politics, being a woman is first and foremost defined within the familial sphere through traditional gender codes. (Çitak and Tür 2008, Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2011, Unal and Cindoğlu 2013) Pronatalist policies constitute a main pillar of AKP's pro-family politics. Through regulating women's reproductive capacities and their rights on their bodies, pronatalist discourses and policy initiatives see women's womb as a policy area that can be easily utilized for political purposes. Another major component of this patriarchal regime under the current AKP rule is the articulation of distaste of feminist ideas. (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2011) Feminism is defined as the other of the pro-Islamist stance in AKP's gender politics. This patriarchal discursive framework under the AKP rule provides discursive opportunity structures for certain speakers to articulate patriarchal ideas more effectively.

Nonetheless, the proliferation of the patriarchal gender regime and the rise of antifeminist politics under the AKP rule does not mean that profeminist discourses and struggles are all silenced by the hegemonic rules of the current discursive regime. On the contrary, since the discursive terrain is characterized by constant social struggles (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), profeminist discourses function as a counterweight vis-a-vis the rise of conservative gender regime and effectively respond to the wide circulation of patriarchal statements in public debates. Against this background, it is significant to investigate how women columnists engage with this discursive struggle over the governing rules of the gender regime.

In previous parts, it has come into the open that women columnists form contingent, contextual alliances with the feminist subaltern public in response to the rise of patriarchal discourses. The recent expansion and wide circulation of patriarchal discourses under the AKP rule has surely provided an incentive for women columnists to articulate profeminist demands more frequently in their newspaper articles. In this respect, one can safely argue that the contemporary contextual setting plays a key role in women columnists' cooperation with the feminist subaltern public. Acknowledging the need for a counter discourse to challenge the patriarchal gender regime, they form a profeminist stance on issues such as violence against women, women's participation into politics, pronatalist policies and politicians' or other public figures' misogynist statements. This contingent profeminist stance triggered by threat perceptions indicates that when certain gender debates are at stake, women columnists greatly contribute to the publicist face of feminist demands and needs. In this frame, one can argue that the current rise in patriarchal discourses and policies constitute a useful ground for feminist coalition politics to emerge "as a way of forming political alliances around

specific issues, struggles and goals". (Ferguson, 1993: 186) As this study has shown, profeminist women columnists are influential public figures in the contemporary gender regime since their contingent collaboration with the feminist subaltern publics has the potential to enhance the efficacy of coalitional feminist politics in public debates.

On the other hand, one should not take the promising potentialities women columnists' peculiar positionality for granted. The failure to be inclusive and the contingent shift towards essentialism are major limitations in women columnists' narratives that imperil the prospects of forming an effective coalition on contemporary gender debates in Turkey. For example, the fixation of Islam and veiling as antithetical to gender equality is one of the essentialist narrative lines in secular women columnists' accounts that precludes the incorporation of intersectionality and multiple aspects of selves into gender analyses. Considering this essentialist approach to Islamist women's selves, one can argue that some of the critiques articulated by secular women columnists regarding the proliferation of the patriarchal gender regime under the AKP rule does not stem from an all-inclusive profeminist standpoint. Rather than profeminist sensibilities, ultrasecularist tendencies may overweigh in the formulation of these critiques. Kırıkkanat's account on the escalating violence against women in contemporary Turkey is a good example of this ultrasecularist tendency. Associating violence against women with Islam, she establishes a cause-effect relationship between the recent rise in male violence and the proliferation of conservative values and norms in society. Such essentialist associations, when coupled with an ultrasecularist line of thinking, falls short in acknowledging the broader picture about structural gender inequalities and the functioning mechanisms of patriarchal discourses.

In a similar vein, the promising aspects in pious women columnists' narratives on feminism and feminist identity become ineffective when the Islamic feminist framework in these narratives is replaced by an overwhelming stress on the Islamic frame. Redefining the meanings of Islam and feminism through a dialectical reading, pious women columnists pose significant criticisms to the misogynist discourses in public debates and challenge some of the patriarchal policies of the AKP rule. Yet, when it comes to certain issues such as protection of family unity, motherhood or flexible employment for women, they may side with the conservative politics of the AKP rule and replace the feminist tones in their narratives with a dominant Islamist standpoint. At certain points, this shift in their narratives may be accompanied by an essentialist fixation of feminism.

The fixation of feminism as anti-family and regarding it obsessed with women's professional success at the expense of familial life, blocks the flourishing of the dialogue between the secular and Islamic feminist positions. This essentialist fixation also prevents pious women columnists from acknowledging the perils of conservative policies about family unity or women's flexible employment. As a result, gender policies and discourses that are highly criticized by secular feminist publics such as women's flexible employment or AKP's call for three children may find resonance in pious women columnists' narratives without any critical questioning.

For instance, Tuksal underlines that feminists overstress women's leadership position at the workplace and ignore the fact that some women may prefer to spend more time at home to care for the family and children. This fixed reading of feminism as anti-family and obsessed with women's leadership puts a distance between Tuksal's conservative gender views and secular feminist activism. On the

other hand, Karaca declares that the AKP's call for three children is a natural outcome of the conservative politics that the party adopts. For her, since the party's conservative political stance by its very nature encompass pronatalist and profamily policies, such discourses should not be seen as an imposition on women's reproductive freedoms as there is no regulation on this matter that can hamper women's free choices. Here, Karaca obviously overlooks the fact that the regulatory character of patriarchal discourses do not need to rely on legal arrangements.

As seen in these statements, pious women columnists' support for some conservative policies regarding family life and women's reproductive rights does not entail an acknowledgment of the perils that such policies may lead to with regard to gender relations. One can suggest that pious women columnists' stress on Islamic norms and values curbs the promising aspects of their dialectical understanding of Islamic feminism when it is not accompanied by a critical stance that the coexistence of Islam and feminism can provide.

In this frame, it is obvious that the gender regime under the AKP rule generates certain opportunity structures for both secular and pious women columnists to articulate a profeminist stance in public debates. Despite the limitations and essentialist tendencies involved, the profeminist tones in women columnists' narratives constitute a discursive terrain where cooperation with the feminist subaltern public can be enhanced and coalitional feminist politics can flourish. Thus, women columnists' approach to the issue of feminist self-identification is of tantamount importance to the contemporary feminist struggle in Turkey. The affirmation of feminist identity and feminist goals by an influential public figure such as a well-known woman columnist can greatly contribute to the standing of feminist discourses in public debates. Yet, as the analysis so far has clearly shown,

not only the affirmation of a profeminist stance, but also the anti-essentialist character of this affirmation and inclusivity of differences and multiples aspects of selves are critical for an effective feminist coalition politics in the current antifeminist, neoliberal and neoconservative era.

An all-inclusive, nuanced conception of coalitional politics recognizes differences among women, while it also ensures a ground where it is possible to rely on the rhetorics of a feminist “we” to articulate political demands. (Lyshaug, 2006) In this way, it enables women to act in concert without suppressing their differences. This conception of coalition politics argues that to go beyond strategic, issue-based collaboration, it is necessary to cultivate sympathy and develop inclusive political ties that can be formed as a result of affective encounters with others. Since differences present themselves only in the context of communicative engagement (Dean, 1997:4), transformative coalition politics characterized by flexibility with respect to one’s values and receptivity to others’ experiences and demands, can only be achieved as a result of self-reflexivity, dialogue, mutual respect and sympathy. (Elomaki 2012) In this regard, one should acknowledge that women columnists’ strategic, contingent cooperation with the feminist subaltern public can be regarded as an initial step towards a feminist coalitional politics. Nonetheless, in order for this issue-based cooperation with the feminist subaltern public to turn into an all-inclusive, transformative, sustained profeminist coalitional politics, further communicative engagement informed by self-reflexivity, receptivity to others’ demands and openness to self-transformation is needed.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

In seeking to analyze the intricacies of feminist self-identification in the contemporary Turkish context, this dissertation has set out to disentangle the puzzling ways in which feminist identity is narrated and negotiated by influential female public figures, i.e., women columnists, against the complex background of pro-Islamism, neoliberalism, conservatism and authoritarianism. In recent years, the issue of feminist self-identification has come to the forefront of the feminist agenda as a major line of fraction. As Banet-Weiser (2007: 210) points out, “feminism exists in the present context as the politics of contradiction and ambivalence.” The perplexing multiplicity of differences underlying feminisms today makes the current political moment quite challenging with respect to feminist principles and feminist self-identification. The self-reflexive reinvigoration of feminism inspired by postmodern and poststructural critiques has led to the dismantling of fixed conceptions of identity and introduced a number of working definitions of feminism that always change, depending on particular concepts, specific issues and personal practices. As a result, this plethora of differences has put forward that “there are as many ways of becoming a feminist as there are of becoming a woman.” (Budgeon, 2001: 23)

While the self-reflexive moment of feminism has inspired new theoretical attempts to reconcile subjects' situatedness with fragmentation, multiplicity, contingency and flexibility¹⁴⁵, the anti-identity trend in feminist scholarship, together with postmodern discourses and the postfeminist backlash fed by conservative discourses poses a serious challenge for this reconciliation. The fact that identity is cast into doubt in feminist theory and practice has led to widespread concerns among theorists about the future of feminist activism. Bordo (1990: 142) defines the postmodern replacement of identity with plurality and fragmentation as an escape from our situatedness. According to her, given that the idea of consensus around feminist concepts such as patriarchy, sex, experience is already outdated, it is hard to find a common ground to articulate political demands in order to achieve feminist goals. In a similar vein, Benhabib (1992: 230) notes that being alert to the traps of foundational thinking should not lead to a retreat from utopia. This line of thought suggests that in an age in which gender inequalities persist, the poststructuralist positioning of subject in a decentered realm of detachment makes it difficult to take a position and acknowledge the situated character of subjectivity. Regarding this, Friedman (1998: 31) reminds us that the concept of "post-identity" does not imply a new historical stage with greater sophistication; but rather, a dangerous flirtation with a regressive discourse of postfeminism. Accordingly, to avoid displacement of gender as old-fashioned and take note of the enduring character of gender inequalities, it is politically imperative to maintain identity as an analytical concept.

In this frame, as it has been argued throughout this dissertation, the issue of feminist self-identification is one of the most pressing issues in feminist thinking and practice in the contemporary social and political context. The contemporary

¹⁴⁵ Weir (2008), Alcoff (2006), Hekman (2004)

postfeminist moment relies on both progressive and regressive discourses, which, in return, points at the complexity of the current state of feminism. While a particular strand of postfeminism inspired by the postmodern ideas of flexibility and difference contributes to the self-reflexive moment of feminism, another strand connotes “the time after feminism” and “rejection of feminism”, implicating that feminism is passé or is a dangerous ideology hampering “core” values of society such as family or motherhood. (Genz & Brabon, 2009) The regressive connotations of the contemporary postfeminist/anti-feminist moment further crystallize when read together with patriarchal conservative discourses. The antifeminist tones in the current postfeminist moment encourage conservative discursive regimes stressing traditional gender roles by providing them a suitable milieu to promote the claim that feminism is passé/unnecessary/dangerous.

This study has revealed that the collaboration between conservative discourses and the contemporary postfeminist moment fed by antifeminism becomes quite explicit in the Turkish context, when read against the complex patchwork of conservatism, pro-Islamism and anti-feminism. It has been pointed out that gender politics under the contemporary AKP rule relies on a conservative understanding of family and anti-feminism that replaces gender equality with the idea of complementarity between genders, claiming that feminist ideas cannot respond to contemporary challenges. As this conservative gender politics with pro-Islamist tones is promoted through policy initiatives, legislations, discursive interventions, conservative gender discourses gain further efficacy in public deliberation. Consequently, feminism gets increasingly eliminated from the social and political lexicon through various rhetorical strategies such as promotion of antifeminism from within a pro-Islamist framework and/or reference to the postfeminist moment in the

contemporary world. In this frame, the thorough study of the gender regime under the AKP rule has disclosed that postfeminist arguments calling for revision of established feminist ideas may be easily appropriated by conservative social forces for rendering antifeminist gender discourses entrenched.

The following conclusions follow this line of analysis. First, attempts to destabilize the meanings underlying feminism and feminist identity through postmodern concepts such as flexibility, multiplicity, difference and fragmentation can contribute to an anti-essentialist, dynamic conception of feminism. Yet, when appropriated by the anti-identity trend in scholarship and the conservative patriarchal discourses, this destabilization may easily evolve into elimination of gender as an analytical category and redefinition of feminism as passé, redundant and/or dangerous.

Thus, one should be alert to the fact that in order to enhance the public standing of antifeminism, conservative discourses may rely on certain strands of postfeminism deeming feminism as old-fashioned, static and exclusionary. Moreover, they may appropriate contemporary feminist debates in such a way as to generate a progress narrative in which basic feminist acquisitions such as the idea of gender equality are rendered obsolete. Thus, it is of critical importance to take notice of the implications of the contemporary feminist doubts cast on concepts such as equality and commonality as they may turn into rhetorical tools to legitimize the conservative rejection of feminism. On the other hand, this vigilance should not dissuade us from employing a dynamic, anti-essentialist approach to revisit core feminist ideas and conceptions that are incapable of dealing with today's challenges.

Keeping in mind the points outlined above, this study has scrutinized the issue of feminist identification without a categorical fixation of identity positions as progressive or regressive. It has demonstrated that the call for revision of entrenched feminist ideas may connote both a progressive, antiessentialist move and a conservative deviation from the feminist line of thinking. This complexity points out that discourses on feminism may be highly transitional, commuting between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic publics. This acknowledgement has made it possible to study the issue of feminist self-identification in its complexity and beyond the categorical answers of “Yes, I am a feminist” or “No, I am not a feminist”.

In this frame, this study has demonstrated that when read through the lenses of anti-essentialist, pro-identity feminist theories, feminist self-identification can operate as an interpretive horizon, enabling subjects to make sense of their experiences as well as the social and political context surrounding them. As such, it can serve as a useful tool to denote the situatedness arising from gendered subjectivity and the claims, demands and needs associated with it. In addition to implying acknowledgment of gendered subjectivity and identification with feminist collective identity, this interpretive, dynamic usage of the term can also function as a rhetorical strategy to promote counter-hegemonic feminist discourses vis-a-vis conservative antifeminism. Hence, one should acknowledge that negotiation of feminist identity can gain additional meanings beyond belonging and identification. It can assume a role in enhancing the efficacy of feminism in the discursive gender regime where hegemonic conservative discourses and counter hegemonic feminist discourses constantly struggle for meaning.

As discussed throughout this study, feminist self-identification functions as a multi-faceted form of public statement denoting the complex engagement with gendered subjectivity, lived experience and the social and political context. It reflects the peculiarity of subject positions in the public sphere and the ways in which subjects make sense of the social and political world around them in line with their gendered experiences. When read in such terms, it turns out to be a hermeneutic site where one engages in multi-layered meaning making processes. (Alcoff 2006) This reading of feminist self-identification as an “interpretive horizon” deeply grounded in subjects’ social locations is based on the idea that identifications are perspectival, context-specific and thus open to change. (Hekman, 1997) They derive their peculiarity from the “materiality of lived experience” that the subject experiences in a particular context. In this regard, one can safely argue that the topic of identity is best approached in context-based analyses. This locality can reveal how identification as a way of interpreting and working through, operates in a specific social and political context.

In this sense, the study of feminist self-identification in the contemporary Turkish context has disclosed many significant points regarding the discursive construction of feminism and feminist identity in the contemporary gender regime in Turkey. First, it has revealed that in a social and political context where antifeminist discourses are a constitutive part of the gender regime, the negotiation of feminist identity assumes multiple meanings. Accordingly, feminist identity may connote a strategic positioning that aims to avoid negative labeling and ostracization. It may also hint at a counter-hegemonic attempt to challenge the rise of patriarchal gender discourses. Its multifarious connotations point out the heterogeneity of the discursive realm in which meanings of feminism and feminist identity are debated. This

discursive realm is quite volatile and heavily-loaded in that the struggles between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic gender discourses are overarching to the extent that they permeate into the most intimate spheres of life including reproduction, abortion, c-section, sexuality, marriage and crosscut across class, ethnicity and religion.

Relying on the analysis put forward in this study, one can suggest that the narration of feminist identity always encapsulates quite complex qualities that resist fixed categorizations and demand a nuanced, interpretive approach acknowledging different tones embedded in identification. The contextual implications of the negotiation of feminist identity in contemporary Turkey render this need for a nuanced approach even more acute. As noted above, beyond being a categorical statement of belonging, feminist self-identification in contemporary Turkey is a form of public statement that reflects the overarching struggles for meaning in the gender agenda and is capable of contributing to the publicist aims of the feminist counter public.

The multifaceted character of feminist self-identification indicates that feminist identity in the contemporary Turkish context corresponds to a very intricate positionality that has both “selective” and “enforced” qualities. (Franks, 2002) When it connotes an “enforced positionality”, it usually involves stereotypical labeling and ostracization. On the other hand, feminist identity as a “selective positionality” designates a multifaceted engagement that displays quite dynamic, flexible properties. In women columnists’ mindset, the selective and enforced qualities of feminist self-identification blend together in such a way as to generate an amalgamous identity position that bears the marks of the contextual setting, women

columnists' situational meaning making processes and the interrelational dialogue that they engage with in the public sphere.

In this frame, this dissertation has contributed to the attempts to study the issue of feminist identity through a dynamic, anti-essentialist approach that can capture its multifariousness. Through a detailed survey on recent feminist theories on identity, it has disclosed main analytical tools of “mid-way” theories that mitigate between poststructuralist accounts of identity and the political need for stable identity claims. This perspective has proved to be quite fruitful for the purposes of this study especially in making sense of the coexistence of the denial of fixed identity labels and the stress on agency in women columnists' narratives. In this sense, one can suggest that “mid-way” theories provide useful tools to comprehend the shifting narrative lines, hybrid meanings as well as the multi-faceted, equivocal conceptions of belonging in women columnists' approach to feminist self-identification. This alternative perspective going beyond the binary opposition between the arguments for stable and flexible self reveals the complex web of meanings embedded in the espousal and/or denial of the feminist label and puts forward that politics of identity is not always entirely constraining.

To explore the cognitive building blocks involved in the narration of an identity position, this study also attempted to shed light on the close relationship between identity and the idea of narrative. Pointing out that the idea of narrative can capture the complexities and dynamic aspects of identity positions, it has underscored that identity narratives are formed within the limits of prevailing public narratives and in accordance with the interpretive horizon set forth by subjective experiences. In this sense, one of the major conclusions of this study has been the relevance of the idea of narrative in dealing with multi-layered identity narratives.

The idea of narrative can also provide a suitable ground to revisit the concept of public sphere in a more nuanced way. This study has put forward that subjects' particularities, which are brought into the open through narratives, map out the contours of their position in public deliberation. In this sense, idealistic accounts of the public sphere that ignore subjects' particularities with the aim to ensure inclusivity of all, prove to be futile in dealing with the power dimension involved in public deliberation. Following the feminist critique of the Habermasian conception of the public sphere, this study has explored the promising aspects and the limits of the idea of subaltern publics where marginalized identities can articulate their demands and needs. Since contestation over meaning always takes place through agonistic relationships in the public sphere (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), any study into the constitution and the operating logic of marginalized identities should take into account the relationship between hegemonic and subaltern publics. Thus, one of the main aims of this study has been to reflect on the relative positioning of hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses vis-a-vis each other and the transitivity between them. Rather than limiting the focus to the contestation between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic publics as binary opposites, this study engaged in an attempt to explore domains where hybrid discourses come into being, going back and forth between hegemonic and subaltern discursive fields. These elusive, mobile, borderland discourses are constantly in shift in accordance with the changing contextual setting, subjective experiences and/or strategic concerns. As such, they exceed the limits of the discursive field characterizing the public in question and point out the permeability of borders. Henceforth, two-pillar conceptions of the public sphere that confine their focus to the contestation between hegemonic and

counter-hegemonic publics, may not suffice to account for the operating mechanisms of borderland discourses.

Through an elaborate analysis of women columnists' narratives, this study has disclosed that borderland discourses come into being at a location marked by pure potentiality where subaltern discourses engage in dialogue with the hegemonic public. Since women columnists' unique positionality between the hegemonic and the feminist subaltern publics demands a new terminology, it would not be far-fetched to suggest that the shifting lines in their narratives connote a positionality that can be named as "public-in-between". This liminal space destabilizes the components of both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic publics, generating transformative effects on public discourses. It provides us a venue where the publicist character of counter publics can be further explored. Underlining the political necessity of forming conjunctural alliances, the study of borderland discourses hints at the existence of alternative public domains where the multiple, dialectical and always in process character of the "counter" in counter publics can be acknowledged. This dialogic reading of the relationship between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic publics can highly contribute to the formation of coalitional politics, deconstruction of the so-called representative unity of hegemonic and counter hegemonic publics and the enhancement of the efficacy of counter discourses. In addition to its possibilities, the idea of borderland marked by in-between positionalities may also display certain perils. At some points, borderland discourses may be prone to reproducing hegemonic norms and values, which destabilizes the meanings of the "counter" in their constitution.

Pointing out the sui-generis implications of the combination of pro-Islamism, neoliberalism, neoconservatism and antifeminism in AKP's gender politics, this

study has also touched upon the need in feminist activism to enhance the efficacy of profeminist ideas vis-a-vis the rise of patriarchal discourses in contemporary Turkey. AKP's conservative, anti-feminist gender discourse does not exhaust all possibilities of meaning making about gender issues in the contemporary public debates in Turkey. On the contrary, with each conservative, anti-feminist attempt to reinforce meaning in the discursive field, other possibilities for meaning strive to be more visible and influential. Given the antifeminist ethos of the current social and political moment, attempts to explore the possibility of bolstering coalitional feminist politics is of tantamount importance in the Turkish context today.

Keeping this in mind, one can suggest that the fields of struggle in the feminist subaltern public in contemporary Turkey has expanded considerably in order to counterweigh the rise of antifeminist gender discourses. Moreover, it has come into the open that feminist activism needs to ensure the broadest collaboration possible in order to contest the hegemonic attempts to stabilize meaning in the field of gender relations. Although the political urgency of feminist activism generates a promising potential for collaboration, the feminist subaltern public needs to develop a relational, transformative conception of coalition that will ensure a broader alliance between different voices of profeminist social forces. This relational conception of coalitional politics can greatly contribute to profeminist attempts by bridging differences without eradicating subjects' individuality. (Weir 2008, Anzaldua 2002)

In this frame, this study has set forth that the need for feminist collaboration in contemporary Turkey does not only require collaborative initiatives in the profeminist counter public, but also demands extensive publicity to keep feminist ideas on the agenda. From here, it is possible to reach the conclusion that unearthing

the potential in the media for enhancing the publicist goals of collaborative feminist politics is key for women's activism today.

In this frame, this study has indicated that women columnists as prominent public intellectuals engage in a contingent, contextual alliance with the feminist subaltern public, when certain issues are at stake. It has put forward that the rise of the patriarchal gender regime under the AKP rule has generated an incentive for women columnists to align with the feminist subaltern public. This profeminist alliance takes place at a liminal point characterized by a complex amalgam of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses.

In addition to its contribution to the enhancement of the efficacy of profeminist discourses in public deliberation, women columnists' contingent profeminist positionality can also bolster women's media activism, transforming the patriarchal language in media enterprises. At a time when major political contestations take place in the media sphere, women's media activism has the potential to counterweigh the rise of conservative patriarchal discourses. However, as it is shown in the study, in order for this profeminist alliance to turn into a sustained, all-inclusive and transformative coalitional politics, women columnists need to engage in further communicative engagement informed by self-reflexivity and receptivity to others' demands. Collaboration with the feminist subaltern public per se does not ensure transformative coalitional politics. Neither the feminist counter public nor profeminist women columnists have fully adopted the relational, anti-essentialist qualities of transformative coalition politics. To make sense of the complexity of the profeminist collaboration between different actors in the public sphere and uncover the gist of the profeminist ideas at stake, one should acknowledge the multiplicities underlying actors' positions. Thus, before presenting

women columnists' categorically as a major coalition partner for the feminist subaltern public, one should investigate the reciprocity between the profeminist components of women columnists' writings and the potential for an all-inclusive, anti-essentialist feminist coalitional politics in the feminist subaltern public.

Having said this, it is worthwhile to stress that women columnists' narratives display multiplicity, rendering fixed categorizations and labelings impossible. They are divided into reformist and orthodox sub-clusters, depending on their receptivity to others' differences and openness to change through dialogue. This in-between positionality in the public sphere and the contingent alliance with the feminist subaltern public sphere are indicative of the *sui generis* aspects of their situatedness in the Turkish context. As pioneer women in the media field, most of the women columnists assume a generic existence when they talk about their professional identity in public. This generic self-presentation originates from the fact that the operating mechanisms of the media sphere rely on a binary opposition between womanhood and professional merit. As most of the interviews in this study point out, the male dominance and the patriarchal elements of the journalistic profession result in women columnists' negation of gendered subjectivity. This generic thinking underlying women columnists' pioneer role in the journalistic sphere results from their aspiration to avoid victim's position, prove their professional merit and ensure fair treatment. In this sense, one can suggest that vulnerabilities underlying women columnists' positionalities in the public sphere is one of the main factors explaining the puzzling, janus-faced shifts in their narratives.

Another significant point underscored in this study is the secular/Islamist divide as one of the major fault lines with regard to women columnists' approach to contemporary gender debates. In this sense, the comparative study of women

columnists' narratives has proved to be quite useful in mapping out the contours of their position in the public sphere. One should note that differences in secular and pious women columnists' narratives do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that they constitute two isolated groups with impermeable boundaries. In collaborating with the feminist subaltern public, these two groups may display many commonalities in their approach to gender debates. The call for flexible, multiple identities, the critique of fixed identity labels, the stress on an all-inclusive, profeminist coalitional politics and opposition to patriarchal statements, violence against women and underrepresentation of women in parliament can be outlined as major themes that provide an incentive for secular and pious women columnists to take collaborative action. Yet, what is crucial here is to acknowledge that this potential for bridging differences does not reduce different positionalities into unified, categorical agreements.

Hegemonic discourses reproducing negative labeling and subjects' failure to differentiate between stereotypical labeling from outside and redefinition of identities in line with one's needs and demands, have also appeared as major forces shaping women columnists' approach to gender, gendered subjectivity, feminism and feminist identity. Both the contextual setting and women columnists' peculiar positionality in the public sphere play a key role in their construction of intricate narratives on feminism and feminist identity. In this sense, identity positions in women columnists' narratives are adopted as a result of both processes of making sense of subjective experiences and the discursive effects of hegemonic public narratives. They are neither solely imposed from outside, nor do they have a pre-given, essential character.

Shifting narrative lines and strategies that women columnists employ in their narratives clearly exemplify that identity narratives resist closure and are hard to pin down because they encompass multiple layers of meaning in line with subjects' positionality and their making sense of the contextual setting. They involve multiplicities, contradictions, strategic elements, constantly shifting belongings and contextual positionings. Prominent narrative lines and strategies that stand out in women columnists' narratives on feminist identity and feminist self-identification can be outlined as follows: 1.) Avoidance from being confined to fixed identity categories, 2.) Critique of fixed identity labels, 3.) Reservation of a privileged epistemic position for themselves in order not to be confined to a victim's position, 4.) Stress on agency, intentionality and individual success to enhance the public recognition of their professional identities, 5.) Coexistence of denial and affirmation of feminist identity in the same narrative, 6.) Coexistence of anti-essentialist and essentialist approaches to feminism and feminist identity, 7.) Appropriation of belonging in line with the public context in question.

Along these lines, one can conclude that identity narratives in the public sphere are always constructed by bearing in mind who the audience is. Since identity narratives signify a reciprocal event between the teller and the audience, we always address a particular audience while we perform our identities. Thus, each time we perform our identities, we may put the stress on different aspects of the self or perform the self in different ways, depending on the dialogue that we expect to emerge out of our interrelations with the audience. One can suggest that women columnists' "narrative editing" is closely related to their linguistic vulnerability in the public sphere, their unique positionality and the discursive limits as well as the discursive opportunity structures embedded in the contextual setting.

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