EMANCIPATED BUT UNLIBERATED?
REFLECTIONS ON THE TURKISH CASE

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Western feminist theory has often been castigated for its ethnocentrism but has rarely been subjected to an explicit examination from the point of view of its relevance and applicability to non-Western contexts. Concepts generated by Western feminists have rarely been applied to informed analyses of women in Islamic societies; conversely, the experiences of women under Islam have not been systematically used to critically evaluate feminist concepts. This has been at least partly due to the persistence of orientalist approaches and their tendency to treat Islam as a unitary ideology from which practices related to women can be automatically assessed in any given Islamic society. Despite the privileged place assigned to Islam in analyzing the position of women in the Middle East, there is little actual agreement on either its implications for women or on where exactly the specificity of Islam lies. Thus, Cynthia Nelson and Virginia Olesen, for instance, see Islam as an ideology of complementarity and suggest that “what makes an understanding and identification with contemporary women’s liberation movements in the West so difficult for Muslim feminists in the East is the latter’s overriding commitment to the notion of complementarity.” Further, “Islam by postulating difference and complementarity (particularly between sexes) does not imply an ideology of oppression.”

The “separate-but-equal” argument appears in the literature with varying degrees of sophistication and generally implies a relatively uncritical stand on the possible role of religion in legitimating women’s oppression. However, even when such a critical stand is adopted there can be important divergences among interpretations of exactly how Islam construes women. Fatima Mernissi suggests...
Asas Kocak, a cartoonist who lives today in Ankara, Turkey, drew this in 1983 while a primary school teacher in a rural Anatolian province. It illustrates his view of the patriarchal oppression of women in Turkey.
in a provocative and interesting argument that women's subordi-
nation is related to the Islamic view of female sexuality which
sees it as potent, active, and so potentially disruptive to the male
social order. As she put it: "The Muslim order faces two threats:
the infidel without and the woman within." Hence, the institu-
tional arrangements (legal submission, veiling, and seclusion) to
protect the unity of the umma (the collectivity of male believers).
This perspective provides a refreshing departure from Western
depictions of female passivity in the orthodox Freudian vein, but
where does it leave women? However, Binnaz Toprak fails to be
convinced by this argument as sexual potency does not imply
mental capacity. On this latter count, she finds Islamic religion rife
with clear indications of women's inferiority.

In fact, so little is Islamic faith in women's ability for rational reasoning that
the Koran accepts the testimony of two women as equivalent to the testimony
of one man. In addition, the Koran explicitly states that men are superior to
women and this has been interpreted by some Muslim commentators as proof
of divine judgment that women lack mental ability and physical capacity to
carry out public duties. Yet, why should these beliefs strike us as so very different from
those, for example, of a Chinese patriarch? Indeed, Lois Beck and
Nikki Keddie suggest that "the basic patterns of male domination,
the virginity-fidelity-son-producing ethos, a sexual double stan-
ard and so on, existed in the Middle East and in other parts of the
world long before Islam was born." Nonetheless:

What is special about Islam in regard to women is the degree to which matters
relating to women's status have either been legislated by the Quran, which
believing Muslims regard as the literal word of God as revealed to the Prophet,
or by subsequent legislation derived from interpretations of the Quran and the
traditional sayings of the Prophet.

Would the replacement of the Sharia (the Islamic code) by new
secular laws and codes, as in the case of Turkey, lead to the loss of
such specificity? Or would there still be evidence of some con-
tinuity?

In this article I will argue that Islam as an ideological system
does provide some unifying concepts that influence women's ex-
periences of subordination. These are vested in the culturally de-
defined modes of control of female sexuality, especially insofar as
they influence subjective experiences of womanhood and fem-
ininity. This is not to suggest that such cultural controls are im-
mutable and unchanging; nor is it meant to deny the complexity of contemporary socioeconomic changes and their independent impact on gender relations. What is proposed is that cultural controls, to the extent that they are intimately related to the construction of oneself as a gendered subject, may engage a deeper level of self-definition, a level that has to be acknowledged if we are to address the question of feminist consciousness in any meaningful way.

I will also argue, however, that there is a great deal of diversity and specificity in women's experiences in Islamic societies which vary with the nationalist histories and social policies of the countries within which women are located. The discussion of the Turkish case will therefore be explicitly geared to a discovery of the general and specific conditions of women's experiences in the Middle East. This discussion will provide the background for an evaluation of the relevance and limitations of Western feminist approaches.

THE ROLE OF THE STATE

Among the countries of the Middle East, Turkey may be singled out as a republic that has addressed the question of women's emancipation early, explicitly, and extensively. The formal emancipation of Turkish women was achieved through a series of legal reforms following the war of national independence (1918-23) and the establishment by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk of a secular republic out of the remains of the Ottoman state. The adoption of the Turkish Civil Code in 1926, inspired by the Swiss Code, outlawed polygamy, gave equal rights of divorce to both partners, and permitted child custody rights to both parents. Women's enfranchisement took place in two steps: women were first granted the vote at local elections in 1930 and at the national level in 1934. These rights were not obtained through the activities of women's movements, as in the case of Western women's struggle for suffrage, but were granted by an enlightened governing elite committed to the goals of modernization and "Westernization." This fact had led to considerable speculation as to what the strategic goals of these reforms could have been. First-generation republican women writers have stressed the inevitability of these reforms in the development of a democratic, civic society. More recently, Sirin Tekeli has suggested that women's rights have played a strategic
role both against the political and ideological basis of the Ottoman state and in terms of establishing proofs of "democratization" vis-à-vis the West. She argues that singling out women as the group most visibly oppressed by religion, through practices such as veiling, seclusion, and polygamy, was absolutely central to Ataturk's onslaught on the theological state which culminated in the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924. (The Caliph was the worldly representative of the Prophet Mohammed. The last Ottoman Sultan was also the last Caliph.) Tekeli interprets the timing of the legislation on women's suffrage in the 1930s, on the other hand, partly as an important attempt on the part of Ataturk to dissociate his single party regime from the European dictatorships of the time (Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy).9 In contrast to the "Kinder-Küche-Kirche" ideology of these fascist states, Turkey presented itself as a country electing women to its parliament and thereby symbolically claimed its rightful place among other Western democratic nations.10

This approach concurs with analyses of the strategic role of women's rights in other kinds of revolutionary activities. Gregory Massell's analysis of the mobilization of Muslim women of Soviet Central Asia and their use as a "surrogate proletariat" illustrates a different but equally pragmatic political project.11 Maxine Molyneux's review of policies geared to women in socialist societies suggests that improving the position of women may be seen by reforming governments as a key to dismantling the old order. In this respect, she points out that the most striking differences may be found between capitalist and socialist states in Muslim societies of the Third World.12 In the former, traditional practices such as polygamy, veiling, child marriage, and the seclusion of women from public life seem to prevail to a much greater extent. This brings us to the rather obvious conclusion that the Islamic nature of a society can only be evaluated with reference to its broader political project rather than the dominant religious affiliation of its population.

In this respect Turkey emerges as a unique case. In historical terms, it is a country that has never been colonized. Therefore, the dilemma of the emancipation of women in Islam has not presented itself quite in the same way as it has in those countries that were former Western colonies. Nelson and Olesen note that, in these latter countries, "the fact that western colonisers took over
the paternalistic defense of Muslim woman's lot characterized any changes in her condition as concessions to the coloniser. Women's emancipation was readily identified as succumbing to western influence."13 More importantly, Leila Ahmed argues that the facts of dependency ultimately compromise the consciousness of women themselves.

For the Islamic woman, however, there is a whole further dimension to the pressures that bear down on her urging her to silence her criticism, remain loyal, reconcile herself to even find virtue in the central formulations of her culture that normally she would rebel against: the pressure that comes into being as a result of the relationship in which Islamic society now stands in relation with the West.14

Although “Westernizing” bureaucrats in Turkey have similarly been charged with capitulation to foreign values and, in extreme cases, with a form of internal colonialism, the level of investment of elements of national identity into women's "traditional" behavior is notably lower than that in most Middle Eastern countries. The process of secularization, although far from being unproblematic, has undoubtedly left its mark.15 Nonetheless, the emancipatory measures geared to women in Turkey have been described in rather contradictory terms as being either spectacular or merely superficial and cosmetic. In actual fact, neither statement is strictly true. It is a fact that Kemalist reforms remained a dead issue for a long time, especially in those rural areas most weakly integrated into the national economy. The avoidance of civil marriage in favor of the religious ceremony, with the related possibility of polygamy, repudiation, and illegitimacy; the marriage of underage girls; the demand for baslik (brideprice) in the marriage contract; the denial of girls' rights to education; and the emphasis on women's fertility were continuing signs of the uneven socioeconomic development of the country. There is no doubt, however, that the Kemalist reforms have directly benefited women of the urban bourgeoisie. Ayse Öncü's incisive analysis of Turkish women in the professions gives us important clues about the reasons and the implications of the recruitment of women into prestigious occupations. The occupations analyzed are law and medicine, in which statistics indicate that Turkish women's participation levels compare very favorably with those in countries such as France and the United States. Öncü suggests that the entry of Turkish women into the professions was a function of the initial
mode of recruitment of cadres under conditions of rapid expansion in the new republic. The rapid expansion of elite cadres with specialized and technical education is a mark of many reforming or revolutionary governments and may necessitate the recruitment of individuals from manual and peasant origins, if upper- and middle-class women do not begin to enter professional schools. The favorable climate of opinion vis-à-vis women's education in Turkey has been instrumental in the recruitment of upper- and middle-class women into prestigious and highly remunerated professions. In this sense, women's education has acted not so much as a means of mobility as a means of class consolidation, because these women might have posed less of a threat than upwardly mobile men from humbler origins.

However class-biased the republican reforms may have been, they have had some obvious and some subtler long-term effects. As a case in point, we may turn to Öncü's prognostic on the role of women in the professions in Turkey. She suggests that despite the historical specificity of their recruitment into the professions, women's entry has created a momentum of its own and has avoided the sex typing of many jobs and possibly provided role models for younger generations. A Turkish woman in the university is as or more likely to become an engineer as any of her Western counterparts. All current studies, on the other hand, continue to show that the socioeconomic status of female university students is clearly higher than that of the overall male student population, indicative of a continuing elite recruitment pattern among women.

The aim of the foregoing discussion was to illustrate, by means of the Turkish case, how the political project of the state can act as a major source of discontinuity in the experiences of women in Muslim countries. The state may be a powerful instigator of change through policies that may in some cases represent an onslaught on existing cultural practices. These may be met with various forms of resistance or may, on the contrary, be facilitated by new political alliances and major transformations in the socioeconomic sphere, including women's own capacity to organize and struggle for their rights. The case of Turkey illustrates both the potentials and the limitations of reforms instigated by a political vanguard in the absence of a significant women's movement. This demonstration has, however, left out a crucial issue, namely, a discussion of
whether and how the discontinuities instigated by the state relate to the development of a feminist consciousness.\textsuperscript{18} Put in another way, what is the relationship, if any, between "emancipation" and "liberation"? The changes in Turkey have left the most crucial areas of gender relations, such as the double standard of sexuality and a primarily domestic definition of the female role, virtually untouched.\textsuperscript{19} In that sense, it is tempting to describe Turkish women as emancipated but unliberated, because signs of significant political activity by women to remedy this state of affairs have been largely absent. However, putting down the failure of the development of autonomous women's movements and feminist consciousness in the Western sense to women's "Islamically" mystified consciousnesses or their reticence to identify with "foreign" values would be a gross oversimplification. Women's liberation movements do not simply refer to women's subordination as an abstract category but give it a content which is reflective of \textit{concrete} instances of subordination and subjective experiences of oppression directly derived from them. These are generally the experiences of women in the industrialized or postindustrialized West. In what follows, I will argue a rather obvious point: that different cultural modes of control of female sexuality create different subjective experiences of femininity. Insofar as subjective experiences of femininity and/or oppression have a direct bearing on the shaping of what we might imprecisely label a "feminist consciousness," they have to be taken seriously and analyzed in far greater detail than they have been.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{CULTURAL CONTROLS AND THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF FEMININITY}

No single issue has been fraught with as much contradiction as that of Muslim women's sexed subjectivity. Their segregated lives have been described either as instances of unrelieved oppression or as rich social lives in "parallel worlds," with greater potential for psychological liberation than their Western sisters who have compromised themselves through prolonged social promiscuity with men.\textsuperscript{21} Their relationships to each other have also variously been described as typical instances of the divisive rivalry of the oppressed or, on the contrary, the sisterhood and solidarity of those with strong same-sex bonds. Apart from the fact that both visions
tend to be relatively ethnocentric, they tell us very little about the underlying dynamics of women’s experiences. There is nothing in segregation per se that necessarily breeds rivalry or fosters solidarity. It will be suggested that it is the mode of control of female sexuality, which includes the practice of segregation, that has a direct bearing on how gender is internalized. The discussion will be by no means exhaustive but will selectively focus on the following issues: the “corporate” control of female sexuality, the psychological effects of sex segregation, and the characteristics of the female life cycle. Several simplifications will have to be made for the sake of clarity. Class-specific modalities of these cultural controls will not be discussed; nor will distinctions be made between aspects of the history of the relations between the sexes and their contemporary variations.

The corporate control over female sexuality becomes strikingly evident in the large number of different individuals who see themselves as immediately responsible for ensuring women’s appropriate sexual conduct. Parents, siblings, near and distant relatives, and even neighbors closely monitor the movements of the postpubescent girl, firmly imprinting the notion that her sexuality is not hers to give or withhold. This is clearly apparent at the critical juncture of the choice of a marriage partner.

In societies where marriage is still defined as the formation of family alliances, it is not up to the individual woman to “get her man.” A national survey carried out as recently as 1968 showed that as many as 67 percent of Turkish marriages were arranged, albeit with full consent of both partners. In 11 percent of the cases the marriage contract seems to have taken place without the women’s consent, and in 3 and 9 percent of the cases in urban and rural areas, respectively, the young couple escaped familial control altogether by means of elopement. In any case, the choice of a mate is by no means a personal matter. Although a woman’s personal attributes do play a role in whether she is considered marriageable, it is ultimately her family’s responsibility to see to it that a suitable match is arranged. In the past, and currently among the less permissive strata of society, this has kept multitudes of women from competing against each other on the free market for sexuality and marriage. Against this background, the equation of love with marriage, notions of romantic love, and images of marriage as woman’s ultimate fulfillment find less fertile ground on
which to flourish. Emotional attachment is often expected to develop after marriage. The degree of emotional closeness, actual or expressed, in the wife-husband relationship is variable. In the traditional context, especially if it involved extended family living, little overt displays of interest in one's spouse was encouraged and few occasions for intimacy were allowed outside the marital bedroom. In contrast to the apparent instrumentality of the wife-husband relationship, legitimate expressions of emotional warmth and closeness become possible in relation to one's children, and also within same-sex groups, a point to which we shall return later.

A central corollary of corporate control over female sexuality in this context is the close connection between female sexual purity and family or lineage honor. Women are vested with immense negative power because any misbehavior on their part can bring shame and dishonor to the male members of a whole community, lineage, or family. Strict external constraints are placed on women, which may range from total seclusion and veiling to severe restrictions of their movements and their access to public places. Both Hanna Papanek in her study of purdah in Pakistan and Fatima Mernissi in her analysis of Morocco lay great stress on the symbolic value of restrictive practices directed at women to protect against the dangers of uncontrollable and socially disruptive sexual desire. Mernissi has noted the explosive and dangerous quality ascribed to femaleness in Muslim societies. Papanek further suggests that it may be that internalised "guilt" feelings are more applicable to impulse control in societies which are highly dispersed. "Shame" mechanisms are more dependent on sanctions imposed by members of a group with whom there is frequent interaction. In terms of this differentiation, the purdah system clearly relies more on the use of shame rather than guilt mechanisms of social control.

She concludes that "it would be a potent irony to find that the seclusion of women through the purdah system operates effectively enough to make sexual repression, in the Freudian sense, unnecessary."24

Without having to venture so far afield, it might be quite safe to assume that the very strictness of the controls placed on female sexuality gives women's femininity the status of an inalienable, permanent property. It is an ascribed status rather than something to strive for. The same cannot be said of man's masculinity. An
argument that had been presented at a more general level by feminists working within a revised psychoanalytic framework is that to the extent that men’s earliest identification is with their primary caretaker, who is usually their mother, their ego boundaries are predicated upon a radical separation from the feminine. I would further like to suggest that cultural constructions of the masculine and feminine play a significant role in exacerbating the need for a constant reaffirmation of this psychological separation. The more compelling the myth of male superiority becomes (as in the case of the Latin machismo), the more difficult it is for men to live up to it. Masculinity is not an ascribed but an achieved status, one that is never permanently achieved, because the danger of being unmanned is ever present. Thus, proving one’s masculinity is a constant preoccupation as is the concern over the loss of masculinity. It may not be surprising to find that in cultures such as Turkey, which controls female sexuality rigidly and at the same time requires that men flaunt their masculine prowess, men are intensely preoccupied with possible loss of sexual identity. This state of affairs could partially account for the persistent element of danger associated with the female sex, an element that introduces the possibility of subjugation through violence especially when and if female behavior is construed as a slight against masculinity or male “honor.” Fatna Sabbah is quite right in pointing out the defensive element in Muslim patriarchal discourse which sets itself the urgent task of “neutralizing” women and their sexuality. Whether it reduces women to the rank of the “animal,” as in erotic discourse stressing female sexual potency at the expense of their humanity, or weakens her physically and morally, as in the sacred discourse, the result is a distortion and crippling of women’s essential humanity.

However, although woman’s very humanity may be in question, her femaleness never is. Very little has been said about the possible psychological consequences of this specific combination for women of corporate control over sexuality and a culturally and emotionally charged conception of one’s femininity. Concern over loss of femininity, a preoccupation referred to in the psychological literature as one of the possible internal obstacles to women’s successful professional achievement in the West, seems conspicuously absent in this context. A study carried out in the United States by Martina Horner proposed that a basic inconsistency exists be-
tween femininity and successful achievement: stories depicting professionally successful outcomes for women met with negative affect and fear-of-success imagery. This study has been criticized on both methodological and substantive grounds, and there have been many failures at replication. Nonetheless, older, classic studies such as Mirra Komarovsky's also pointed out the pressures on college women to appear less competent than they are lest they should appear unacceptable to their dates. Clearly, such concerns are intimately linked to broader expectations of the female role which are subject to transformation and redefinition. However, I thought there might be some value in replicating Horner's fear-of-success measure on a group of female and male university students in Turkey to find out whether similar concerns could be elicited in a different cultural context. Not only did I fail to find a statistical difference between the women and men, but, more importantly, I did not identify the critical qualitative responses that were supposed to signal concern over loss of femininity among women. The women who wrote stories involving the anticipation of negative consequences following professional success were preoccupied by very tangible, external contingencies such as intensified conflict with male colleagues and within their families. There was nothing to indicate that their perceptions of professional success had any bearing on their views of themselves as intrinsically feminine and desirable.

The relationship between Turkish women's gender roles and their professional roles, on such occasions that women do step into public roles, is extremely puzzling. Paradoxically, their sense of gender, while strong, does not seem to permeate their being in the same diffuse, persistent way that it does Western women's in most cross-sex interaction situations, including professional ones. It may be that the very rigidity of cultural definitions of femininity helps redefine women in positions of power as "nonfemale," or at least "asexual," or that a variety of cultural mechanisms are specially mobilized to construct some cross-sexual encounters as sexually "neutral" (such as falling back into the kinship idiom that labels unrelated women as sister, aunt, and mother according to their ages, with explicit overtones of asexuality). In any event, women seem to have the ability to act as professionals whose habits of behavior do not require persistent orientation to men as males. Admittedly, these observations are highly speculative; the reasons of-
ferred to account for them are even more so. For instance, Lloyd Fallers and Margaret Fallers, in their study of the women of a small town in western Anatolia, invoke the possible psychological impact of sex segregation. They suggest that "these Turkish women in the public sphere bring with them from the traditional separate world of women a sense of independence from men which makes them more able to concentrate on the tasks at hand in the public world."³⁰ This assertion is in need of critical examination.

Most of humanity continues to live in more socially sex-segregated circumstances that we are willing normally to admit. The fact that certain societies do not impose visible restrictions on women's movements does not in and of itself mean that women share the same social worlds with men. Studies of Western working-class women present examples of intense primary group, sex-segregated socializing.³¹ Strong relationships between women expressed in frequent contact and mutual cooperation do not exist only in formally sex-segregated societies. Yet, there is a sense in which, compared with men's clearly articulated patterns of "men-only" leisure activities, women's culture in the West emerges as a sort of residual category rather than as a truly self-contained world. In sex-segregated societies, women's parallel networks of sociability are highly articulated and involve structured visiting patterns, specific forms of religious and ritual participation, as well as specified forms of group entertainment. A lot of self-expressive activity takes place within single-sex groups (such as singing, dancing, and joking), and women do not depend exclusively or primarily on men for their self-definition.³² The same is, of course, true about male groups and friendships.

This background of sex-segregation may seem to have very little bearing on the contemporary urban middle class in Turkey where couple or mixed-sex socializing is becoming the norm. Yet, a specific pattern seems to be emerging which Emelie Olson has characterized as the "duofocal" family.³³ Apart from the time spent together as a couple, women and men tend to continue to cultivate their separate networks of same-sex friends. For women, this network involves relatives, old classmates, and neighbors as well as their colleagues, if they are working women. However, this mode of socializing implies continued access to their primary group networks, and this access is bolstered by relatively low geographic mobility. Under conditions of increased mobility, more character-
istic of the Western middle class, it may be harder for women to cultivate long-term primary networks, and there may be a tendency—especially on the part of housewives—to gravitate toward husbands' networks of social relations and the secondary organizations, such as clubs and associations, of the community in which they live. The extent to which the Western nuclear family defines itself as an inward-looking, emotionally self-sufficient unit is clearly quite variable, and there are important differences along class and ethnic lines. Nonetheless, to the extent that the "couple" operates as a unit, and may in some extreme cases come to represent the only source of primary group interaction for both sexes, it creates new sources of strain and places a greater psychological burden on the institution of marriage or cohabitation. The dangerous levels of social and emotional isolation that may result for non-working women have been documented extensively in both feminist research and fiction. It should not seem surprising that the "rediscovery of sisterhood" has been so high on the Western feminist agenda.

Women's greater ability to foster and maintain their own networks of sociability in the Middle East appears as an extremely important element in their control over their lives. One of the consequences of this "social embeddedness" of women is their ability to benefit from wider support systems for their domestic duties, especially childcare. These support systems may be of a reciprocal nature (especially among kin) but are just as frequently exploitive of other women (as with domestic servants or poor relatives). It may seem ironic that, in the last analysis, these are the very mechanisms that serve to shelter the male role from any fundamental redefinition, as domestic tasks continue to be effectively absorbed by other women even when wives lead demanding professional lives.

It is therefore important to remember that women's cooperation and sociability in the Middle East takes place against a highly patriarchal background where a variety of both material and symbolic means will be mobilized to minimize challenges to men's existing prerogatives. An examination of women's life cycles will help us put in place a final but important building block of their identity as well as shed some light on the psychological mechanisms instrumental in reproducing women's subordination.

The nature of the female life cycle in the "ideal-typical" patri-
locally extended household provides us with important clues with respect to both the reproduction of women's subordination in the Middle East and the psychological internalization of this subordination. This type of domestic arrangement, involving early marriage of women into male-headed households, clear son preference and devaluation of the female child, and a sharp age hierarchy within both female and male domains, is by no means specific to Islamic societies but is also quite typical of South and East Asian societies such as India and China. Nonetheless, many cultural practices that have a profound impact on women's psychological development in the Middle East emanate from this type of household, which is neither specifically Middle Eastern nor Islamic, and which exhibits some significant variations across Middle Eastern societies.

In Turkey, the critical relationships in the household are between in-marrying women to the male-headed household. A girl comes to her husband's household, as her title gelin (literally, the "one who comes") indicates. In her own socialization as a little girl, it is made quite clear to her that she will have to leave her house of origin and go to el (strangers). This may not be as extreme a break with her past if she marries within her kin group. However, she starts out her married life under extremely unfavorable power terms. Within the household there is a clear hierarchy whereby the newest bride is subordinated to her mother-in-law as well as all the sisters-in-law with more seniority. Childbearing, especially of a male child, gives her fuller acceptance in her husband's family, and, finally, when her father-in-law dies she establishes her separate nuclear household and comes into her own. However, the apex of her influence and power comes when she in turn has grown sons who bring her brides. The cyclical nature of women's relative power position in the household, as well as the fact that their socialization is at every stage overseen by other women whose authority they may covet, leads to a thorough internalization and reproduction of this particular form of patriarchy. In this context, a women's relationship to her son is absolutely crucial. The mother-son relationship is an intimate and affectionate one, where the woman indulges her son greatly, sometimes protecting him against a punitive father, and looking to him for future security and protection. Conversely, a man's relationship to his mother may be stronger than that to his wife, and in cases of conflict his
solidarity may easily go to the former. The tug-of-war between mother-in-law and wife for the man's loyalty is a product of this socialization which has far outlived the context in which it was born.

Currently, extendedness accounts for a very short period of a household's domestic cycle, and it may not take place at all. As younger men become increasingly emancipated from their own fathers, young couples in nuclear families are also more independent. The expectation of aging in an extended household surrounded by subservient brides is simply no longer there. However, the break from the extended family pattern does not seem to have a definitive effect on women's familial expectations. Women's socialization, which brings a promise of lifelong nurturance, is more often than not actually fulfilled in the Turkish context. Adolescents and youngsters continue to depend on their families for shelter and material support, regardless of whether they are required to contribute to the family budget. Even after marriage, actual material constraints may make a period of cohabitation, or at least close contact, inevitable. The birth of grandchildren brings new responsibilities and chores to the older woman at a time when her Western counterpart may well be contemplating going back to college. On the whole, women experience continuity rather than discontinuity between the promises of their socialization and their eventual life-style. More importantly, in societies which continue to be more familial in orientation, for both women and men, the sense of psychological deprivation attached to being "confined" to domesticity may be less acute, if there at all. The same is not true for many Western women. Their involvement in childcare extends over a period of ten to fifteen years, a short period for an individual with a normal life expectancy. Children typically become more independent or leave home at a time when the husband is still active in his career and the wife is at a near-menopausal or menopausal stage. Any attempt to understand the psychological implications of women's life cycles must simply take into account the emancipation of children, adolescents, and young adults. In societies where the material and cultural base for such emancipation exists, women are more likely to suffer from "role loss" and may more easily turn to a fundamental redefinition of their role and a search for alternative life-styles. Significantly, many Western women's dissatis-
factions with their familial roles coincided with a restriction and impoverishment of these roles. It may well be argued that women's liberation movements in the West have helped to bring women's socialization and consciousness more in line with the actual demands of their situation rather than let them shoulder the whole psychological burden of change—alone, alienated, and mystified.\footnote{But see, e.g., Blumberg 1975.}

To summarize, an attempt has been made to show how in Turkey, and more generally in the Middle East, corporate control over female sexuality, sex-segregated networks of sociability with extensive informal support systems, and a life cycle involving a continued valuation of women's nurturant roles combine to produce a specific experience of one's gender. This experience is clearly fraught with deep contradictions. A secure sense of gendered self is achieved as a by-product of the most restrictive and oppressive controls over female sexuality. The sense of strength derived from mutual cooperation and support among women is ultimately instrumental in sheltering men from new demands and prolonging their traditional prerogatives. Moreover, the relationships among women often tend to be of a highly exploitive nature. Middle- and upper-middle class women, regardless of whether they are involved in remunerated work outside the home, may have the purchasing power to hire domestic workers such as maids and nannies. For poor women, who join the labor force out of economic necessity, the only household members who can be relied upon to share tasks are daughters, daughters-in-law, or other living-in female relatives. In every case, the basic living comforts of the household are created by women at the expense of other women. Processes of rapid social change increasingly reveal and intensify these contradictions. There is no reason to assume that, in the same way that young men resented forgoing independent income-earning opportunities for unremunerated labor in their father's farm or shop, girls will not resent being taken out of school to keep house and take care of younger siblings. We may expect intensified conflict between different generations of women especially if their position vis-à-vis each other represents an important labor relation in the household. Similarly, there is no reason to assume that as the minimum wage comes to represent a significant portion of middle-class incomes, and as job alternatives are created outside the domestic sector, the availability of domestic labor will not...
decline, leaving better-off women with no satisfactory alternatives to cater for their needs.

Many other aspects of women's lives are also in a state of flux. There is a growing uncertainty regarding sexual mores. Although corporate control over sexuality may continue to prevail, the actual nature of acceptable sexual conduct is constantly being challenged and renegotiated, creating important areas of confusion for both sexes across all classes.\textsuperscript{36} This may expose women to surprises and humiliations that their mothers were spared yet at the same time protect them from some of the worst excesses of the more traditional system. In any case, there will be important changes in the parameters that currently shape women's experiences. Whether these changes will promote greater empathy with the central concerns of women's liberation movements in the West or will produce a nostalgia for and commitment to traditional values and practices is difficult to predict. In all probability both tendencies will be present to some extent. At any rate, any observations on the development of a feminist consciousness within this context must start with a full recognition of the set of specific contradictions of women's experiences.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have attempted to identify some of the factors accounting for similarities and divergences in women's experiences in the Middle East through a detailed discussion of the Turkish case. I have chosen a specific historical location to demonstrate that the political project of the state can exert a powerful influence which inflects and modifies the place and practice of Islam and, consequently, the life options for women. Thus, although the secular reforms of the Turkish Republic may have had a set of nationalistic goals as their ultimate objective, they have nonetheless had a progressive impact on women's rights. I have, however, also argued that despite important variations there are undeniable unifying themes in the experiences of women emanating from the nature of cultural controls over female sexuality in the Muslim Middle East. The corporate control of female sexuality, linking female sexual purity to male honor, the segregation of the sexes, and the nature of the female life cycle, have been singled out as features that exert a decisive influence in shaping and reproducing
a culturally specific experience of gender. Although there are deep and important variations both among Middle Eastern societies and within them (along class and ethnic lines), if an irreducible "core" of cultural practice had to be identified I would suggest that it resides primarily in concrete modes of control of female sexuality, not all of which are specific to Islamic societies, rather than in the unmediated dictates of Islam. This search for specificity is of more than purely academic interest, because I have been arguing that ultimately we cannot totally divorce specific forms of consciousness (feminist or other) from the social relations that condition them.

It is in accounting for culturally specific forms of sexed subjectivity and their possible link with distinct modes of consciousness that I have found Western feminist theories either inadequate or incomplete. Radical feminist theories of both the culturalist and materialist variety, insofar as they choose to stress the universal aspects of women's oppression, have few tools to account for the specific historical and cultural arrangements that mediate between biologically rooted universal phenomena (such as childbearing) and their different institutionalized forms. On those occasions that they make statements about the universal experiences of womanhood, the attempts of Western radical feminists turn out to be either un-self-consciously reflective of concrete, culturally specific contexts or ahistorical searches for the essential woman. Marxist/socialist feminists, on the other hand, are generally better able to account for historically specific forms of women's subordination (especially within postindustrial capitalism) and generate concepts that are abstract and broad enough to escape charges of ethnocentrism. However, the very broad and abstract nature of these concepts makes a consideration of culturally defined sexed subjectivity—the very stuff that consciousness is made of—difficult if not impossible to deal with.

I would like to conclude by suggesting that this is the terrain that still remains to be captured. Advances in this direction would not only enrich feminist theory but would also make it a more sensitive tool for political action.
NOTES


6. Although most of the empirical material for this article is drawn from Turkey, my aim is to open up a more general line of theoretical inquiry for women in the Middle East and North Africa. Any references to Islamic societies and Muslim women within the text must be understood to refer to this circumscribed area (excluding, for instance, Islamic societies in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia).


10. On this question, Nora Seni sees a greater degree of continuity between the Ottoman and republican state traditions, especially in terms of the symbolic value attached to the control of women. For her, the "granting" of political rights to women by the republican state has the same analytical status as the painstaking Ottoman legislation specifying the mode of dress and conduct of women in urban space. Although highlighting the importance of the symbolic, this argument ultimately falls short of elucidating the political necessity of the reforms. See Nora Seni, "Ville Ottomane et Representation du Corps Feminin," Les Temps Modernes (July-August 1984): 66-95.


13. Nelson and Olesen, 32.


15. The meaning and actual degree of success of this process is a hotly debated issue in Turkey. Analyses attempting to explain the resurgence of Islamic values in Turkey draw our attention to structural changes which produced the emergence of a new elite at the center, in the form of the religious National Salvation Party [see Toprak, 291], and to a more diffuse search for identity stemming from the rapid transformation of society which had to be acknowledged even by the country's "secular" military rules [Nur Vergin, "Quand l'Islam reinvestit la ville," Le Monde Diplomatique (November 1982): 11]. Interestingly, most analysts seem to think that these developments do not pose a serious threat to women's rights.
17. Surveys carried out among university students consistently show that on the whole, female students come from more affluent backgrounds than male students, judging by indicators such as father's profession, family income, parents' education, and patterns of residence (metropolitan, urban, rural). This suggests that parents of modest means will make a special effort to put their sons through college—but not their daughters. There is therefore a closer relationship between girls' class background in terms of giving them access to higher education, than boys' who are drawn from a wider variety of social backgrounds.
18. For the purpose of this paper, I will adopt a minimalist definition by proposing that a feminist consciousness may be deemed to exist whenever women act as the self-conscious subjects of their own struggle, that is, when they recognize a set of demands as explicitly their own.
20. This is not to suggest that the complex historical forces that have led to contemporary feminism can be reduced to a mere epiphenomenon of specific women's or men's consciousnesses but rather to indicate a willingness to explore the impact of different cultural contexts on the shaping of sexed subjectivity. Ultimately, this should lead us into a discussion of alternative constructions of the human subject. This issue, although critical to an understanding of feminism, must remain outside the scope of this article.
21. Ahmed, for instance, argues convincingly that the segregated women of the Arabian Peninsula are not in the least mystified as to the true nature of the relations between the sexes in their society and have few doubts about their own self-worth despite the prevalent ideology of women's inferiority. See Leila Ahmed, "Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem," Feminist Studies 8 (Fall 1982): 521-34. Daisy H. Dwyer's study of Morocco, on the other hand, seems to suggest a greater degree of collusion on the part of women with the stereotype of female inferiority, although their acquiescence is mingled with protest and resistance. See her Images and Self Images: Male and Female in Morocco [New York: Columbia University Press, 1978], 263.
31. See, for example, Michael Young and Peter Willmott, Family and Kinship in East London (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957); and Lee Rainwater, R.P. Coleman,
32. See, for instance, Carla Makhlouf-Obermeyer, Changing Veils: A Study of Women in South Arabia [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979]. She suggests that women's meetings are also a vehicle for satire and ridicule of the male world.
35. I do not wish to suggest that gender relations in the family, as we know it, are not intrinsically oppressive to women but rather want to reflect on when and how they come to be perceived as such. I am intrigued by the possibility that such perceptions may arise at the point of transformation of such relations or when an important disjunction takes place between the ideology and the facts of domesticity.
36. For instance, the continuing value attached to women's virginity in a context where opportunities for cross-sex contact are more available and to some extent more permissible creates new practices such as the surgical replacement of the hymen designed to cover up any premarital lapses. For an insightful discussion, see Fatima Mernissi, "Virginity and Patriarchy," Women's Studies International Forum 5 (1982): 183-91.
37. It is noteworthy that on those occasions when Marxist/socialist feminists do discuss subjectivity they often fall back on psychoanalytic theory and its contemporary offshoots in ways that tend to obfuscate and trivialize, rather than engage with and problematize, the very real differences the experience of womanhood may represent.