Women's Islamic Movements and Politico-Religious Empowerment:

Accommodation, Dissent, and Transgression in Turkey and Egypt (1995-2016)

by

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Note on Transliteration and Language

I use International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) Arabic transliteration system throughout the dissertation, except for the internationally accustomed styles of personal names such as Hosni Mubarak or Amany Saleh, and for the Arabic words in use in English such as the Quran, hadith, sunnah, ijtihad, sharia, hijab or qiwamah. These are not italicized.

In case of concurrent transcriptions of Turkish and Arabic words, Turkish is written first separated by a forward slash (/) from the Arabic word.

For Arabic-to-English translations, I used *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: Arabic-English (4th Revised Edition)*, edited by J. M. Cowan, printed by Spoken Language Services Inc, Urbana, IL, 1994 (copyright: Otto Harrassowitz, 1979, 1994).

Abbreviations

AKDER: Ayrımcılığa Karşı Kadın Hakları Derneği – Women's Rights Association against Discrimination

AKODER: Aileyi Koruma ve Destekleme Derneği – Association for Protecting and Supporting Family

AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – Justice and Development Party

ASWIC: Association for Studying Women in Civilization– jamʿīya dirāsāt al-marʾā w-al-ḥaḍāra

AUC: American University in Cairo

BKP: Başkent Kadın Platformu Derneği – Capital City Women's Platform Association

ÇATOM: Çok Amaçlı Toplum Merkezi – Multi-Purpose Community Centre

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

CEWLA: Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance – markaz al-qaḍāyā al-marʾā al-maṣrīya

CIHRS: Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies

CWO: Coalition of Women's Organizations

DEDI: Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute

ECWR: Egyptian Center for Women's Rights

EEC: European Economic Community

EFU: Egyptian Feminist Union

EIPR: Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

FEPS: Faculty of Economics and Political Science

FGM: Female Genital Mutilation

FJP: Freedom and Justice Party – ḥizb al-ḥurrīya w-al-ʿadāla

GİKAP: Gökkuşağı İstanbul Kadın Kuruluşları Platformu – Rainbow Istanbul Women's Organizations' Platform

GONGO: government organized non-governmental organization

Hazar: Hazar Eğitim Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği - Hazar Education Culture and Solidarity Association

HİKDE: Hanımlar İlim ve Kültür Derneği – Ladies Learning and Culture Association

IIIT: International Institute of Islamic Thought

ISIL: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

İKADDER: İstanbul Kadın ve Kadın Kuruluşları Derneği – Istanbul Women and Women's
Foundations Association

İLKDER: İlke İlim Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği – Principal, Science, Culture and Solidarity
Association

KADEM: Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği – Woman and Democracy Association

KSSGM /KSGM: Kadının Statüsü ve Sorunları Genel Müdürlüğü/Kadının Statüsü Genel
Müdürlüğü (current) - Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women

KVINFO: Danish Center for Research and Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity

Markaz Hadara: *markaz al-ḥaḍāra l-il-dirāsāt siyāsīya – Civilization Center for Political Studies*

Mazlumder: İnsan Hakları ve Mazlumlar İçin Dayanışma Derneği - Association for Human
Rights and Solidarity for the Oppressed

MB: Muslim Brotherhood

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

MÜSİAD: Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği- Independent Industrialists and
Businessmen Association

Nazra: Nazra for Feminist Studies – naẓra l-il-dirāsāt al-nisawīya

NCW: National Council of Women - al-majlis al-qawmī l-il-mar'ā

Noon Center: Noon Center for Women and Family Issues - markaz nūn li-qaḍāyā al-mar'ā wa-l-
usra

OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PKK: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê – Kurdistan Workers' Party

POS: Political Opportunity Structures

PSL: Personal Status Laws

RPP: Republican's People Party – Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi

SCAF: Supreme Council of the Armed Forces

SIS: Sisters in Islam

SMT: Social Movement Theories

TEKH: Türkiye Entellektüel Kadın Hareketi - Intellectual Women's Movement of Turkey

The Initiative: Muslim Initiative against the Violence against Women - Kadına Şiddete Karşı
Müslümanlar İnisiyatifi

TÜRAP: Türkiye Aile Platformu - Family Platform of Turkey

UKADER: Uluslararası Kadın ve Aile Derneği - International Women and Family Association

WGT: Women who Get Together – Buluşan Kadınlar

WIMs: Women's Islamic movements

WLUML: Women Living under Muslim Laws

WMF: Women and Memory Forum - al-mar'ā w-al-dhākira

WWI: World War I

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We have joked a lot about the difficulty of Ph.D. life, but it has probably been a rare period in our lives when we had the luxury to focus on our one and unique idea, as Peter would say. Renira,

Abstract

Increasing religious traditionalism and authoritarianism worldwide, and in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in particular, pose a severe threat to the politico-religious empowerment of women. The threats have made examining women's Islamic movements (WIMs), one of the most important agents of political-religious empowerment of Muslim women, all the more necessary. What have been the capacities of women's Islamic movements for increasing and embodying politico-religious power in the Muslim-majority countries in the MENA for the last twenty years? How do institutional configurations of religion and other contextual differences across MENA influence politico-religious empowerment of women and movement patterns of WIMs?

Movement elements and contextual constraints influencing the empowerment capacities of WIMs have been overlooked, as scholars have mostly focused on the Islamic ideologies and discourses of WIMs. As opposed to the emphasis on ideology and agency in the literature on women's Islamic movements, I analyze empowerment capacities of women's Islamic movements with a contextual social movement approach. I study the rights advocacy of WIMs as opposed to the women's piety movements. Conducting a case-oriented comparative study in major cities in Turkey and in the capital of Egypt – two countries with different religion-state configurations, secularization patterns, and governing parties – enables us to see the effects of political institutions and context on the movement dynamics of WIMs and politico-religious empowerment of women.

The dissertation combines multiple data collection tools including personal interviews, ethnography, participant observation, and collection of published, broadcast and online sources. Data analysis is based on historical tracing and discourse analysis. The findings are based on fieldwork in Istanbul, Ankara, and Bursa between May 2013 and January 2016 over a period of fifteen months, and in Cairo over six months in 2014.

Two primary fields of literature have guided the theoretical framework: Social movement literature and literature on power contestations between religion and gender. I deploy the critical perspectives in both kinds of literature, especially those on the specificities of authoritarian contexts in the MENA. The findings of the thesis, however, signal a need for a new conceptual lens in understanding women's empowerment and movements in authoritarian and patriarchal religious contexts. I argue that the concept of *visibility of dissent*, incorporated from recent anthropological studies, captures dissenting and transgressive acts of women in broader public

space in authoritarian and patriarchal contexts more fittingly than 'participation' or 'collective action' concepts in social movement literature, and than the 'power of presence' (Bayat 2007) or 'everyday politics' emphases in the literature on authoritarian settings. Secondly, I adapt Linda Woodhead's (2007) typology on religion's relation to gender to create a typology of politico-religious acts of WIMs, namely accommodating, dissenting and transgressing. Finally, by juxtaposing these acts with their stances on broader political oppression in their contexts, I demonstrate that WIMs can attain several politico-religious empowerment capacities, namely consolidating, reformative and transformative ones. The dissertation provides a contextual- and movement-sensitive analysis of empowerment capacities of the women's Islamic movements, based on the recent empirical data from two important countries in the MENA.

Introduction

It is May 18, 2013 and I am waiting outside of a conference hall in Zeytinburnu, Istanbul where a well-known female writer in Islamic circles had just given a talk on women as constitutive agents of Islam. Her talk was part of a high-profile symposium on Islamism thought in Turkey. In her talk, she criticized the symposium's advertisement banners where the faces of twenty-four people from the history of Islamism were printed – all male. While she steps out of the conference hall, I go towards her to introduce myself and ask for an interview about her work and thoughts on women and Islam. Right before me, another well-known male intellectual in Islamic circles approaches her – behind him a male group of his sympathizers who are trying to assist or talk to him. He asks the female writer to tone down her speech about women's issues. She looks disturbed but still keeps a calm posture. I step back to spare her and approach later.

Women's politico-religious empowerment is at stake around the world since the influence of religions over politics has been enduring and in some parts has revitalized (Zald 1982, Asad 1999; Roy 2011). The politico-religious power – understood as abilities and boundaries sanctioned by religious-based legal or social measures as well as the broader political empowerment – has been more restricted for women across religions (Ahmed 1992, Berktay 1998, Aldikacti-Marshall and Sabhlok 2009; Morin and Guelke 2007). In the case of the Muslim majority countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), patriarchal religious interpretations on women's position in family and society are being produced by either official authorities or popular Islamist movements – although in different degrees and issues across the countries. Meanwhile authoritarian governments in the region – disrupted by brief revolutionary and free periods – curtail the overall public space. The idea of equality between women and men is being questioned in mainstream religious and political discourses in the MENA. Accordingly, women's rights in marriage, divorce, child custody are more limited than men in the countries where personal status laws are based on religion. Women's access to public space, including the right to education, work, and travel abroad, is under control with various legal or cultural measures sanctioned by patronizing religious

doctrines. Violence against women is overlooked, if not condoned, by religious authorities on the excuse of avoiding social disorder (*fitna*). Post-colonial authoritarian states often compromise women's rights to co-opt the religious sectors (Abu-Odeh 2004a).

During the early 2000's, women's studies scholars of the region pointed out an expansion of women's participation in the public sphere since the mid-1990's. Moghadam and Sadiqi argued in 2006 that over a decade:

> [T]he public sphere in a number of MENA countries is being *engendered* and *feminized* because of the emergence of women as political actors/agents and as an increasingly important political constituency—as voters, as members of parliament and local councils, as civil servants, as new "public intellectuals," as participants in civil society organizations (e.g., human rights organizations and professional associations), and as heads of women's organizations, associations, and networks (2006, 3, emphasis in original).

Along the same lines, some scholars have argued that Muslim women have opened up new spaces for themselves within the Islamic tradition by reinterpreting religion from a gender sensitive perspective (Hidayatullah 2014, Seedat 2013, Abugideiri, 2010, Badran 2009, Barlas 2008, 2002, Hatem 2002, 47, Cooke 2001). Mostly referred as Islamic feminism, scholars maintain that the reinterpretation of Islamic sources has empowered women.

The question remains as to how wide and robust this space has become and what kind of empowerment has taken place in the last two decades of protests, revolutions, entrenched authoritarianisms, and religious extremism in the MENA. Despite the revolutions and political openings in 2011 where women participated in mass numbers, women's empowerment has been under critical threat vis-a-vis the 'masculinist restoration' and authoritarian conditions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (Kandiyoti 2013). Religious traditionalism and extremism on the one hand (that have arisen in several post-revolution Arab countries), and authoritarian regimes (mostly post-colonial) on the other, limit politico-religious space of women. While religious traditionalism and extremism dehumanize women, authoritarian governments and

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regimes polarize political discourse, curtail overall democratic space and abuse women's rights discourse.

Hence, there is a need for a holistic approach to women's empowerment as Chantal Mouffe (1995) points out. Women's empowerment is directly connected to broader political empowerment in the MENA (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009). Therefore, besides the power contestations between women and religion, there is a need to look at the contestations between women and the political authority. Only with both elements surveyed, it is possible to assess women's *politico-religious* empowerment.

There are various usages of 'politico-religious'. In its dictionary definition, 'politico-religious' refers to the areas where politics and religion meet as exemplified in the usages of 'politico-religious power', or 'politico-religious alliance'. Sometimes it is used to refer to politicized religious movements such as Islamist or Hindu-nationalist movements (see Aldikactı-Marschall and Sabhlok 2009, 412). The complex and diverse relations of politics and religion in the MENA (Moghadam 2003a, 11) make using a common definition ever more difficult. 'Politico-religious empowerment,' understood as women's political and religious empowerment together, is not utilized in the literature as such. Studies on women's empowerment and emancipation in religion focus on opening up discursive spaces and limits and successes of Islamic feminism, without necessarily discuss the concept of empowerment. When they refer to empowerment in religion, they do not conceptualize it the political aspects. In this dissertation, women's 'politico-religious empowerment' is employed to capture three interrelated aspects of empowerment from the literature and the field: (a) women's access to the public sphere and decision-making mechanisms; (b) women's right to interpret and represent religion – especially when religion is a denominator for social practices or legal rights, (c) freedom from broader political oppression (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009).

Women's movements are important means for women's empowerment (Beckwith 2007, Squires 2007, Moghadam 2007, Banaszak et al. 2003, Rai 1996, Alvarez 1990). As instruments, women's movements advocate, protest, and lobby for women's *discursive* and *legal* empowerment. However, as an end in themselves, women's movements are also *the* field of empowerment. Acts of resistances are defined as demonstrations of power (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013). As Lila Abu-Lughod stated in her study of the resistances of Bedouin women 'where there is resistance,

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there is power' (1990, 42), thereby reverse-reading Michel Foucault's assertion 'where there is power, there is resistance' (1978). Women's movements constitute an embodiment of empowerment by their sole existence. As embodiment, they create *discursive* and *organizational* spaces for women; in other words, they *are* women's discursive and organizational empowerment. Characteristics of movements – such as being underground or public, the numbers of people involved, the framings and forms of contention – tell about the empowerment of the group in question. For this reason, I examine politico-religious empowerment in this dissertation in three spheres: discursive, legal and organizational.

Women's Islamic movements (WIMs) have a high potential of being agents of women's politico-religious empowerment in the Muslim majority countries in the MENA. Women's Islamic movements encompass a broad array of activisms ranging from charity, micro-economy, professional solidarity, mosque and religious reading groups to advocacy of human rights, women's rights, family, and children rights (Pruzan 2012, Abugideiri 2010; Moghadam 2002). I limit my analysis of women's Islamic movements primarily to groups and women who engage in *advocacy*. I concentrate on those who aim to change *broad-level* societal perceptions or state regulations from an Islamic perspective via writing, lobbying, protesting, joining public conversations and organizing projects. Among those, I look at autonomous or semi-autonomous women's groups, thereby excluding the women's sections of political parties.

The dissertation significantly diverges from the existing literature on WIMs, as I include women who use regular Islamic discourse within the definition of WIMs – regardless of their personal religious orientation or identification. In other words, I do not study the *identity* of religious women, but the *acts* of women who publicly put forward an Islamic discourse. That is why I prefer the expression 'women's Islamic movements' instead of 'Islamic women's movements.' I define the movement as Islamic, not all the women included in the study. With this definition, the composition of WIMs differs from country to country.

Besides the empirical question of women's politico-religious empowerment in the changing contexts of MENA, another issue is that the *organizational dynamics* of women's Islamic movements are often overlooked in the literature. Most studies have focused on the discourse, ideology and agency question in WIMs. The type of agency of religious women, the hermeneutics of Islamic feminism, and their implications for modernity have been main issues of discussion

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around WIMs. On the other hand, studies on the politico-religious empowerment have focused exclusively on legal reform. A social movement focus on WIMs is important to understand their capacities in increasing and embodying women's politico-religious empowerment based on their both discursive and organizational capabilities and limitations.

Research Question and Case Selection

What have been the capacities of women's Islamic movements for increasing and embodying women's politico-religious power in discursive, legal and organizational spheres in the MENA in the midst of contradictory political developments in the last two decades? Which trajectory is corroborated: the one suggesting new spaces for women (Moghadam and Sadiqi 2006) and especially in religion (Badran 2009, Hatem 2002, Cooke 2001), or the one indicating a masculinist restoration in the recent years (Kandiyoti 2013)? How far have politico-religious movements of women engendered and feminized the public sphere as claimed by Moghadam and Sadiqi (2006)? What have been the mechanisms and processes to expand women's politico-religious power?

A case-oriented comparative perspective can shed light on how women's politico-religious empowerment is boosted or restrained in diverse contexts of the MENA and how women respond to limitations and political opportunities around them. One of the important contextual features that influence women's politico-religious power is the institutional configuration of religion within the state, known as differentiation. Various patterns of differentiation across the MENA provide ample ground to study women's politico-religious empowerment in Muslim-majority societies. Options range from secular states such as Turkey to sharia-governed states such as Saudi Arabia, and to states that institutionalized religion only in limited domains as most of the countries in the region such as Egypt.

I selected Turkey and Egypt to contrast capacities of WIMs in their efforts of empowerment in two diverse contexts of the MENA. Turkey, with a (still) secular constitution and legislation, can be regarded as an 'extreme' case in the region. It is insightful to study WIMs in Turkey to understand how women's politico-religious space is being stretched or shrunk when Islam is not a source of legislation. Furthermore, as a country governed by an Islamist-rooted party since 2002, Turkey presents a paradigmatic case to examine the tensions between WIMs and the Islamist-rooted governing party in a secular legislative context. On the other hand, the incremental

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Islamization of the discursive sphere and a shrinking organizational sphere have led to a fertile ground for conflicts between WIMs and the Islamist-rooted government.

In Egypt, on the other hand, religion is especially utilized in personal status laws (*al-qānūn al-aḥwāl al-shakhṣīya*), while other legislation is based on secular European models. This mixed system is the most common among Muslim-majority countries around the world and in the MENA; therefore Egypt represents a 'typical' case. Furthermore, the revolution in 2011 and subsequent reinstatement of authoritarian rule in 2013 also makes Egypt another paradigmatic case to investigate the stakes around women's politico-religious empowerment in a fast-changing political environment.

There are also several puzzles emerging from the field on women's movements in the MENA: Why do some WIMs publicly dissent from Islamist governments or Islamic-based regulation and laws in unfavorable environments, while others do not? Furthermore, the contestations are not only between WIMs and states, governments, and conservative Islamist groups in society but also between WIMs and local feminists. Due to the potential meeting points of feminism and women's Islamic thought, but at the same time the tensions between the feminists and women's Islamic movements in the local contexts, it is crucial to look at the stakes and discussions in the local context. Why do some women define themselves as an Islamic feminist, while others do not? Why do some collaborate more with feminists, while others do not? What explains the different shapes of WIMs in Egypt and Turkey?

I apply the classic social movement research agenda to WIMs to assess empowerment in the organizational sphere. Accordingly, I look at their repertoires of contention, organizations and networks, framings and discourse, as well as political opportunity structures around them (Tarrow 2011, McAdam 2001). I build on the corrections that have been made to adjust the classic social movement theories to authoritarian contexts especially by Asef Bayat (2007) and Nadje Al-Ali (2002). The following sub-questions aim to shed light on social movement dynamics of WIMs: What are the discourse and activisms of WIMs within the political opportunity structures and constraints around them? How have various colonial and secularism experiences and – accordingly different institutional configurations of religion – influenced the movement patterns of WIMs? How does authoritarianism influence the organization of WIMs? What are their discourses and to

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what extent can they act upon their articulated discourses? What are the limits of WIMs to collaborate with feminists and religious authorities?

I also benefit from recent sociological studies on visibility and propose 'visibility of dissent' as a useful conceptual framework to evaluate movement capacities of dissenting and transgressing women in authoritarian contexts. The small numbers of dissenting women from religious conservatism and/or authoritarianism in both countries and the 'sensitivity' of the issues they raise give them a high – and often dangerous – public visibility. Unlike protesters in western contexts (for which social movement theories were developed), dissenting women in Turkey and Egypt are anything but anonymous. Awareness of amplified visibility limits women's dissenting and transgressing activities and thus politico-religious empowerment.

Thirdly, I adapt Linda Woodhead's typology of religion's positions vis-à-vis gender (2007) to explain the different acts of WIMs. Locating WIMs on their *position* and *strategy* vis-à-vis mainstream gender order, three main types of acts emerge: accommodating, dissenting and transgressing (Chapter 1, Table 1). Finally, I juxtapose these acts with WIMs positions towards the political oppression in their context to come up with their politico-religious empowerment capacities or powers as consolidating, reformative, and transformative (Chapter 1, Table 2).

The findings are based on field research conducted in Istanbul, Ankara, Bursa, and Cairo between 2013 and 2016. By evaluating the present-day WIMs, the thesis shows that there are crucial differences in priority issues, discourse and movement patterns between WIMs in Egypt and Turkey and among WIMs in each country – especially over their dissenting and transgressing visibility and empowerment capacities. The differences between WIMs and their empowerment capacities in two countries are partially explained by different institutional religious and secular configurations, colonial heritage, access to various global women's networks and polarization between Islamists and seculars in the local context. Visibility of dissent among WIMs is mostly explained by connections to feminist, human rights and left-oriented networks. Despite the fundamental tensions between WIMs and their local feminist counterparts, there are also remarkable similarities between WIMs and local feminists in both countries.

Women's Islamic Movements

The ever growing literature on women and Islam has improved the understanding of women in Muslim countries and has defied generalizations on the subject. Most of the attention has been

given to the ideological and discursive characteristics of WIMs. Related to this, many studies on the subject have focused on micro-level every day and local piety practices of Muslim women or hermeneutics of Islamic feminism rather than their meso-level organizational dynamics. They tackle organizational elements but only secondarily. There have been three central debates around women's Islamic movements since the 1990's regarding (a) the place of women's Islamic movements within *liberalism and modernity,* (b) the kind of *agency* of pious female actors, and (c) whether Islamic ideologies of women – particularly Islamic feminism – are *emancipatory or empowering.* This dissertation contributes to this last field of debate with an organizational and social movement perspective.

The first literature has dealt with locating women's Islamic movements within the modernity and liberal politics. This literature has challenged the assumption that modernization has to be coupled with secularization in society. This debate has been connected to a broader critical engagement with modernity and colonialism in understanding the 'woman question' and how they shaped sexuality and the 'cult of domesticity' (see Gilroy 1993; McClintock 1995; Stoler 1995). This broader literature shows the association of the Western modernity with imperialism and the categorizations of race and gender.

Studying pious female actors as an identity question, scholars argue that WIMs are also a part and product of the modernity or liberal politics (Deeb 2006, Arat 2005, Gole 1996, İlyasoğlu 1994). They show that there are intersections between modernity and piety in ideas and practice. For example, in her study of religious Shiite women in Lebanon, Lara Deeb argues that pieties and modernities are compatible with each other (2006, 4). Similarly, Yeşim Arat studies women in the Islamist Welfare Party in Turkey and concludes that their activism ranging from door-to-door advertising to organizing conferences demonstrates the values of liberalism and that the boundaries between Islam and liberalism are porous (2005). This field of research has corrected the singular interpretations of modernity and liberalism in which secularism is the only way to human self-realization. However, these studies do not directly tackle the politico-religious empowerment of women in the region.

Related to the debate on modernity and secularism, several scholars point out the futility of binary categorizations of religion and secularism and instead argue for the need to look at contextual dynamics (Kandiyoti 2012, Zubaida 2011, Hafez 2011, Ismail 2006). Some point to the

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influence of a larger patriarchal Mediterranean context in thinking about women and Islam. Deniz Kandiyoti states that patriarchy and Islam have been so much confused in the analyses of Muslim societies because the birth of Islamic civilization has intersected with the traditional patriarchy in the same lands (2011, 94). She contends that since we cannot conceptualize the connections between Islam and patriarchy, we either explain all patriarchal relations with Islam or we emphasize Islam's role in patriarchy too little (2011, 120). Leila Ahmed also articulated that patriarchal family and female subordination has been the norm in the Middle East and Mediterranean via Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism (1992). Valentine Moghadam also argues that since "Islam is experienced, practiced and interpreted quite differently over time and space… it is necessary to look at the broader sociopolitical and economic order within which it is exercised" (2003, 8). In this dissertation, I maintain this perspective and argue that contextual dynamics should be accounted for in the discussions of Islam and gender.

Another major theme in the literature on WIMs has been the *agency* of pious Muslim women. This subject is connected to empowerment but from an individualistic and psychological point of view. Sociologists and anthropologists ask whether pious women have a desire for freedom and emancipation. In the 1970's, a common answer was the theory of false consciousness which argued that women internalize patriarchal norms through socialization (Woodhead 2003). The false consciousness thesis lost its popularity in the 1980's. As Deniz Kandiyoti puts it, specific consciousness styles of women (whether feminist or not) are not independent of the social relations that condition them (2011, 90). As she argued:

> [P]utting 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…[D]ifferent cultural modes of control of female sexuality create different subjective experiences of femininity (Kandiyoti 1987).

Consequently, the debate has moved on to the operations of human agency within structural limits. Since the 2000's there has been a renewal of interest in the question of the agency of religious women from this perspective (Ben Shitrit 2013; Hafez 2011; Deeb 2006; Mahmood 2005;

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Mack 2003). Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005) has been the most influential. In her study of the women's mosque movement in Egypt, Mahmood finds that pious women experience agency *not* in acts of resistance, but in acts of submission. She argues that there are "nonliberal models of agency" in contrast to the liberal model of agency which is individualistic and rebellious (2005). According to Mahmood, emancipatory desire is not a universal characteristic of individual, but rather a part of the Western conception of individual.

However, some scholars such as Marnia Lazreg (2009) and Mai al-Nakib (2013) are cautious with Mahmood's treatment of religious women's submission as agency. For example, Al-Nakib is against conceptualizing the docility of women as – or only as – agency if the desire for submission is "coextensive with patriarchal norms and structures" (2013, 468). I agree that we need to be careful in normalizing and praising the submission and docility since the agency of women in submission does not increase their politico-religious power. I maintain that women's own negotiations about their immediate and broader surroundings should be attended, but with a critical approach to the power hierarchies.

Lihi Ben Shitrit, however, reaches somewhat different conclusions in her comparison of the women in the Islamic and the Jewish ultra-Orthodox Shas movements in Israel (2013). Ben Shitrit finds that emancipatory commitment and an autonomous self is central to women in the religious groups in her study, even though they believe in the patriarchal norms (2013). On the same line of inquiry, Sherene Hafez looks at "the desire and subjecthood of activist Islamic women" in a small women's Islamic organization in Cairo (2011, 4). Hafez analyzes the "processes that shape, shift, incite and produce the desires and subjectivities" of these women (2011, 4). By using the metaphor of rhizome from Gilles Deleuze, she shows that the desires of religious activist women have multiple roots of religion, secularism, and nationality.

Connected to their subject of inquiry, most of these studies on Muslim women's agency, by Deeb, Mahmood, Hafez and Ben Shitrit, focus on the micro-level with deep psychological analyses of subjecthood and emancipatory *desire*. In this dissertation, on the other hand, I study the advocacy acts of the women's Islamic movements to assess their capacities of discursive, organizational and legal empowerment of women in politico-religious terms. Even though the piety movements are part of the broader social change with their vast scope – as Mahmood also describes the broader Islamic revival in Egypt – their immediate goal is to cultivate personal

changes among their members and immediate circles. In line with this situation, these scholars often *anonymize* all the actors in their studies.

On the opposite, in this dissertation the units of analysis are more outward-looking and advocacy-oriented women who aim to influence the broader religious discourse and legal sphere than the local piety movements. Some of these women are visible in various media with their faces and names to articulate a message to the broader public. In this sense, I approach the 'agency' of women *not* from an individualistic and psychological perspective, but from a *meso-organizational* level. The factors that influence women's choices of repertoire of action, style of discourse, and level of confrontation with religious and political authorities are focal in this level of analysis to assess the actor's level of empowerment and capacities to empower others.

Empowerment and Islamic feminism

The third debate around women's Islamic activism is the question whether Islam or Islamic feminism can be an emancipatory or empowering ideology for women. I aim to contribute directly to this literature. This debate assesses the historical and current record of Islam on women's rights and Muslim women's activism regarding it. First, it is important to define and understand better Islamic feminism, the center of this discussion. Islamic feminism (*İslami feminizm/al-nisawīya al-islāmīya, al-nasawī al-islāmī*) has been a promising field of activism regarding women's politico-religious power in Muslim countries. It refers to the attempts of re-reading Islamic sacred resources to realize a more just and egalitarian Islamic gender regime (Abugideiri 2010; Badran 2011; Moghadam 2002, Pruzan 2012). Accordingly, Islamic feminists aim to reinterpret the Quran (the holy book of Islam), hadith (the prophet's teachings), sunnah (the prophet's deeds) and early Islamic history to look for new possibilities for gender equality (Moghadam 2002).

The term Islamic feminism gained attention in the scholarship after Iranian women's engagement with religious rules of the Islamic Republic has become well-known during the 1990's. The Islamic revolution in 1979 and subsequent legal arrangements led Iranian women to engage with the Shi'ite Islamic doctrines from a gender sensitive perspective through magazines like *Zanan* (Women) and *Hoquq-e Zanan* (Women's rights) (Afary 2009, 316-318). One of the main arguments of Islamic feminists is that gender inequality in religious sources and practices in

Muslim societies is not divine, but discriminations have been socially constructed through centuries via biased male jurists.

Women's contributions to Islamic reinterpretation in the West have increasingly shadowed contributions in Muslim-majority countries. Feminist reinterpretations of the Quran by Muslim women located predominantly in the United States have occupied the Islamic feminist scholarship in English language (Hidayatullah 2014, Webb 2000).[1] The most-cited scholars who have done textual and exegetical analysis on the Quran from a gendered perspective have been American Muslim women such as Pakistani-American Riffat Hassan, Lebanese-American Azizah Al-Hibri, African-American Amina Wadud and Pakistani-American Asma Barlas. Younger voices have also joined the Islamic feminist intellectual production recently such as Sadiyya Shaikh from South Africa and Kecia Ali from the U.S. who both study sexuality and gender. This dissertation partially aims to highlight Islamic and religious feminist productions and activities in two Muslim-majority countries in the MENA, as opposed to the emphasis on the production in the West.

Transnationality of Islamic feminism and its connections to critical and reformist Islamic interpretations have been well demonstrated (Sharify-Funk 2008, Mandaville 2001). In parallel to the scholarly production, several international and global platforms on Islamic feminism have been founded since the late 1990's mostly based in the West (Pruzan 2012, Moghadam 2002). Some well-known examples are *Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE); American Society for Muslim Enhancement,* and *KARAMAH* based in the U.S.; the *International Congresses on Islamic Feminism,* and *International Group of Studies and Reflection on Women and Islam* based in Spain; *Musawah* based in Malaysia and *Women Living under Muslim Laws (WLUML)[2]* mainly based in the UK. These international organizations often use the discourses of 'full citizenship' to women and 'women's rights.' They highlight *equality* as a principle to sustain justice between men and women in Muslim societies. They have outreach via global meetings, international conferences, book projects and online media. They are often well-funded from Western-based donors. The Western support or basis of Islamic feminist scholarship and

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[1] There are also increasing numbers of studies on Muslim women's activism in the European context (see Jouili 2015; Merdjanova 2013; Dessing et al 2013; Selby 2012), and religious reinterpretation of women in European societies (see Grung 2015).

[2] Although WLUML does not define itself as a Muslim women's network as Muslim laws also effect Non-Muslims, it is still an important network of women from Muslim societies in fighting against discriminatory practices under Muslim laws.

institutionalism have been a tension for some local religious women in the MENA which will be analyzed in the dissertation.

Most Islamic feminists have a historicist approach and highlight that the Quran and Muhammad's teachings elevated the status of women in the patriarchal Arab territories in which Islam was brought up (Ahmed 1992). Therefore, they argue that the spirit of the Quran is about elevating the status of women based on the conditions of the context, and there is no contradiction in reviewing the Quran, hadith, and sunnah in the light of today's different contexts and put a higher standard for gender equality. Amina Wadud, for example, argues that Quranic reforms should be read as precedents for further development (1998, xiii).

There are two major strands in the debate whether Islam and Islamic feminism can be empowering and emancipatory. The first literature broadly argues that Islamic emancipation of women is possible (Gray 2013, Ahmed 2011, Badran 2009, Cooke 2001, Fernea 1998, Afshar 1998; Najmabadi 1994). Elizabeth Fernea, one of the first Western women who undertook field work on women in the MENA and one of the first scholars who searched for 'Islamic feminism,' argues that feminism 'can take many forms and can be fought on many fronts' (Fernea 1998, 414)[3]. Margot Badran (2009) praises that Islamic feminists question patriarchy in both public and private through *ijtihad* (new reasoning) and articulate an egalitarian understanding of Islam. Badran further argues that Islamic feminists have been more radical than secular feminists by asking for full equality not only in public sphere but also in private sphere (2009, 250).

On the other hand, the second group in the literature is more suspicious of the idea of emancipation of women with religious discourse since religion is often positioned as a power above the gender considerations (Yılmaz 2015, Al-Nakib 2013, Mojab 2001, Moghissi 1999). Haideh Moghissi points out to an over-enthusiasm about Islamic feminism in post-colonial and anti-Orientalist scholarship which has often been pushed forward from the diaspora (1999, 126). She questions the limits of feminism of Islamic feminists if their frame of reference is determined by Islamism which may lead to 'defeatism' (1999, 133). Likewise, Mai Al-Nakib maintains that Islamic feminists adhere to the 'same image of thought' with extremists and 'imprison' themselves by conforming to recognizable patterns – borrowing the terms from Deleuze (2013, 467). In a

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[3] It is important to note that Fernea herself was a feminist who had a sense of belonging to family and religion (Fernea 1998).

recent study on Islamist women in Turkey, Zehra Yılmaz (2015) argues that women have been the key actors in establishing a new form of Islamism and religiosity amidst the neoliberal globalism. Re-asking Kandiyoti's 'empowered but not emancipated?' question, Yılmaz argues that despite creating empowering spaces for themselves, it is difficult for Islamist women to be emancipated due to their limited participation in the political arena and they cannot question certain values like 'family' (2015, 19, 252).

I approach both stances cautiously. I completely disagree with Badran's statement that Islamic feminists are more radical than secular feminists and that secular feminists have historically accepted complementarity in the private sphere (2009, 250). Both types of feminists have dealt with private and taboo issues with similar limitations in the region. However, it has been mostly the secular feminists who first publicly protested the issues like domestic violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), and sexual harassment in various countries in the MENA. Furthermore, I take Moghissi's and Al-Nakib's criticism seriously that Islamic feminism located on the ground of 'Islamism' may lead to defeatism. However, this is not necessarily the case. I demonstrate that there are women who challenge and transgress from the convicted religious perceptions, not only regarding the content of their discourse but also their style of discourse and contention – again with an Islamic stance. I agree with Haideh Moghissi's reference to Chantal Mouffe (1995) that feminist transformation is not possible without touching upon all discourses and practices of *women's* subordination. However, in this dissertation, following the scholars like Nadia Al-Ali and Nicole Pratt who underline the broader political oppression in the region, I maintain that without challenging other political oppressions in a given society alongside the religious oppression of women, *transformative politico-religious power* is not possible to attain. This is, of course, not only binding for the empowering capacities of Islamic feminists, but of all feminists.

There are also debates about the definitional borders of 'Islamic feminism.' Some scholars, such as Aysha Hidayatullah (2014), Margot Badran (2009), and Haideh Moghissi (1999) prioritize the conceptual simplicity and defend the label regardless of the self-definition of the activists as feminist or Islamic feminist if the term captures their main objective, the content of acts or discourses. Some scholars, adding to a conceptual confusion, labeled some Islamist women as Islamic feminists (cf Badran 2009, Karam 1998).

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On the other hand, other scholars like Fatema Seedat (2013), Asma Barlas (2007), Gisela Webb (2000) do not find the labeling appropriate. Seedat sees potential dangers of calling convergences between Islam and feminism as Islamic feminism (2013). She argues that besides the neo-colonialism that the term may imply, it can also shrink the space between Islam and feminism that could otherwise lead to other types of amalgams. She argues that the labeling also may obscure different sources besides Islam in non-Western societies (2013). I agree with this second group of scholars that the words 'feminist' or 'Islamic feminist' should be used carefully. Some women who could be defined as such based on their discourses and actions reject the definition due to different historical and contextual reasons (Bahi 2008, 135, Barlas 2007). These women are the very actors who contribute to the content of what we may call 'Islamic feminism,' and they have already produced intellectual works that articulate historical or theoretical reasons to reject (or accept) such a categorization. The *negotiations* of the actors around the concept should be incorporated due to the hegemonic relations behind the concept. In this dissertation, I do not label women as feminist or "Islamic feminist" *unless* they accept the definition, but occasionally I do call fitting activism in general as Islamic or religious feminism.

Meso-Organizational and Social Movement Focus

There is a gap in the literature in studying women's Islamic movements from a social movement perspective. Valentine Moghadam and Fatima Sadiqi made one of the calls for a similar perspective in 2006. They proposed to analyze women's public activism in the MENA region under four dimensions: to understand different strategies women use; the relationship of the women's movement to the state, and the state's position vis-à-vis women/feminists in the public sphere; the influence of women's activism or "the woman question" on the public discourse(s); and the role or influence of global forces and developments in creating new political spaces and a more inclusive public sphere in MENA (Moghadam and Sadiqi 2006).

Concurrently, in contrast to the abundance of analyses on leftist, 'progressive' and feminist movements, there is a gap in the social movement literature on analyses of the right-wing or religious movements. This trend has been changing in recent years especially with the rise of conservative and right-wing governments across Europe and the US. In their research on extreme right movements in Western Europe and the U.S., Donatella della Porta and Cladius Wagemann (2012) argue that social movement studies have traditionally concentrated on "the progressive left-libertarian movements" and ignored "the 'bad side' of activism." della Porta and Wagemann

highlight the importance of the meso-organizational level of analysis in understanding such movements. They complain about the overemphasis on ideologies and socio-economic and psychological explanations in studies that examine extreme right movements in West.

The negligence is observable in studies on Islamist movements, women's religious movements and movements in authoritarian contexts, in general. Asef Bayat is suspicious of "how far the prevailing social movement theories can account for the complexities of socio-religious movements in contemporary Muslim societies, in particular when these perspectives are rooted in the highly differentiated and politically open Western societies, presenting a highly structured and over-homogenising picture of social movements." (2005, 892). Bayat argues that "there is a strong tendency for the commentators to rely overwhelmingly on symbols, language, and ideology" when they study Islamist movements (2005, 895).

On a similar vein, complaining about the lack of organizational studies on Islamic movements, Quintan Wiktorowicz compiled one of the first collections of systematic analyses of Islamic movements from the social movement perspective (2004). Wiktorowicz contends that treating Islamic activism as sui-generis has been the norm on the assumption that they are unintelligible in comparative terms (2004, 3). He hints at an implicit essentializing due to a focus on Islamic ideologies and goals. Wiktorowicz is one of those who argues that dynamics, process, and organization of Islamic activism can be analyzed with standard tools of social movement theory. Diane Singerman, in the same volume, also argues that Islamic movements should be analyzed like any other social movements (2004).

Women's movements, especially the liberal and radical feminist movements in the West, have been studied from the perspective of social movement theories more consistently and critically since the 2000's (Ferree and McClurg 2007, Banaszak et al. 2003). However, women's Islamic movements have mostly been studied with a focus on ideology, consciousness, and agency as discussed earlier. Women's religious movements in general, West or East, have often been studied as a macro or micro pathological condition like the research on the extreme right (della Porta et al. 2012, 7).

Following the calls for context-sensitive analyses in the MENA (Moghadam and Sadiqi 2006) and meso-organization level of analyses in religiously motivated movements (della Porta et

al. 2012), I take on a social movement perspective in the study of WIMs. I look at contextual settings and meso-organizational dynamics including the discourse, networks, forms of contention, and contextual factors that influence empowerment capacities of the women's Islamic movements. This thesis contributes to the literature on WIMs from a meso-organizational level as opposed to micro-level psychological analyses of submission or agency or macro-level analyses of Islam's gender ideology.

The social movement focus also opens ground for comparative studies on women's Islamic activism, which is lacking. Almost all the works on women's Islamic movements have been single case studies, focusing on a specific type of a WIM in one country. The lack of comparative studies makes it difficult to see commonalities and differences within WIMs across the world and broaden the research agenda. Therefore, this study also contributes to the literature methodologically with its case-oriented comparative analysis of WIMs in two diverse contexts in the MENA.

Structure of the Dissertation

In chapter one, I lay out the theoretical framework of the study: I build on social movement theories in authoritarian contexts and underscore the concept of visibility of dissent. I also adapt Linda Woodhead's typology on religion's relation to gender to describe different acts of WIMs. After juxtaposing it with their stances against overall political oppression, I present a typology of different empowerment capacities of WIMs. In chapter two, I describe methodological considerations, including case selection, units of analysis, data collection, methods of analysis as well as a discussion about positionality during the research process. In chapter three, I briefly lay out the common and divergent historical instances that set the ground for women's Islamic movements in Turkey and Egypt. In chapters four and five (Part II), I examine the activism and discourse of WIMs in Turkey (1995-2016) by especially focusing on the developments after AKP's (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/Justice and Development Party*) coming to power in 2002 and after strengthening its position after 2008. I analyze changes in the patterns of mobilization and discourse of WIMs with a particular focus on the visibility of dissenting and transgressing WIMs' activism vis-à-vis religious traditionalism and AKP authoritarianism (2008-2015). In chapters six and seven (Part III), I map out WIMs in Egypt, mainly the activities of Islamic feminists, eclectic women's groups and briefly Islamist women (1995-2016). I analyze changes in the patterns of

mobilization and discourse after the revolution in 2011 with a particular focus on the visibility of dissenting and transgressing WIMs' activism vis-à-vis religious traditionalism and authoritarianism (2011 – 2016). In the final chapter, I provide a theoretical discussion after summarizing the empirical findings based on the comparative dimensions of the study.

Part I

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

1.1. Social Movements in Authoritarian Settings and Feminist Corrections

Analyzing social movements in authoritarian contexts has challenged the existing theories of social movements which were primarily developed for movements in Europe and North America. The feminist critique of social movement theories has also been useful. Today, after decades of interaction especially between the structuralist and social constructivist scholars[4], classic social movement literature has come to agree on four main elements in movements: a) mobilizing structures such as networks and organizations; b) forms and repertoires of contention; c) frames and meanings; and d) political opportunity and threat structures (Tarrow 2011, 28-29; McAdam 2001, 14-15; Ferree and Mueller 2007, 587). These elements interplay together in a social movement (Tarrow 2011, 183-4). While the first three powers are defined as the building blocks of social movements, the last element refers to the contextual factors (Snow et al. 2007, 12).

There has been a lack of research on collective action and social movements in the MENA from the perspective of classical social movement theories (SMT) (Beinin and Vairel 2011, 2). Some studies on Islamic movements applied SMT[5]. The main conclusion of this research is that the classic SMT is indeed applicable to the MENA. With few exceptions, most of these studies do not undertake an effort to re-conceptualize SMT. However, several scholars argue that the classical definitions of social movements should be reconsidered in authoritarian settings of the MENA

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[4] A disagreement between structuralists and social constructivist perspectives has been the main dividing line between social movement scholars since the cultural turn in social studies in the 1990's. While earlier works of Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly focused on the political opportunity structures (POS); social constructivists (see Goodwin and Jasper 1999, Gamson and Meyer 1996, 275; Melluci 1996) emphasized the cultural components and meaning-making by actors. A more holistic approach to social movements has been developed with the critiques from the constructivist perspective, as well as after new research showed context-specific diversity. Joel Beinin and Frederic Vairel argue that revised models of social movement theories as presented in McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2007) are better suited to study social movements in the MENA with their less structuralist and more dynamic and relational approaches (2011, 6).

[5] see Wickham 2002, White 2002, Ismail 2003, Hafez 2003, Wiktorowicz 2004, Clark 2004, Schwedler 2006, Bayat 2007

(Bayat 2007, Jad 2004, Al-Ali 2000). Forms and repertoires of contention have been the core contested area in this regard, although other elements have also been challenged.

Forms and repertoires of contention

Forms and repertoires of contention include public performances that vary in degree and kind. Performances may be conventional and contained or may take disruptive and violent forms (Tarrow 1998, 93). In the mainstream SMT, demonstrations, collective protests and rallies are regarded as conventional and contained forms of actions, since they are legalized and involve 'low-risk' in constitutional states (Tarrow 2011, 111-113). However, some scholars argue that even in liberal democracies dissent is not merely allowed in demonstrations, but it is actively reshaped and managed by the police and authorities by allocating pre-designated areas for public dissent or changing the route of marches (Mitchell and Staeheli 2005, Della Porta and Reiter 1998, Marx 1998).

In authoritarian contexts, on the other hand, demonstrations and collective protests disrupt the norms or existing anti-protest laws. They are often violently suppressed by security forces. In return, protestors are more likely to be disruptive and violent, too. Therefore, we need to define demonstrations, protests and other open public gatherings as disruptive forms of actions in authoritarian settings. Lack of demonstrations and public rallies in such contexts should not be read as the non-existence of social movements.

Some scholars suggest looking for other forms of contention in authoritarian contexts. They argue that everyday forms of resistance are especially pronounced in the MENA (Bayat 2010, 2007, 1997; Beinin and Vairel 2011, 10). The literature on 'everyday' politics and resistance, led by James C. Scott (1989; 1985) and Michel de Certeau (1984), has been influential in studying resistances that do not conventionally count as movements due to lack of organization, direct contestation and popular mobilization (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013). 'Pervasive use of disguise' is a fundamental element in these everyday resistances (Scott 1989, 54).

Accordingly, Bayat argues that in authoritarian Muslim societies, women's "mundane daily practices in public domains" also constitute movement 'by implication' (2007, 161, 171). For Bayat, 'power of presence' with ordinary actions enables an incremental encroachment to 'the

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power base of patriarchal structure(s)' (2007, 161). Acts like 'working, participating in sports, studying, showing interest in art and music, or running for political offices' for women in Iran are resistances (Bayat 2007, 161). Along similar lines of mundane daily practices, Amel Grami argues that simple acts like wearing colorful outfits in public challenge norms in patriarchal contexts like Tunisia and it is a type of resistance (Grami and Bennoune 2015). Studying acts of everyday religion, if not resistance, has been prevalent in the recent studies on the MENA (Deeb and Harb 2013, Schielke and Debevec 2012). I share the conviction that authoritarian contexts necessitate new lenses for the definition of movements. Nevertheless, this dissertation differs from this literature that focuses on everyday acts and resistances of women in the MENA which are 'disguised' and 'implied,' sometimes unintended and often only visible to immediate surroundings. Instead, I study overt, intended and broader public contestations and activism of women in the MENA.

Further critique and correction to forms and repertoires come from a feminist perspective. The gender of actors can make a conventional act much less conventional. For example, since women are less expected to demonstrate, their demonstrations may be regarded as more disruptive. Donatella della Porta writes about the hesitancy of women's rights activists in Italy in organizing protests due to the public stigma and the fact that protesting can scare women away from activism (2003, 60).

In similar patriarchal conditions of the MENA, this gender element should also be taken into account when defining women's movements. Hence, writing, publishing and other scholarly work are regarded as parts of social resistance in authoritarian regimes (Pratt 2007, 82), and women's movements in the Middle East (Moghadam and Sadiqi 2006, 3; Al-Ali 2000, 6-7; Zihnioglu 1999, 340). Publishing has historically carried a significant portion of women's movements in the MENA, as shown in Chapter 3. Moghadam and Sadiqi state that press and media are crucial tools for women in the region:

> Women's strategic use of the media as a means of access to the public
> sphere transforms and feminizes both. This includes the print media,
> including the women's press (e.g., women's magazines and newspapers,
> women's studies journals, novels and poetry produced by women, women-
> owned publishing houses) and films (the emergence of women filmmakers,

as well as the growing importance of women's issues in filmmaking).

(2006, 3)

Writing is even more apparent as a tool in the case of pious Muslim women in Turkey who previously tried to present a more docile profile in public space (Turam 2008). These activists, themselves, point out the importance of writing as a form of women's political activity in the Middle East (Eraslan 2009). Besides the fact that writing has been a constitutive element of the movement, female scholars and writers sometimes give public appearances and collaborate with activist organizations, switching between their intellectual and activist positions (Al-Ali 2000, 6-7). For these reasons, women's scholarly and literary work are regarded as part of women's movement in this study. I focus on the authors and works which have some popularity among the activists for scope limitations.

Mobilizing Structures

Mobilizing structures such as networks and organizations are one of the main components of movements in SMT. They range from formal organizations to interpersonal networks and cultural affinities (Tarrow 1998, 123-124). Movements may become institutionalized and professionalized over time. They may build hierarchical organizations or non-hierarchical groups that emphasize equal levels of participation (della Porta 2003, 57). In both types of structures, the emphasis is on *participation* or *collective action*. I will revisit this emphasis in section 1.2.

Scholars of social movements in authoritarian or non-Western countries highlight the importance of informal networks and family, and they argue that these have often been absent in political analyses, particularly on social movements and civil society (Denoeux 1993, Broadbent 2003; Singerman 1995, 2006, 2). The attention on informal networks is part of a wider critique to the Habermasian public sphere theory. Nancy Fraser argues that subordinated groups have historically formed alternative publics which she calls 'subaltern counterpublics' (1990). These alternative public spheres empower subordinated groups. Fraser describes them as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser 1990, 67). Taking the feminist movement in the U.S. as an example, Fraser asserts that in counterpublics like bookstores, journals, festivals and local places, feminists

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invented new discourses and terms, such as sexism, sexual harassment, and marital and date rape, which armed them to reduce women's disadvantageous position in official public spheres.

Kim Knott suggests that there is a move from the focus on 'place' to 'space' in studying social theory in general, and religion in particular. (Knott 2005b, 4). This suggestion is useful as we cannot limit movements and their mobilizing structures today to only one place, platform or dimension; but with the collectivity of social media, blogs, stickers on buses, NGO's, demonstrations or publications we can talk about spaces of women's Islamic movements and their politico-religious contribution or articulation. Space and power are closely interconnected (Knott 2005b, 9; Morin and Guelke 2007, xix) Spaces or *mobilizing structures* – either as official public spheres or counter spheres – empower their members and societies via the discourse produced in them and also by their existence as space.

In this respect, the digital infrastructure has added a new mobilizing space to social movements. The effect of social media on regenerating and assisting social movements have been extensively studied since the Arab uprisings, Occupy Wall Street and Indignados demonstrations in 2011. The implications of this potential effect on reconceptualizing social movements and theory have been discussed (Milan 2015, Tufekci 2014, Thompson 2005). Today, women have more access to information on Islam and women, and it has become easier to find out and join local and global women's networks. Blogs of popular religious scholars or ordinary young activists, websites and social media accounts of local and global Islamic women's networks provide grounds to disseminate knowledge, organize gatherings, mobilize people and create a movement. Hence, online activism of WIMs constitute another important bulk of data in this study.

Framing, emotions, and discourse

With the cultural turn in social movement studies in the 1990's, scholars emphasized the importance of identity and meaning construction and role of emotions in mobilizing people (Melluci 1996; Jaspers 1997). Framing and meaning-making have become an important part of the classic social movement agenda since then. Tarrow explains that meaning-making is necessary to identify the grievances and translate them into claims, but "to maintain solidarity among activists" and mobilize potential followers, "emotion work needs to be done" (2011, 152-3). Myra Marx Ferree and Carol McClurg Mueller (2007, 596) argue that the role of emotion in social

movements has firstly been studied in women's movements. Studies on women's movements have shown that emotions are part of the cognitive responses, without positing that women are more emotional than men (Ferree and McClurg 2007, 596). For example, motherhood has long been a central theme in women's movements to evoke cultural codes and 'imagery of maternal care to legitimize challenging political actions' (Ferree and McClurg 2007, 588).

In feminist scholarship, discourse has been defined as power, and women's literature and writing are regarded as signs of overcoming masculine modes of discourse and thus women's empowerment (Freedman 1993, Singley and Sweeney 1993). The content (publicizing taboo issues or not), and the *style* of argumentation are also important characteristics of power. Women's politeness and docility versus an assertive and aggressive style during public activities, and reactions they receive carry clues about empowerment.

Identity constructions of the 'self' and 'the other' are central to discourse analysis (Billig 1995). Social actors, first of all, construct self-representations. The framings of social actors about themselves and rights they demand (often from the state) are the most common meaning-making in social movements. This is a society-state or individual-state relationship (Keyman and Onis 2005). There are also framings about 'others.' All social actors involve some degree of inclusion and exclusion process when they create framings. For example, citizenship discourses define the 'rightful citizen' and those who are not. This is the performative and interactive side of the citizenship where social actors communicate to one another (Fairclough et al. 2006, 102; Hausendorf and Bora 2006, 2). In the MENA, we observe a variety of discourses such as justice, dignity, or motherhood, besides the rather new discourse of citizenship rights in women's movements. The focus on the 'other' is important in studying women's Islamic movements, as WIMs around MENA have aimed at raising awareness on the problems of 'others', rather than exclusively focusing on women's issues.

Political opportunities and constraints

Social movements do not develop in a vacuum; political, economic, socio-cultural and international factors influence the emergence of movements and their forms, mobilizing structures and framings. Political opportunities refer to the external opportunities and resources; while constraints refer to the costs and limitations for the social movements. Contention increases when

there are external resources open to actors such as ideological or financial support from outside the movement or when the costs of inaction are unbearable (Tarrow 1998, 71). Scholars perceive external threats or constraints also as a significant impetus for mobilization (Golstone and Tilly 2001).

Goodwin and Jasper (1999, 36) criticized the popularity of political opportunity structures (POS) theory by arguing that political opportunities only explain part of movement emergence and that the metaphor of structure is misplaced. Later in *Dynamics of Contention*, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2007) adopted a less structuralist perspective. Indeed, against his earlier structuralist vision, Tarrow argues that opportunities might not be apparent to the leaders of the social movements; therefore, they have to be *perceived* by actors to stimulate a mobilization (Tarrow 2011, 33). Thus, seizure of opportunities and noticing the costs by the actors are significant for emergence and mobilization of movements.

Authoritarian regimes put more constraints and cost of action on social movements; they curtail the space for collective action with direct and indirect methods of control, repression, or absorption (Gasemyr 2016, Lee and Zhang 2013, 1477). In consolidated authoritarian regimes, social actors additionally apply self-censorship which confines social movements without direct repression. Self-censorship is very crucial in understanding movements in authoritarian contexts. It is connected to the risks and costs of *visibility* of the social actors.

Ferree and Mueller criticize the classic social movement agenda as being unable to address POS in a gendered way (2007, 598). They maintain that women are overrepresented in the early and informal forms of resistances because they have less political access to the formal institutions (2007, 588-90). Pointing at the gendered political opportunity structures, they contend that it has not been a choice for women to decide to participate either formal or informal platforms, but social movements and informal local activism have often been the most feasible choice to raise a voice (2007). Similarly, Jude Howell argues that women find it easier to participate on public issues at the local level, especially through community organizations, self-help groups, trade unions, religious groups, mothers' groups or campaigning organizations (Howell 2004, 5). Going one step more towards public beyond local activism takes more courage for women.

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Mechanisms, Processes, and Effectiveness

The mechanism-and-processes approach aims to connect the four elements in movements to explain how a specific social movement comes into being and develops (Tarrow 2011, 184-5). Tarrow delineates several mechanisms and processes of movements such as diffusion, exhaustion, radicalization, and institutionalization (2011, 190-2). There are several important processes in the case of the women's Islamic movements in patriarchal and authoritarian conditions of the MENA: emergence, diffusion and scale-shift, mobilization, exhaustion, cooptation, institutionalization, radicalization, and sustainability. These processes give clues about the strength and independence of WIMs and their capacity for empowerment. There may be different mechanisms that bring out these processes than those in democracies. Furthermore, radicalization in women's movements in the context of MENA, rather than referring to violence, often refer to the radicalization of discourse, disruptive repertoires of contention, organizing demonstrations flash-mobs, and talking about taboo-issues in public.

In addition to these processes noted in the classical social movement theories, I use *metaphors* of molarization and molecularization derived from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari[6] (1987) for their visualization capacity. Applying these concepts as metaphors to social movement analyses helps to better visualize the process of change (molecularization) and unification (molarization) in movements without having to name what kind of change or unification is happening.[7]

Molarization refers to the practices that "minimize variation, regulating connections, movements, and change so that it is predictable and stable" (Montgomery 2010, 45). Molar processes stabilize 'movement' and create coherence within it. On the other hand, molecularization refers to the processes where boundaries, routines, and concepts are destabilized (Montgomery 2010, 45). Molecularization is transforming and open-ended experimentation. While things that are *becoming* are molecular; identifiable forms of anything, person, thing, or social movement

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[6] There is a growing feminist literature discussing Deleuze (see Goulimari 1999, Gatens 2000, Wolfgang 2013). It includes studies on Arab feminism and women's religious movements in the MENA (see Hafez 2011, Al-Nakib 2013, Yanay-Ventura and Yanay 2016).

[7] Deeper analyses of these concepts help to make social movements theories much more dynamic (see Montgomery 2010). However, this is beyond the scope and contribution of this dissertation.

represents the molar form (Batra, no date, 2). In other words, while molarization may refer to movements that are goal-oriented and it assumes unity and organization; molecularization can refer to movements that are not necessarily goal or result oriented but movements that are experimenting and becoming. Molar is coherence, and molecular is change. As Deleuze and Guattari argue evolving or radical change happens at the molecular level (1987, 11). Even though Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the need of molecularization for change, they acknowledge the necessity of a unified and molar movement for women (1987, 304). Both processes are necessary for social change:

> It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity: "we as women…" makes its appearance as a subject of enunciation. But it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow. (1987, 304)

There is a widespread premise in the literature that an agreed agenda and coordinating body are necessary to constitute a social movement – like a molar movement. Islah Jad (2004) suggests that diverse small groups and associations with different agendas form women's movement in the Middle East. The existence of 'certain common goals' makes these mobilizations a movement, even when there is no 'central coordinating body' or 'agreed agenda.' (Jad 2004, 39). Similarly, Bayat opts for 'a more fluid and fragmented vision of social movements' and suggests to "go beyond mere discourse, language and symbols, especially those of the leadership, taking both multiple discourses and meanings as tools for writing histories of such activities" (2005, 893). Bayat defends to look beyond the discourse and agenda of 'leadership' and find multiple voices within the movement. These suggestions complement the idea of looking at *molecularizations* in seemingly molar movements.

The issue of effectiveness is also an important question in social movement theories (Tilly 2004; Molyneux 1998). What kind of forms of contention or discourse produce useful results? For example, some peaceful forms of protests like hunger strikes can be effective but risky (Tilly 2004), especially in authoritarian regimes. Effectiveness and result-orientation are the primary

goals of most molar movements. While I analyze the legal gains about women's politico-religious empowerment via the activism of WIMs, I regard discursive acts and organizational forms as also part of the effect and empowerment itself. For example, the introduction of taboo issues, the creation of new platforms, collaborations, the entrance of new actors, and organization of disruptive events give signs about the level and type of empowerment.

However, actors in social movements do not always act for effectiveness. Especially in authoritarian contexts, some people take action without any hope for change, but only to side with the 'right' or to show their position. Here, molecularization concept seems to be useful with its emphasis on experimentation and becoming. The ant in the legend who carried water to extinguish the fire for Abraham ordered by King Nemrud responds those who question the effectiveness and intelligibility of her movement: at least it is clear whose side I am on, or "…at least I know that I have done my part" (Janmohammad 2011). I have noted this attitude among some female actors in the study.

1.2 Visibility of Dissent

There is a need to conceptualize the activism of women who dissent from patriarchal religious doctrines and also authoritarian regimes. The 'political participation' concept in social movement literature, the 'power of presence' concept for everyday resistances in authoritarian settings, and physical visibility emphasis on women or LGBTQ in recent anthropological studies do not capture the acts and speeches of dissent by women in the broader public in such contexts. The lack of anonymity and wider public visibility in unfavorable environments make these kind of acts and speeches a special case. I conceptualize these acts and speeches as 'visibility of dissent'. I will use this concept to also capture visibility of *transgression* when broadly-speaking, and I will define the difference between dissent and transgression in section 1.3.

Social movement literature extensively focuses on participation or collective action (Tilly 2004, McAdam et al. 2001). The question of popular mobilization no doubt has currency in authoritarian contexts to analyze larger cycles of contention such as the January 25th revolution in Egypt, Gezi protests in Turkey or middle-scale protests, strikes and marches. Indeed, large-scale

types of collective action develop despite high risks and repression in the MENA (Beinin and Vairel 2011, 8).

Yet, during 'normal' periods in authoritarian contexts, contention is often contained and limited to small-scale public activism such as less-attended demonstrations, press statements, signature campaigns, NGO activism, conferences, panels, TV interviews, and online posts. Despite their small-scale, these actions are followed closely by authoritarian governments and/or conservative religious groups depending on the content of the action. In such small-scale activisms, participation does not remain anonymous unlike in mass public demonstrations – which the social movement literature focuses. Dissenting women among WIMs become visible with their faces and names disclosed to a broader audience. Women often make a conscious and informed decision to disclose her identity and render herself vulnerable to potential attacks and threats in conventional and social media. This entails personal risks – including stigmatization, losing jobs or job prospects, being targeted, threatened or even killed – in authoritarian contexts where misogynistic religious groups are prevalent.

Alternative to 'participation,' Asef Bayat proposes the 'power of presence' concept for authoritarian contexts. It refers to "[the] delicate *art of presence* in harsh circumstances, the ability to create social space within which those individuals who refuse to exit can advance the cause of human rights, equality, and justice, and do so even under adverse political conditions." (2007b, 194-205). Indeed, the 'politics of presence' 'art of presence' or 'power of presence' (2007b) as he puts it, Bayat focuses on everyday resistances and mundane daily activities. However, these concepts do not refer to the activism of women who go one step further in the public scene. Unlike in mundane daily activities, such women do not only risk to be visible to their families, passerby's or moral police on the street, but they risk being *visible* in a much broader public level and risk losing their reputation, jobs, and being subjected to broader political and social repression. 'Visibility' as such signals a more public level of political movement than 'presence' of Bayat.

Visibility is a recently attended theme in feminist, queer and media studies. It has especially been studied regarding body politics in LGBTQ movements (Persson 2015, Hong 2013, Fejes and Balogh 2013; Currier 2012, Gray 2009, Moreno 2008). A survey of feminist journals in the last decade reveals that issues of body politics, affection, sexuality, visuality, and visibility have dominated women's studies including in Muslim contexts. The visibility of females (including

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Muslim women), LGBTQ and trans people have especially been studied in terms of *physical* outlook in public, such as how their bodies, sexuality, clothes, or veils attract a distinct attention than white heterosexual men. Historically, their physical appearance in public has been deemed sinful, illegal, or abnormal.

For example, in her influential book *Looking White People in the Eye* (1998), Sherene Razack discusses the gendered and raced power relations of being seen and being looked at. Kath Woodward shows that visibility is still gendered in crossing the boundaries of private and public in the Western contexts (2015). Fatima Mernissi and Nawal Al-Saadawi, who have been the pioneers of feminist studies in Islamic contexts, argue that because women are recognized as powerful agents in Islam, their private and public presence are controlled extensively (El-Saadawi 2001, 100; Mernissi 1987). As Mernissi argued "the entire Muslim social structure can be seen as an attack on, and a defense against, the disruptive power of female sexuality." (1987, 45). Mernissi wrote about women's 'dreams of trespassing' the boundaries set onto them in harem cultures in North Africa (1994). Being a female, as a visible gender characteristic, limited women's mobility.

While I affirm the importance of this literature, this dissertation problematizes a deeper level of visibility: women's acts of *dissent* in unfavorable environments. More than simple physical visibility, some women make deliberate decisions to go public to articulate a *meaning* that dissents from the mainstream in authoritarian and/or patriarchal religious contexts. It is true that physical visibility is also discursive and meaning-making. However, articulation of meaning through *intellect* (via written or spoken words) doubles and deepens the visibility of gendered minorities. Women's physical visibility has been problematic, but their talking and making meaning has been riskier and more frowned upon. In *visibility of dissent*, women articulate a *point* besides being physically in a parliament or a demonstration. In case of WIMs in this study, women articulate a *politico-religious* point which may be regarded not only as dissent but also as transgression in authoritarian and/or patriarchal religious contexts.

The visibility of dissent of women as meaning-making individuals in a broader public in MENA is more than the physical visibility in the literature above at three levels. First, the dissent is *intended* unlike everyday resistances where intention is *not* a must (see Vinthagen and Johansson 2013; Monceri 2012; Hollander and Einwohner 2004; de Certeau 1984). Secondly, women become visible by a *dissenting articulated* message – on top of their physical visibility – often in an

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unfavorable environment. Thirdly, they become visible to a *broader public* (via writing, TV appearance, blogs, social media, platforms, NGOs or demonstrations), rather than simply being visible to people who happen to be in physical proximity in street, public transportation, workplace or school.[8]

In the MENA, women's public presence and visibility continue to be seen as a threat by regimes and social structures even after the recent revolutions and regime changes (Cooke 2016). Women who continue to be present in public demonstrations and activities (such as painting graffiti in Cairo) do so at great personal cost, most notably sexual harassment and intimidation (Cooke 2016, Abaza 2013). Women who choose to be visible via dissent bear the burden to represent the message of women's rights movements and to make themselves vulnerable to attacks and criticisms. Frequently, such women are leaders or members of women's rights advocacy NGO's. Islah Jad problematizes NGOs' reliance on media communication for advocating public issues without a wider public support (2004, 39). Jad questions the efficacy of these 'NGO acts' with 'movement' actions which have a broader base (2004, 39). I disagree with Jad in juxtaposing 'NGO acts' with 'movement' as NGO's and their visible human and women's rights defenders may trigger mobilization with their visibility which often disturbs the governments. Some NGO leaders who become prominent defenders of human and women's rights are being attacked or imprisoned by governments and their actions are being restrained.

There are two dimensions of visibility. The first one is recognition – the actor's willingness to be recognized (Brighenti 2007). Sometimes actors disclose their identity but at other times they use pseudo names or acronyms before they publish a text. They may selectively join in protests and campaigns; they may also prefer not to be on the spotlight as organizers or speakers at times they participate. What determines these choices of public exposure? The second dimension of visibility refers to the control and representation by the power structures (such as government,

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[8] 'Spectacular resistance' concept of Homi Bhabha is not about direct confrontation and 'visibility of dissent' as I use it. Homi Bhabha writes that mocking and mimicking the colonizer is *not* an ordinary resistance and he calls such acts extraordinary and 'spectacular resistance' (1985, 162). It is spectacular because "it reveals hegemonic or imperial power to be fractured and not as effective and totalizing" (Kapoor 2003). However, the discursive warfare in Bhabha's terms is hidden and sly (1985) and part of everyday resistance, than overt discursive contestation that this dissertation looks at.

media and academia) as to who deserves to be visible and how; and who is deemed invisible (Brighenti 2007; Casper and Moore 2009, Hong 2013).

Sometimes activists have to actively claim their own visibility against the control and 'misrepresentations' of their identity by the power structures. Guo-Juin Hong discusses how the media publicized the LGBTQ community in Taiwan by putting the members' lives into danger and how, in return, the community realized that they had to take the representation into their own hands via self-documentaries (2013, 687). Hong argues that visibility is not only a matter of making oneself visible, but also about deliberate steps to attract media attention and even to collaborate with the media (2013, 691). Following Judith Butler's approach to parody, Hong hints at media co-optation and argues that "[t]he struggle for visibility makes it imperative to carve out a representational space in the mainstream cultural and social field" (2013, 699). Likewise, members of WIMs know that secularist and leftist media, for their own political agenda, are eager to publicize their criticisms of religion or Islamist governments. Therefore, I also look at control and manipulation mechanisms in the media to see the tactics available to women and their potential co-optation with media.

The developments in communication media as new mobilizing structures have changed the nature of 'publicness,' where being public is increasingly defined by being visible (Thompson 2000, 36-39). These changes have enabled intimate forms of self-presentation to be transmitted without co-presence in a context what John B. Thompson calls 'the society of self-disclosure' (Thompson 2000, 40). In such a society, anyone can act 'politically' – it is enough to post a comment in Twitter and Facebook. Thompson argues that the new visibility with new media technologies is not only an unintended outcome due to the leakage in communication flows, but "it is also an explicit strategy of individuals who know very well that mediated visibility can be a weapon in the struggles they wage in their day-to-day lives" (Thompson 2005, 31). Visibility of actors in social media and movements in authoritarian contexts has recently been the subject of several studies (see Navarro Montaño 2015, 2016; Milan 2015). Stefania Milan argues that collective action in the social media, in her words 'cloud protesting,' intensifies the politics of visibility by partially replacing the politics of identity (2015).

One potential criticism of this concentration on the visibility of few overtly dissenting women is that it is elitist. However, women who dare to be visible in the MENA come from a

variety of class backgrounds – some of whom do not have any international networks or resources. Furthermore, in some cases, they are targeted, alienated, silenced or killed. Another related criticism can be that visible actors may not contribute to politico-religious empowerment of women and we may overlook the actual empowerment in the grassroots. James C. Scott argues that public and symbolic confrontations "as discursive negations of the existing symbolic order... fail unless they gain attention" (1989, 57). I disagree. Even though they do not receive attention at that moment, they are picked up by activists later. In cases where we cannot assess any legal or mainstream discourse change, dissenting visibility of women leaves legacies to be picked by future generations.

All revolutions and movements use symbols that galvanize the movement, and such symbols are transferred through generations. Huda Sharaawi's standing up against the British powers (1919) and removal of her face veil in Egypt (1923) or Halide Edip's independence speech at the *Sultanahmet Square* demonstrations (1919) and Nezihe Muhiddin's efforts for political representation (1923-27) in Turkey are remembered as key historical moments and picked up by activists (see Chapter 3).[9] Samira Ibrahim's publicity of the virginity tests applied to protesting women made her face the symbol of anti-military graffitis since 2011 in Egypt. Likewise, the 'red women' in Gezi Park protests became the symbol of freedom that women have aspired to in Turkey. As historian and free speech scholar Timothy Garton Ash asserts "the survival of free speech has depended on the courage of exceptional individuals who refuse to bow down or recant in the face of imprisonment, torture and death threats" (2016, 140). Besides empowering themselves by their visible dissent, those groups and individuals also contribute to the empowerment of others as long as their legacies are picked up by broader movements.

1.3 Acts of Politico-Religious Empowerment

After presenting the social movement framework and stressing the distinctive visibility of women's dissent in authoritarian and patriarchal religious contexts, a remaining question is how

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[9] Murdered Islamic feminist Gonca Kuriş is still not well-remembered in Turkey – which is an important question in this study.

to analyze the acts of WIMs. I build on Linda Woodhead's theorization of power relations between religion and gender (2007) and construct a typology of different acts of WIMs.

A Typology of Power Contestation between Religion and Gender Order

In responding to the lack of a theory of gender and religion, sociologist of religion Linda Woodhead proposed a typology to theorize the power relation between religion and 'gender order' (2007). 'Gender order' refers to the gendered power relations in a given society, "despite the impossibility of ever disentangling the full complexities" of the order (Woodhead 2007). While gender refers to a multifaceted set of power relations in society (Bourdieu 2001), religion as a system of power is a constitutive part of the existing gender order in a given society (Woodhead 2007, 568; Berktay 1996, 9). Therefore, we can speak of a 'mainstream Islamic gender order' in a given Muslim society with its *practices* and *discourse*. For example, Islamically-codified family laws are an important pillar of the mainstream (Islamic) gender order in some Muslim-majority countries. Or, the discourse of popular Islamist movements and official Islamic institutions on gender relations are other critical keystones of the mainstream (Islamic) gender order in a given context. Accordingly, mainstream Islamic gender order is different from context to context and may change over time. One needs to look at dominant institutional practices and discourses within a time frame to assess the mainstream Islamic gender order in a particular context.

The typology of Woodhead has recently been used in gender and religion studies (see Nyhagen and Halsaa 2016, 56-57) and also in the textbooks of sociology of religion such as Emerson et al (2016, 142-146). These studies use the typology as a given and they do not comment on it. In the typology, the first relation between religion and gender is 'religion's *situation* in relation to gender' (Woodhead 2007, 569, emphasis in original). Religion can be situated as mainstream to the existing gender order, or can be situated marginal to it. While 'mainstream' religion is integral to the gender order in a society, 'marginal' religion is regarded deviant by those who accept the existing gender order.

The second relation is 'religion's *strategy* in relation to gender' and it refers to the ways in which religion is mobilized (2007, 569, emphasis in original). The religion can confirm and sacralize the existing gender order or it can challenge and resist it. Woodhead expresses the intersection of these two relations in a four quadrant diagram. The vertical axis connotes the

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situation which runs from mainstream to marginal, and the horizontal axis connotes the strategy of religion which runs from confirmatory to challenging:

Figure 1: Religion's positioning in relation to gender (Woodhead 2007, 570)

MAINSTREAM

Consolidating   Tactical

CONFIRMATORY   CHALLENGING

Questing   Counter-cultural

MARGINAL
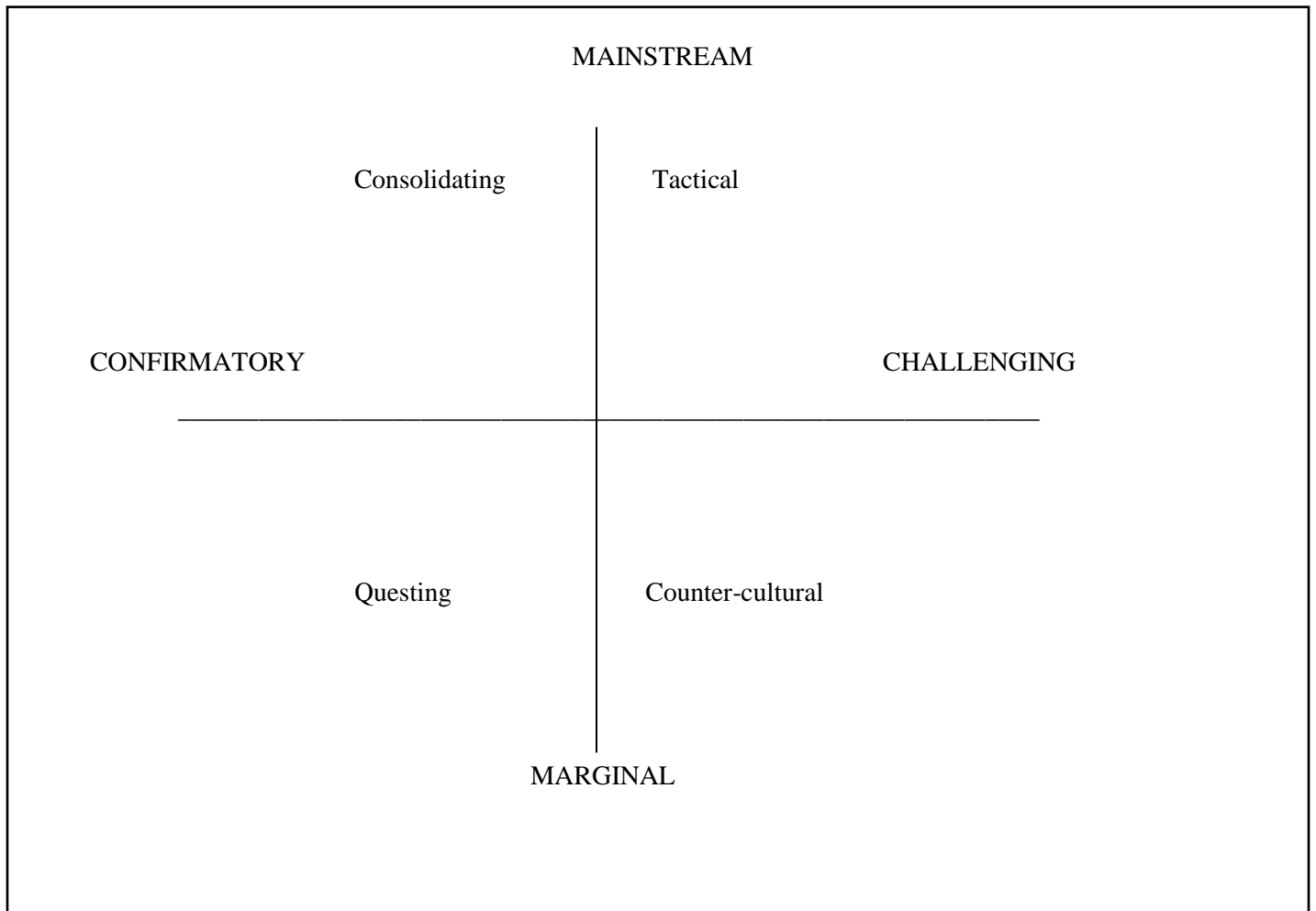
The typology is apt and adaptable to assess the positions and acts of women's Islamic movements in relation to 'mainstream Islamic gender order' in their countries. Woodhead states that the typology "does not assume that there is necessarily a static single 'gender order' in a society, for the unit of analysis may vary from a nation-state to a region or ethnic group" (2007, 569) and it is not necessary "that all members of a religion will assume identical positions in relation to gender." (2007, 570).

Trajectories/Types

The 'consolidating' trajectory is an intersection of mainstream position and confirmatory strategy in the upper-left quadrant in Woodhead's diagram. Some WIMs *accommodate* to the existing mainstream religious gender order with their mainstream positions and confirmatory strategies. In her study of lower and working class Egyptian women, Arlene Macleod argues 'new veiling' is both an accommodation and protest. It is an accommodation to the traditional roles ascribed to women such as modesty, but it is also protest as women step out of the traditionally assigned space with their veil (1992, 122). Although I do not study everyday acts like veiling, Macleod's study reminds that it is not easy to categorize an act simply as accommodation without looking into the subtle meanings behind it. That is why I offer to look at several criteria to define an act: we need to look at not only the discourse, but also form of contention and style in women's movements. On the other hand, in comparative studies, some acts stand out as *more* accommodating to gender norms than others. I will locate the acts of WIMs which accommodate to existing gender norms in the accommodating trajectory.

The 'tactical' trajectory is an intersection of mainstream position and challenging strategy in the upper-right quadrant. It refers to women's attempts to 'bargain with patriarchy' within the mainstream religion in Kandiyoti's term (1988) (Woodhead 2007, 573). Following Michel de Certeau's (1984) differentiation of 'tactical' and 'strategic' in everyday life, Woodhead explains how 'tactical' religion is employed by the less powerful agents against 'strategies' of the more powerful religion (Woodhead 2016, 16). There are parallels between the tactical religion in everyday life and usage of religion by WIMs. Some WIMs *dissent* from the mainstream religion's gender order, although they are still within the boundaries of the mainstream. However, 'tactical' does not completely explain the dissenting acts of WIMs. Pursuing 'patriarchal bargains' partially explains the goals of dissenting WIMs that would fit into this quadrant. Thus, I rename the quadrant as 'dissenting' as seen in Table 1.

The 'questing' trajectory is the result of an intersection of marginal position and confirmatory strategy at the lower-left quadrant. Questing refers to marginal religions like New Age cults and self-spirituality groups where the mainstream gender roles in society are *not* questioned, but the focus is on individual spirituality and gain (2007, 569-577). Woodhead explains that these cults are more prevalent among the female population in Western societies who

want to 'cope with the contradictions and costs of the unequal distribution of power and unpaid care work' instead of changing these conditions (2007, 576). Some women's *sufi* and spirituality groups in the MENA may be 'questing' examples[10]. However, I study groups and women who aim at a broader public change with advocacy; therefore groups that may occupy this quadrant are not in the scope of this dissertation.

Lastly, the 'counter-cultural' trajectory is an intersection of marginal position and challenging strategy in the lower-right quadrant. Counter-cultural refers to religious movements outside the mainstream realm and which challenge the mainstream with their teachings or actions. For Woodhead:

> Religion which is counter-cultural with regard to gender is not only marginal to the existing gender order, but actively opposes it and strives to change it and forge alternatives. Here sacred power becomes a central resource in the attempt to establish more equal distributions of power between the sexes (2007, 576).

Woodhead gives the goddess feminist movement, most of the members reclaim the 'witch' title, as the primary example in this quadrant. She also acknowledges that some goddess feminist movements can be utopian, aim to transform the world and take part in protests. Nevertheless, her examples on goddess movements and her focus on counter-culturality do not thoroughly capture the 'marginal' WIMs that challenge the existing religious order and community. Such WIMs are not necessarily counter-cultural and they do not necessarily have their own cultural communities and rituals.

Marginal and challenging WIMs *transgress* the norms – more than the dissent of the reformist WIMs. Political philosopher Flavia Monceri (2012) maintains that the transgression is *beyond* dissent, since transgressive acts claim to establish new rules that do not need recognition from the mainstream power:

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[10] Some types of everyday resistance in the literature may have commonalities with the questing trajectory such as 'poaching' (Scott 1989, 34) or 'embedded resistance' when subalterns embrace roles in the hegemonic system (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013). Scott argues that "[m]ost "everyday resisters" are rather like opponents of a law who estimate that it is more convenient to evade it or bribe their way around it rather than to change it." (1989, 57). This approach is comparable to 'questing'.

Whereas dissent is a kind of resistance, which aims to be 'recognized' by the part of the dominant order; transgression is the result of an individual exercise of the power to construct rules and establish them as 'norms', a power having no need to be recognized by those who conform in order to be legitimated. Transgression is a way through which existing rules are unmasked as merely constructed entities, whose legitimacy has no firm 'natural' or 'rational' ground, but depends on their being conventionally accepted by a high enough number of individuals. In other terms, transgression is a way to establish a new order *within* the old one, at the same time engendering, at the cultural, social and political level, more or less lurking fears of disorder, anarchy and self-destruction. (Monceri 2012, 30-31, emphasis in original)

Transgression has parallels with the concept of 'constructive resistance' which is a "proactive form of constructing alternative or prefigurative social institutions which facilitate resistance" (Vinthagen 2007, 12-13). Likewise, transgression in the case of WIMs is about creating new meanings in religion. Building on such acts of WIMs, I rename the quadrant 'transgressive' as seen in Table 1. In her analysis of everyday life, Flavia Monceri argues that transgressive practices do not have to be intentional (2012, 38). WIMs in this study are selected from women and advocacy groups who overtly *intend* to accommodate, dissent or transgress, although in rare cases actors realize their 'transgression' after the reactions they receive.

Political scientist Fatmagül Berktay (1996) lays out two concepts which could parallel the difference between dissent and transgression in religion. According to her, there can be two ways (not mutually exclusive) to question the concept of religion and the gender roles that religions impose: *resistance* (*direnme*) within religion and attaining the *'power of naming'* (*ad koyma kudreti*) by freeing oneself from the unchangeable definitions of religion (1996, 13). These two concepts are similar to dissent and transgression, respectively, in the framework that I constructed based on Woodhead and Monceri. Berktay suggests acts like 'naming herself', going against imposed definitions and creating alternative definitions and 'counter-culture' make women have

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'power' (*iktidar*) and create their own destiny (1996; 30, 216).While Berktay appreciates women's attempts to redefine their nature and role in religion (talking about Christianity per se), she, nevertheless, argues that real emancipation is not possible without crossing the boundaries of an oppressive tradition (1996, 210).

How can we operationalize and differentiate dissent and transgression from each other and from the mainstream? Here the social movement framework is very useful. I argue that what defines an act as accommodating, dissenting or transgressive is not only the *content* of the act (such as discussing issues that are considered to be taboo) but also the *style* of argumentation/discourse, and the *repertoires and forms* of contention (such as organizing a contained project or a spectacular disruptive protest) (see Table 1). For example, a street protest would convert an otherwise dissenting act into a transgressive one in a repressive context as long as the protest crosses the allowed boundaries in that context. That is why a *social movement perspective* is crucial in assessing the type of an act. I summarize the potential acts of WIMs in the Table 1 as follows:

Table 1: WIMs' acts towards mainstream religious gender order based on content, style and forms of contention (My adaptation based Figure 1 from Woodhead 2007, 570)

Situation in relation to Mainstream Religious Gender Order / *Strategy in relation to Mainstream Religious Gender Order*	**Mainstream**	**Marginal**
Confirmatory	**Accommodating act/visibility:** • Content: Mainstream • Style of Argumentation: Contained • Forms of Contention: Contained	Questing Out of the scope of the dissertation
Challenging	**Dissenting act/visibility:** • Content: Taboo issues included • Style of Argumentation: Moderate • Forms of Contention: Contained	**Transgressive act/visibility:** • Content: Taboo issues included • Style of Argumentation: Radical • Forms of Contention: Disruptive

First of all, an accommodating act carries the features of the mainstream religious gender order in a particular context: The content of an accommodating act is often mainstream. For example, women's right to education and work is a mainstream topic that is promoted in official Islamic discourses (for example of *Diyanet* in Turkey and *al-Azhar* in Egypt). The style of argumentation would be contained, meaning that women would use a modest or even a submissive discourse, and the authorities would not be challenged. The forms of contention in accommodating acts are also contained and non-confrontational such as organizing conferences or charity sales.

In a dissenting act, we can find taboo issues, as well as, conventional issues discussed. The style of argumentation is expected to be moderate, but it can vary from contained to aggressive.

The forms of contention are often contained, such as conferences, giving public speeches, and sometimes more disruptive ones like street protests or press statements. In a transgressive act, we ideally find taboo issues at the center of the act. The style of argumentation is radical, meaning that it is unexpectedly assertive and challenging. The forms of contention are also expected to be disruptive, such as a street protest, flash-mob, or turning a conventional act a non-conventional one by women's involvement, such as female-led funeral prayers.

It is important to underline that I listed the ideal components for each act – these represent ideal types. In reality, sometimes an issue may be mainstream but the style and form of the women who raise the issue can be disruptive. At other times, we find a taboo issue discussed in a very contained format and with a non-confrontational discourse. That is why it is important to assess each act carefully in its immediate context and see how much adaptation and confrontation it has in order to label it as accommodation, dissent or transgression in the final assessment.

It is also important to note that the same space can host different discourses, issues and forms of contention in different contexts. For example, while discussing marital rape may be a transgressive act in Egypt, it may be less so in Turkey since the marital rape has been criminalized through the efforts of women's organizations earlier. Likewise, we need to keep in mind that mainstream Islamic gender order in a context may also change in time. Nevertheless, there have been some common trends in heterosexual cultures as to what constitutes a dissent and transgression in religion. Below, I refer to some of the recent liteture on women's dissent and transgression in Muslim majority societies that help to identify common trajectories of mainstream, dissent and transgression.

Dissent and Transgression in Islamic frameworks

While disagreement (*ikhtilāf*) has been allowed in Islamic traditions, disorder/chaos (*fitna*) has been condemned (Esposito and Voll 1996, 41). The concept of *fitna* has historically been used to limit the opposition to the authority in Muslim-majority societies[11] (Esposito and Voll 1996, 41, Mandaville 2001). As such, dissent within a mainstream Islamic framework is often labeled as tools of the West, secularism, or communism by religious scholars or authorities depending on the

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[11] However, the concept of fitna has also been evoked to oppose a rule on the accounts that the rule leads to fitna (Esposito and Voll 1996).

context in question. A significant fragment of *dissent* within Islam is coming from the Muslim women (*muslimāt)*. As I discussed in more detail in the section of Islamic feminism in Introduction, some Muslim women push the boundaries of religion by dissenting from the widely-accepted Islamic regulations and try to disentangle the masculinities attached to Islam, so-called 'Islamic masculinities' (Boubekeur and Roy 2012; Sharify-Funk 2008).

The concept of *fitna* has been evoked not only against dissent but also transgression. *Fitna* accusation has especially been applied to women. Women and their bodies, in particular, are regarded as *fitna* in canonical Islamic text with their alleged potential to provoke sexual attraction (Mernissi 1987). Issues pertaining to sexuality or women's bodies are often within the scope of transgression. Transgressing is connected to trespassing 'public norms' and 'public morality' (Morris and Sloop 2006, Sehlikoğlu 2015). Mainstream Islamic gender orders, like any heterosexual order, aim to regulate intimacy and privacy (Berlant and Warner 1998).

Sertaç Sehlikoğlu studies the culture of intimacy and privacy, referred as *mahremiyet* in Turkey by analyzing two instances where 'private' becomes public: an Islamic fashion magazine and a kissing protest in Ankara (2015). *Mahremiyet* is derived from the concepts of *haram/ḥarām* and *mahrem/maḥram* which refer to forbidden, taboo, or female members of the family. As Nilüfer Göle defines *mahrem* in Turkish, it refers to "intimacy, domesticity, secrecy, women's space, what is forbidden to a foreigner's gaze; it also means a man's family" (1997, 7). Sehlikoğlu studies culture of *mahremiyet* as a "border-making mechanism" related to disclosure of things linked to sexuality (2015, 237).

Studies on Muslim women increasingly focus on *transgression* in Islamic heritage with a particular emphasis on the role of Sufism in the recent years (Jamal 2015, Shaikh 2012). While Sufi tradition and history[12] sometimes provide legitimacy for dissent and transgression within Islam, one does not have to consult to Sufism to be able to defend the right to dissent and transgression from within.

Studying honor killings in Muslim communities, Amina Jamal warns that critical transnational feminists should not define 'transgressive' acts like homosexuality or having sex

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[12] As Shaikh also notes Sufism has not always been a panacea for resisting patriarchy (2012).

outside of wedlock as secular and un-Islamic and they should not rush to defend these acts as individual freedoms based on secularity. Jamal gives Islamic mysticism as an example to highlight "the emancipating potential of the transgressive act from a spiritual perspective"[13] (2015, 69). Jamal argues that the influence of Sufism enabled 'a degree of ambiguity' with regards to piety and sin, and spaces of transgression until the 1980's in Pakistan. Sufism deferred the questions of authority as to who would punish the sinful acts of Muslims (2015, 71). Jamal states that with the rise of contemporary forms of Islamism such as Salafi and Wahabi currents which have captured the Islamist movements and political parties, transgressions have become more problematic.

Another scholar who focuses on sexuality, Sadiyya Shaikh studies "the voices of dissent to patriarchy" in the Islamic tradition with a focus on the views of a Sufi polymath Ibn Arabi (2012). Ibn Arabi supported women's spiritual leadership including of *imamate,* leading mixed-gender congregational prayers. This has been a very controversial issue among Muslim communities and those women who led or attempted to lead prayers have been labeled as heretics or transgressors, like Amina Wadud[14]. Shaikh criticizes the mainstream view on the issue that women's body should not be in front of or next to men during the prayer, as the argument is that women's bodies *are* sexual. Shaikh argues that this mainstream view obscures that men's bodies are also sexual (they can be attractive to women but also other men), and the view also implies that men are incapable of controlling their libidos (2012, 8). With this reasoning, Shaikh attempts to refute the arguments against women's *imamate*.

This literature concentrates on 'transgression' within religion and problematizes what is considered as transgression or *fitna* within religion. This dissertation follows this perspective and extends this literature on transgression within religion by studying it side by side with accommodation and dissent.

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[13] Islamic mysticism does not aim to reach at a post-secular and post-religious subject with sexual transgression, but to transcend body and soul (*fanaa*) to reach the resurrection (*baqaa*) in the ideology of oneness of being (*wahdat-ul wujud*) (Jamal 2015, 70).

[14] Wadud, as a female imam, led the Friday prayer for a mixed-gender congregation in New York in 2005. The prayer was held in an Anglican church, as other mosques had refused to host the prayer. The prayer was protested outside the spot and has stirred controversy since then. Wadud has received death threats.

1.4 Capacities of Politico-Religious Empowerment

Women's politico-religious empowerment is directly connected to broader political empowerment and women's resistance against different types of oppression (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Mouffe 1995, 324-329). Therefore, besides the power contestations between women and religion, there is also need to look at the contestations between women and political authority. Only with both elements, it is possible to assess the capacities of WIMs in increasing women's *politico-religious* empowerment.

How do we measure empowerment? First of all, I look at both *actual* empowerment and also *capacities* of empowerment. The two are entangled, as I regard the existence of women's movements as actual (discursive and organizational) empowerment based on women's studies literature. Then I study WIM's acts to assess their *capacities* for *further* empowerment in discursive, organizational and legal spheres.

In terms of *actual* empowerment in the field, I look at the existing organizational space and discourses of women's movements, and legal gains as proxies for empowerment. Accordingly, I pinpoint different empowerment types as discursive empowerment, organizational empowerment, and legal empowerment. So for example, the fact that a group has emerged among WIMs that particularly occupy themselves with violence against women or political oppression is a discursive and organizational empowerment in itself. On the other hand, changes in the ground such as the relaxation of headscarf bans, reforms for gender equality or democratization constitute legal empowerment.

In terms of *capacities* of empowerment, I use proxies based on the suggestions in the literature: WIMs stance towards mainstream religious gender order and political oppression. In the MENA, durable authoritarianisms have plagued societal freedoms and individual empowerment, in general. The democratic and authoritarian trajectory of a country influence the social movement dynamics. Besides limiting the space for women's movements and free discourses, authoritarianism leads to polarization of between segments of society – most notably between seculars and Islamists in the MENA. This puts the woman question in the middle of hostile political contestations. Women's rights have also been used as a tool by governments which position themselves as 'liberal' to Western audiences and creditors.

Nicole Pratt argues that the civil society normalizes the authoritarianisms in the Arab Middle East for accepting the post-independence hegemonic consensus that underpins authoritarianisms (2007, 57). This hegemony consists of socioeconomic, institutional and ideological pillars including redistribution, national modernization, anti-Westernization and Islamism. Although civil society actors opposed their respective *regimes*, they did not challenge *authoritarianism* as they share these hegemonic assumptions (Pratt 2007, 10). Pratt maintains that despite some formulations of alternatives against authoritarianisms, Islamists, seculars, working classes and peasants have mainly demanded the reinstitution of economic benefits and national-modernist ideology from the regimes. According to Pratt, the discourse of rights and critique of some features of authoritarianism emerged only with the human rights and women rights groups in the region (2007, 88). For her, these groups are the ones who internalized the democratic ideals much more than other civil society groups.

Notwithstanding the validity of Pratt's argument that women's movements in the MENA put forward a visionary discourse against the authoritarianism throughout the 1970's and 1980's, women's movements have taken part in underpinning authoritarianisms in the region with compromises and collaborations with such regimes. I found out that WIMs are divided in standing against, being silent or in support of the authoritarianism. I juxtapose the acts towards the mainstream religious gender order in Table 1 with WIMs' relation to political oppression to find out women's different politico-religious empowerment capacities in Table 2:

Table 2: Women's Politico-Religious Acts and Empowerment Capacities

WIMs relation to political oppression / WIMs relation to mainstream religious gender order	Challenging	Members with both Inclinations/In between	Silent or Supportive
Transgressive (marginal &challenging)	**Transformative** power/empowerment capacity	D	E
Dissenting (mainstream & challenging)	A	**Reformative** power/empowerment capacity	F
Accommodating (mainstream &confirmatory)	B	C	**Consolidating** power/empowerment capacity
Questing (marginal & confirmatory)	Out of the scope	Out of the scope	Out of the scope

Ideal types are tools of generalization and theorization in case-oriented approaches (della Porta 2008, 206). The politico-religious empowerment capacities (or powers) in Table 2, as transformative, reformative and consolidating, are *ideal types*. The strongest empowerment capacity is the transformative one: I attain a transformative capacity to women's groups, individual women or events if they both *transgress* the mainstream religious gender order and *challenge* the political oppression. The second empowerment capacity is reformative: I attain a reformative capacity to women's groups, individual women or events if they both *dissent from* the mainstream religious gender order and they *at least partially challenge* the political oppression. The third

power is consolidating power – this is not always *empowerment* as it is mostly about sustaining the existing power relations. I attain a consolidating power to women and events when they *accommodate* to the mainstream religious gender order and if they are *silent* about political oppression.

Besides these three ideal types that I constructed, there are six variations of stances in the table that do not fit into these ideal types, and I leave them without labeling. They can be defined by their positions in two axes, such as dissenting from gender order and challenging political oppression (position A); or transgressing the gender order but silent about other political oppression (position E).

The boundaries between the ideal types and the other six stances are porous. For example, a movement with a dissenting act against religious gender order and a challenging stance against political oppression (position A) may have both reformative and transformative capacity. Alternatively, a transgressive act against the religious gender order coupled with a middle way stance against political oppression may also have a reformative or transformative capacity (position D). An accommodating stance on religious gender order may also couple with a challenging stance against political oppression (position B), such as the case of Muslim sisterhood under al-Sisi regime in Egypt. Assessing the empowerment capacities of the positions B and E is particularly difficult and contextual. We need to look at each case in context to determine the most fitting empowerment capacity.

Chapter 2: Methodological Approach

2.1. Scope of Women's Islamic Movements

In this dissertation, I examine women and women's groups which raise an Islamic voice on societal perceptions, governmental discourses or state regulations on women's issues via advocacy. I selected them based on Islamic *justifications* in their discourses and activities, rather than their *personal religious orientations*. Consequently, I incorporated the activism of some secular women's rights activists in Egypt to women's Islamic movements if they systematically use a religious discourse to advocate reform. I did not interrogate my interviewees about their piety or personal religious beliefs, but about their perceptions of the connections between religion, state and women's rights. The units of observation and analysis are the sub-groups in women's Islamic movements, such as Islamic feminists, Islamists or eclectic women's groups. I analyzed each of these groups and located them in the typology according to their acts and stances. I excluded political party branches of women due to scope conditions such as AKP's women's branch and women's branches of broader political organizations such as Muslim Sisterhood in Egypt. However, I did not discard women's groups and NGO's which have ties with umbrella organizations through framing and/or funding.

Women in advocacy among WIMs engage in intellectual activity via writing and giving interviews and/or public activism via organizing protests and NGO activities. It is not meaningful to draw a strict line between the two actions, as same people often perform them. However, to give a broad description, intellectual women include university professors, writers, and graduates of social sciences including theology faculties. They mostly come from a middle-class background, although there are few from the upper class, more so in Egypt. Activist women include NGO heads, workers and members, as well as independent activists. Activist women I studied often come from middle-class backgrounds in both countries. While some women have connections to rural areas via their family background or NGO work, I study the advocacy movement of WIMs in urban areas.

Why do I focus on advocacy level instead of ordinary women? Ordinary women are also actors of politico-religious empowerment with their 'power of presence' in public as Asef Bayat (2007) and others have demonstrated. Some ordinary anonymous activists may even become

symbols of resistance moments such as 'the blue bra girl[15]' in Egypt or 'the red dressed woman[16]' in Turkey. However, in this dissertation, I am interested in understanding the movement space for women's politico-religious empowerment in an extended period of time, and I can only assess it by looking at women or groups who systematically use religious discourse.

I do not study other types of Islamic activism such as social welfare, charity, self-help, micro-economy and local mosque and piety activism, including the official and informal religious female preachers (*vaize*/*dāʿīyah*). Although some of them aim to change societal perceptions of women in religion, they do not *directly* aim to change state regulations, and their contributions stay at the local level. Furthermore, including them would expand the scope of the study massively. I limit the analysis to advocacy activism where the words and deeds of women target a broader audience through various means of media.

Another limitation of the dissertation is that I do not study women in official religious institutions in a systematic manner, namely *Diyanet* in Turkey and *al-Azhar* in Egypt, including the theology faculty publications. However, I look at the relations of WIMs with these institutions and the reflections on daily politics of the statements issued by these institutions.

2.2 Research Design

The dissertation is a *case-oriented* comparison with a spatial variation of WIMs in two countries, Turkey and Egypt, as well as a temporal variation of WIMs in each context (della Porta 2008, 204; Gerring 2007, 24, 89-90). The combination of temporal and spatial variation takes the study closer to the comparative-historical method (della Porta 2008, 202; Gerring 2007, 24). della Porta differentiates case-oriented comparison from the variable-oriented comparison:

> In historical comparison, *à la* Weber, the aim is the in-depth
> understanding of a context…. seeking to understand a complex
> unity rather than establish relationships between variables….
> Focusing on a small-*N*, case-oriented comparison usually points
> at similarities and differences through dense *narratives*, with a

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[15] 'Blue bra girl' became a symbol for the women's marches in Cairo after a female protestor was dragged on the street by the security officers and her *abaya* was stripped off revealing her bra in December 2011 (Abaza 2013, Langohr 2013).

[16] A photograph that shows a policeman spraying tear gas to a casually dressed woman sparked reactions and it became one of the first symbols of Gezi Park protests in June 2013.

large number of characteristics being taken into account, often

together with their interaction within long-lasting processes…

… [A]n in-depth knowledge of a small number of cases provides

the basis for generalizations that are temporarily limited to the

cases studied and whose wider relevance should be controlled

through further research…. Theorization and generalization, in

this tradition, are provided not by statistical regularities but by

ideal types (della Porta 2008, 204-206).

In this case-oriented comparison, I interpret and generalize the data by coming up and utilizing three ideal types of empowerment capacities of WIMs – as detailed in the theoretical framework (see Chapter 1, Table 2).

I analyze women's Islamic movements and their empowerment capacities within and across countries. Temporal variation is also a comparative strength of the dissertation (see Table 3). The time scope of the study is the last two decades (1995-2016). The first organizations that have been essential in the convergence of Islam and feminism in Turkey and Egypt were founded in 1995 (influence of UN Beijing conference in institutionalization). Critical turning points for WIMs and women's politico-religious empowerment in Turkey have been AKP's coming to power in 2002 and its stronger hold of power after 2008.

Table 3: Spatial and Temporal Variation of Cross-Case Research Design (adapted from Gerring 2007, 28)

Spatial Variation	Temporal Variation		
Turkey	1995-2002	2002-08	2008-16
Egypt	1995-2000	2000-11	2011-16

A key turning point for WIMs in Egypt was 2000 when women gained the right to no-fault divorce (*khulʿ*) based on Islamic interpretations. *Khulʿ* has been a landmark development for women's politico-religious empowerment in Egypt and has been a legal precedent for WIMs in Egypt and women in other countries living under Islamic personal status laws. Another critical

juncture in Egypt was the January 25 revolution in 2011. WIMs and women's politico-religious empowerment in Turkey and Egypt are analyzed with an eye on these context-specific turning points.

2.3. Comparative Dimensions and Case Selection

Women in the Middle East should be studied concerning different patterns of nation-states with diverse class and ideological conflicts, and distinct histories and relations to the West, rather than in the context of an overarching 'Islam' (Abu-Lughod 1998, 5; Kandiyoti 1991). Comparing WIMs in different countries in the region helps to take the focus away from 'idiosyncratic' ideologies of WIMs and instead enables to emphasize the contextual conditions that trigger, shape or stall movements. Comparative analyses bring to light how women's politico-religious empowerment is boosted or restrained in diverse contexts and how women respond to political opportunities and constraints around them.

Contextual factors influence the emergence, movement patterns and visibility of women's Islamic movements as well as the politico-religious power and empowerment capacities of women. In addition to this, movement patterns of WIMs also affect the politico-religious power and empowerment capacities of women (See Figure 2). Historically and at present, the major contextual factors surrounding women's movements and politico-religious power in the MENA are differentiation (institutionalization of religion), secularization, colonization history, Islamist parties in power, repression (discussed in Ch 1.4), and prevalence of *takfīrī* movements (religious movements which accuse people of apostasy). Demographics including dominant political theology and socio-economic factors are taken into account, while ethnic and urban-rural dynamics are excluded[17].

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[17] I do not study WIMs in the countryside due to the scope limitations. For the same reason, I do not examine WIMs in the major cities of the Kurdish region in Turkey and governorates in Nubia and Upper Egypt. Intersectionalities of ethnicity, religion and demographics in these areas are too complex to handle within the scope of this dissertation.

Figure 2: Relationship between Variables of the Study
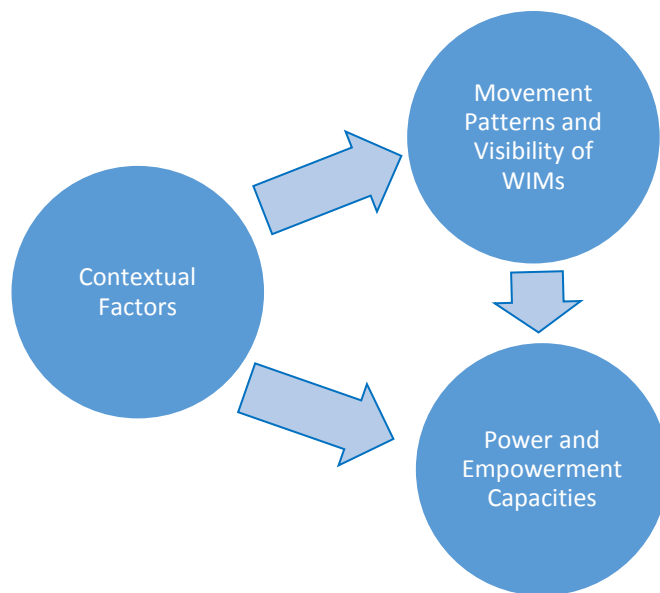
Differentiation

The first assumption is that institutional configurations of religion within the state should influence women's politico-religious power and patterns of mobilization of WIMs. Known as *differentiation* in sociology, religions are embedded and differentiated in diverse ways within the state system (Parsons 1969, 27-8, Beckford 2003, 45). Differentiation refers to 'the degree of autonomy between religious actors and states in their basic authority' (Philpott 2007, 505). Jose Casanova, for example, defines secularization as the "differentiation of the secular spheres' meaning 'emancipation' from religious institutions and norms" (2006, 7). He argues that there are 'multiple and diverse historical patterns of differentiation and fusion of various institutional spheres' (Casanova 2006, 9). For this dissertation, differentiation is important, as it defines the degree of religious influence in gender relations in legal and social terms. Recent socio-political upheavals in the MENA have activated the debates about reforming existing patterns of differentiation. The personal status laws, in this regard, have been the epitome of differentiation in the MENA. They are at the heart of the politico-religious power of women and the patterns of WIMs.

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Various patterns of differentiation across Muslim-majority countries in the MENA, the universe of cases in this study, provide ample ground to study women's politico-religious empowerment. Turkey, with a thoroughly secular legislation and constitution can be defined as an extreme case regarding differentiation among the cases[18]. The extreme case is defined as one with an extreme value on an independent or dependent variable of interest (Gerring 2007, 101). In this study, differentiation functions like an independent variable, a contextual feature that influences the primary interest of the study: women's politico-religious empowerment. Thus, Turkey was selected as an extreme case on the independent variable to study women's politico-religious power and women's Islamic movements when Islam is not a source of legislation.

On the other hand, Muslim majority countries that apply sharia (*al-sharīʿa*, the revealed or canonical law of Islam) in the jurisdiction can be divided into two: those with adherence to sharia in the full jurisdiction (such as Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Iran) or with adherence to sharia only in personal status laws (mixed systems). The mixed systems are the most common among Muslim majority countries in the MENA (Otto 2008). Therefore, mixed systems represent typical cases among the universe of cases. Gerring explains:

> The typical case exemplifies what is considered to be a typical set of values, given some general understanding of a phenomenon. By construction, the typical case is also a representative case... (2007, 91)

A mixed system is more apt to study women's Islamic movements in a typical case among Muslim majority countries in the MENA. Among those, Egypt was selected due to its partial demographic comparability to Turkey, regarding the population size and majority sect of Islam (Sunni in both). Furthermore, Egypt has been a leading country in terms of political, societal and cultural spheres among other Arab countries. Egypt and Turkey together are among the most influential countries in the Middle East in terms of their historical legacy.

Secularization patterns

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[18] Other Muslim-majority countries where Islam is not the source of legislation are some post-Soviet republics in Central Asia, few sub-Saharan countries in Africa.

In both Turkey and Egypt, secular voices and defending women's rights in secular terms are acceptable. Yet, secularism is more pronounced in Turkey due to the encouragement and enforcement of secular values since the foundation of the Republic in 1923. Kemalist secularism is another reason that makes Turkey an extreme case among Muslim-majority countries in the MENA, most notoriously evident in the headscarf bans. I hypothesize that the headscarf bans have had a massive impact on the patterns of mobilization of WIMs in Turkey and women's politico-religious empowerment. It is an open question whether enforced secularization as in Turkey have enabled the permeability between secular and religious expressions among women more than the freer religious expressions as in Egypt.

Influence of Colonization History

Another important dimension that would change the patterns of WIMs in Muslim-majority countries is colonization history. While Egypt was colonized by French and British powers and partially secularized by the colonial and local elite, Turkey was not colonized but rather underwent Westernization and secularization at the hands of local elite. I hypothesize that WIMs in Egypt have more anti-Western and nationalism sentiments and that cultural authenticity claims around women are stronger in Egypt due to colonization history compared to Turkey. However, I also hypothesize that exposure to the foreign language due to colonization in Egypt (Sayed 2006) would give more opportunities to the middle and upper-class WIMs to access to international networks of Islamic feminism and its literature.

Some scholars argue that studying Islamic movements from a perspective of the Ottoman Empire's main successor Turkey has been ignored, while most focus had been on Islamic movements and currents in Egypt, other colonized territories, and the Gulf region (Soguk 2011, 3; Silverstein 2005, 136). Brian Silverstein argues that the scope and nature of Islamic traditions and their connection to modernity "are in need of profound reformulation in light of the Ottoman and Turkish experience" (2005, 137). Similarly, İsmail Kara, a scholar of Islamist thought and movements, argues that the modernization experience of the Ottoman Empire is different than in the other colonized countries and regions (Kara 1997). Moderation of Islam in Turkey has been attributed to 'Turkish exceptionalism' (Mardin 2005; Yılmaz 2011). Mardin points out to an interpenetration, rather than fusion, of Islam and secularism in the Empire with the interaction

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between three social actors: the state officials, a prevalent Nakshibendi order in Anatolia and intellectuals who try to synchronize Islam with European 'civilization' (2005, 148). Mardin argues that the Nakshibendi network became gradually integrated into the market relations and multi-party system with a rationalistic vision (2005, 154-5). At another angle, İhsan Yılmaz argues that the victory of the independence war against the Allied powers after WWI prevented the Turkish Islamists from being radicalized. This enabled Turkish Islamists to keep ties with the tradition and not to follow the literalist rhetoric of Salafism (Yılmaz, 2011, 267-8). Nadje Al-Ali also points out the 'unique' context in Turkey for not being colonized and its influence on women's emancipation in a comparative report about women's movements in Egypt and Turkey (2002). She quotes Deniz Kandiyoti: "the dilemma of the emancipation of women in Islam has not presented itself quite in the same way as it is in those countries that were former colonies" (Kandiyoti 1987, 321 in Al-Ali 2002, 32).

It is imperative to mention the imperial and colonial character of the Ottoman Empire. It ruled Egypt between 1517 and 1867 with two interruptions: Napoleon's campaign between 1798 and 1801 and the Ottoman governor Muhammad Ali Pasha's reign between 1805 and 1848 as the ruler of Egypt (he is regarded as the founder of modern Egypt due to his military, economic and cultural reforms). Legacies of the imperial Ottoman Empire are still being promoted by Islamist and nationalist movements in Turkey. Feminist movements in Turkey have been questioning and criticizing nationalism due to its exclusionary and patriarchal elements especially since 1980's – while leftist women had questioned earlier. Therefore, I expect a different stance and language in WIMs in Turkey than WIMs in Egypt on nationalism and patriotism.

Islamist-rooted party in government

Post-2002 Turkey presents a paradigmatic case to understand the women's Islamic movements in a secular state governed by an Islamist-rooted party in the MENA region. It is a rare occasion to test how an Islamist-rooted government has influenced the patterns of mobilization of WIMs in a secular country and how it has fared in terms of women's politico-religious empowerment.

Socio-Economic Differences

There is a considerable economic development and inequality difference between Egypt and Turkey. GDP per capita based on purchasing power parity (PPP) rose from 4.913 USD to 10.913

USD in Egypt between 1995 and 2015, while it increased from 8.014 USD to 20,008 USD in Turkey in the same period (WB 2017). Nevertheless, I do not expect to see a direct effect of socio-economic development on the politico-religious power of women in Turkey and Egypt. Diverse socio-economic patterns in the MENA from the poorest Yemen to the richest Gulf countries and differing levels of politico-religious empowerment of women confirm that there is no positive relationship between the two.

However, I expect to see the effect of socioeconomics changes within a country on the movement patterns of WIMs, as to who constitutes the movement and how women's changing participation in education and workforce. Women's Islamic movements have historically been a lower-middle class phenomenon in Turkey, although in the last decade more affluent women's Islamic groups, closer to the government, have emerged. In Egypt, members of women's Islamic movements come from diverse economic backgrounds; class differences exist between self-claimed Islamic feminists, Islamists and Muslim sisterhood.

Political Theology: Controlled

Religion affects the politics also via political theology, in other words, 'the set of ideas that religious actors hold about political authority and justice' (Philpott 2007, 505). The majority of people in Egypt and Turkey adhere to the *Hanafi* school (*mezhep/madhhab*) of Sunni Islam[19]. Thus, there is no expected essential difference of mainstream political theologies of WIMs I study in both countries. Yet, processes of mainstreaming of particular Islamist movements, including *takfīrī* ones, during and after British colonialization in Egypt might influence mainstream political theology, via path-dependency.

2.4. Data collection

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork between 2013 and 2016. I stayed in Istanbul between May and December 2013 and Ankara, Istanbul and Bursa between April 2015 and January 2016 – in total over a 15 months period. I lived in Cairo for altogether half a year in 2014 between February and

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[19] Shi'a Islam is mostly represented by Alevism (*Alevilik*) in Turkey which combines elements of Sufism with Anatolian folk Shi'ism. It is estimated that approximately 10% of the population is Alevi, containing both Turkish and Kurdish people. In this research, I do not examine the discourses and activism of Alevi women due to scope limitations and comparability to Egypt. Shia Islam has little presence in Egypt. The second biggest religious group in Egypt is Christian Copts, the church claims their percentage up to 15% (Rugh 2016, 11). It is not in the scope of this study.

May, and between October and December. As part of participant observation, I traveled to an international 'Muslim Women's Conference' organized by International Muslim Women's Union (IMWU) in Islamabad in Pakistan with a group of Islamist women from Turkey in November 2013.

The fieldwork included 68 semi-structured personal interviews; attending public lectures of relevant women and groups; participating in demonstrations and public events on women's rights; participant observation in internal meetings of few groups; following online discussions in e-mail and Facebook groups; and, simply living in and visiting various neighborhoods in Cairo and Istanbul. I also collected information from articles, books, online blogs, TV and newspaper interviews of women and printed materials of groups and associations.

I mapped the fields in Turkey and Egypt, first of all, from the existing literature. Earlier studies of Nadje Al-Ali (2000), Margot Badran and Azza Karam (1998) on Egypt provided names of several women and organizations. In Turkey, the article of Islamist activist Sibel Eraslan (2009) helped to locate several women's Islamic platforms that I did not know. Secondly, I facilitated my stay in Cairo with a visiting fellowship at *American University in Cairo* (AUC) for two semesters at the Political Science department and the Middle East Studies Center respectively. These affiliations helped me tremendously in reaching out to intellectual female activists in Egypt, some of whom are professors at AUC. I had the chance to deliver guest lectures on gender and politics at the Political Science Department and a public lecture at the Middle East Studies Center. I also listened to several lectures and conferences in AUC and Cairo University – which helped me to get further connected to the academic circles and young students in Cairo.

Thirdly, I used the internet to detect other and new women's groups in both countries. I reached out to women and groups by messaging them from social media and sending e-mails to their associations or professional e-mail addresses. I also approached a considerable number of women after their presentations at public events. Lastly, with a snowballing technique, I contacted co-activists and colleagues of the women whom I already interviewed.

All in all, I conducted interviews with 41 women in Cairo, 22 of whom had Islamic perspectives, reaching out representatives of 21 organizations or platforms in Egypt. I reached out to a broader range of women activists in Egypt to understand first-hand the wider context of

women's activism. In Turkey, I interviewed 27 women in Istanbul, Ankara, and Bursa with Islamic perspectives, reaching out representatives of 13 associations or platforms. I interviewed only Islamic-oriented women and groups in Turkey as I had more first-hand information on the broader women's organizations and women's rights field in the country. Interviews took place in locations chosen by the respondents, mostly in public cafes and offices of associations if existed, sometimes at their homes (only in Egypt), and at times right at the public events where I met them. One interview was conducted via Skype, as the respondent (Yara Sallam) was in prison during my fieldwork in Egypt. Most of the interviews lasted around two hours. When necessary, I sent online follow-up questions.

Language

In Turkey, I conducted the interviews in Turkish, my native language. It has been easier to reach out data in Turkey, than in Egypt. I conducted most of my interviews in Cairo in English and four of them in Arabic with the help of a student translator. I did not have difficulty in conducting the interviews in English, as many women's rights activists in advocacy have a conversational proficiency in the language. Having an intermediate level of listening and reading proficiency in Arabic and colloquial Egyptian, I followed several panels in Cairo and read Arabic online media, sometimes with the help of personal and online translators. An important limitation of the dissertation is that I had limited access to the extant Arabic literature due to language barriers. I accessed such literature as long as they are translated to English or referred to in the English literature.

Some heavily laden issues are articulated in English rather than in Arabic for cultural and political reasons in Egypt. Women rights activists find it easier to talk about taboo issues such as sexuality in English. For example, *the Vagina Monologues*, supported and organized by UN Egypt in a private gathering in 2014, was performed in English except for one performance. *Bussy Monologues*[20], born out of students of AUC in 2005 to localize the Vagina Monologues, has also been performing in a mixture of three languages – English, standard and colloquial Arabic. As

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[20] Bussy means 'look' in the imperative in feminine conjugation in Egyptian Arabic (*buṣṣī*).

Samia Mehrez, professor of Arabic literature at AUC notes "…they want to say in whichever language, as opposed to resorting to formal speech and doing it *comme il faut*." (Attalah 2010).

On the other hand, Amina Wadud talks about the difficulty of speaking about some Quranic concepts like '*qawwamun*' (translated variously as protector/provider/have authority over) in English. She talks about the gendered Arabic language and how it affects understanding concepts that transcend gender (Wadud 1998, xii). Indeed, it was a common register during my interviews that women mentioned a critical concept or sentence in Arabic and then continued to explain in English. This is observable in some of the quotations in Chapter 6 and 7.

Quotations

The quotations in Chapter 6 and 7 are direct English quotations from the respondents. I occasionally corrected the grammar for clarity. I rarely quoted Arabic and colloquial Egyptian quotes from interviews and online sources; I translated them with the help of translators. These exceptions are noted. All interviews for Chapter 4 and 5 were done in Turkish, and I translated all quotations into English, unless otherwise stated. I anonymized some of the sensitive quotations for the privacy of the respondents.

2.5. Data Analysis

I used historical tracing and discourse analysis in different degrees in the study. Also, similar to a grounded theory approach, the fieldwork guided me with emerging concepts and enabled me to build on the existing theories (Urquhart 2013, 6; Dey 1999). The visibility of dissent and types of empowerment became pronounced during my fieldwork and data analysis process.

Discourse analysis studies the language of written documents or verbal expressions. It has "a critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge" as it questions the very constructions of the meanings and "knowledges" (Gill 2000). Discourse analysts argue that language is not only a mean to reach a specific knowledge, but it is knowledge in itself (Gill 2000). Therefore, the language can never be neutral. The discourse analyst accepts that the texts do not present an objective fact, but a reflection and interpretation of it (Gill 2000).

The main focus of the discourse analysis is what the practices or the texts do: These include but not limited to creating meanings and problems; drawing boundaries and hierarchies between concepts and stereotyping (Hall 1997, Gill 2000, Billig 1995). Studying meaning constructions and power dynamics are two of the crucial fields of discourse analysis.

2.6. Positionality

The social position of the researcher affects the research questions, research process, and the analysis. Positionality has long been problematized by anthropologists and ethnographers (Altorki and Al-Solh 1988; Shami 1988, 115). I position myself both as an insider and outsider in this study. While I am not part of WIMs, particularly in Turkey, I have a personal stake in women's politico-religious empowerment. I come from a secular Kemalist family where religion has not been a defining factor in my life choices. The closest religious figure in my life has been my maternal grandmother whose solid footing in her life and commitment to her religion have astonished me. I have also been influenced by 13th-century Sufi poets of Anatolia, especially Yunus Emre and Mawlana Jalaladdin Rumi – an influence I may owe to my maternal grandfather. Piety and Islam have meant peace, acceptance of diversity, and forgiveness.

My third year in the college was the first time I recognized the systematic gender inequality – thanks to my professor Özlem Altan-Olcay. Since then, I have started to develop a feminist consciousness. The intersection of gender and religion became my primary academic interest after interviewing the then-president of Capital City Women's Platform Association (*Başkent Kadın Platformu Derneği)* in Ankara for my master's thesis in 2011. The association claimed to fight against difficulties that religious women face in the secular system, but also against the conservative religious discourses which devalue women. I was particularly intrigued by the latter – raising of voices against patriarchy with a feeling of support from Allah. The conflict between the spiritual and forgiving Islam embedded in me and ever-surrounding dogmatic, condemning and misogynistic embodiments of Islam which I encountered during my college years might have triggered this interest. Thus, as a person who is not religious and from a Kemalist background, I am an outsider to the women's Islamic movements (in Turkey), while I am an insider to the issue of women's politico-religious empowerment due to my upbringing, curiosity, and stakes in religion's position regarding gender equality.

There has been a historical hegemonic relation between Western feminisms and Muslim women (Abu-Lughod 2010, Lazreg 1994, 1988). Marnia Lazreg describes "the perils of writing as a woman on women" in Algeria (1988). She states that "[t]he persistence of the veil as a symbol that essentially stands for women illustrates the difficulty researchers have in dealing with a reality with which they are unfamiliar." (1988, 85). The power relations between the West and feminism

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on the one hand, and the East and Muslim women on the other, have been a thorny issue. Women's Islamic movements in the MENA have been in a power struggle with Western and local feminists over the definition of their activism, their priority issues and the legitimacy of their discourse. Questions about the inclusion of men, the importance of family, modesty, openness to feminism, one's stance on LGBTQ rights have become defining litmus tests of how 'emancipated' and 'democratic' these women are.

To be aware of this hegemonic relationship is the first step to avoid a simplistic account of the activities of these women. As Lara Deeb acknowledges, the ambivalence and negotiations mark the approach of pious women in defining proper gender roles rather than a confrontation between secularity and religiosity (2006, 5). Women's own process of negotiating the different perspectives should be taken into account in this hegemonic academic endeavor. "What is the praxis of struggle of women who value local experiences and do not know about women's rights discourse of the West?" a Turkish religious feminist theologian Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal asks in her interview with me (interview 2016). What about women who do not prefer to use such a discourse? What can we learn from the negotiations and articulations of these women about the hegemonic discourses and practices around them? The level of emancipation and an intelligible movement has often been based on discourse and ideology of a movement. However, this is not separable from the context the movement operates in and the transformations of the movement based on the conditions.

Due to this hegemonic relationship, I struggled with the idea that I have to claim 'truth' about my 'subjects' throughout the data collection and writing process. The principle of abstention from moral judgment in anthropology (Köpping 2002, Sugishita 2006) has preoccupied me. I have been hesitant to hold normative statements over my subjects, and I tried to ask and see 'what is there?' instead of preloaded normative questions, in line with the suggestions in the post-democratization studies in the MENA (Cavatorta 2010, Anderson 2006, Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004, Carothers 2002).

Nevertheless, normative issues came up with the research unfolding itself. Now I easily state that I have a feminist stance in this research: I aspire to see strong women in religion and women strong in religion. I have been more sympathetic to the perspectives of some of the women's groups – those who have the courage to speak and be visible, in the name of a universality that they interpret, and challenge the patriarchal interpretations of religion and authoritarianism in

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defense of more rights for women and those others suppressed. I assessed and categorized women with a feminist stance, but with the intention of incorporating their own negotiations within the limits of context.

How visible were my feminism and secular identity to the women in the study? I did not necessarily introduce myself as a feminist, although they would have guessed it via my interview questions or remarks. My clothing style and the fact that I do not wear a headscarf might have indicated a secular identity. In some of the interviews, I openly exposed my background especially when I was asked why I am interested in 'women's Islamic movements' or when I wanted to give an example from Kemalist circles during a casual conversation. I took part in a few feminist and anti-police-violence demonstrations where I encountered some women that I studied in Turkey, and I occasionally shared feminist posts and news in my Facebook account (including some posts from the groups in the study) – visible to those who added me on Facebook.

Risks and Returns

Despite the positive-looking scenery in both countries when I started this project in June 2012 with a perspective of 'democratization,' political violence and authoritarian practices had escalated in both countries when I embarked on each field. During my fieldwork in Egypt, there was no high-level diplomacy between Egypt and Turkey due to then-prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's open support for the ousted president and Muslim Brotherhood (MB) leader Muhammad Mursi in Egypt. As a researcher with a Turkish passport who studies Islamic movements during the al-Sisi regime could have been risky for me and my respondents who were close to the MB, which was delegitimized and criminalized since July 2013. I informed such respondents about my citizenship and my research topic before they agreed to meet me and they decided on the locations of the interviews.

Physical and psychological barriers over the course of data collection and writing can turn out to be a field to harvest meaning. During my research in Egypt, a Turkish student from al-Azhar University was jailed for six months for allegedly joining MB demonstration. The number of forced disappearances have been high (Michaelson and Kirchgaessner 2017). My fellowship affiliation at AUC would have been a safety net in case of an encounter with the security forces. However, after learning about the unsolved murder of Cambridge University student Giulio Regeni

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in January 2016, who was also a visiting fellow at AUC[21], I maintain that the safety nets may not be strong enough for researchers and activists in the current contexts in Egypt and Turkey. In Turkey, dangers were present during my research and participation in the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul in 2013, where I witnessed police violence with some of the women in the study. These encounters inevitably influenced the data and my perspectives. Importantly, my sporadic participation in protesting against authoritarian practices of Turkey have increased my practical concerns over the 'visibility of dissent'. This, in all likelihood, led me to further probe the visibility of dissenting and transgressing women in my study and engrain it decisively into my theoretical framework.

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[21] It has been claimed that Regeni's research on labor movements in Egypt made him a target to the security state. The head of the street vendors' union Mohamed Abdallah admitted that he alerted Egyptian authorities about Regeni's research as a 'national duty' for his suspicion that Regeni was a 'spy' – few weeks before his death. (Aboulenein 2017; Michaelson and Kirchgaessner 2017)

Chapter 3: Women's Politico-Religious Empowerment in Historical Perspective in Egypt and Turkey

This chapter traces the emergence and advancement of women's voices in matters of religion, as well as political developments related to women from the late 19th century to the end of the 20th century in Egypt and Turkey. Women's presence is not new in the public sphere in the MENA as studies demonstrated women's public presence and activism since the19[th] century (Cakir 2011, Cooke 2010, Booth 2001, Baron 1994). Women writers and activists engaged with Islam throughout the modern and post-independence periods. Women lacked a systematic Islamic discourse based on sharia or Islamic jurisprudence, but they consulted to it in a sporadic and tactical way to justify certain demands. The efforts have remained rather at the individual level without a sustained organization. On the other hand, prominent Islamist women did not prioritize women's rights and did not produce a systemic women's perspective in Islam. Yet, their strong presence in the public sphere such as Zainab Al-Ghazali in Egypt and Şule Yüksel Şenler in Turkey produced role-models for Islamist women in the next generations. Overall, women carved out space for themselves within the politico-religious discourse in the 20th century mostly in a tactical or accommodating way.

In this chapter, I highlight prominent streams of thought which influenced women's movements in each country including anti-colonialism, nationalism, Arab socialism, Kemalist secularism and Islamism. Nationalism and anti-colonialization have been strong themes in women's movements in both countries.

3.1. Islamism and Islamist Women in Egypt since the End of the 19th Century

The dichotomies of 'East vs. West' and 'feminism vs. Islam' were not present in the same way as it is today. The period between late 19th and early 20th century is called the Arab Renaissance or the Awakening (*al-nahḍa*). Thinkers of the *nahḍa* did not aim at reform in an apologetic matter. On the contrary, they saw civilization as a common human product and they simply aimed to benefit from developments across the world. Since they had not yet experienced the European

colonization[22], they did not see a problem to draw from the experiences of Europe and they did not have the reactionary sentiments towards the West that thinkers and activists from the early 20th century had (Osman 2013).

Likewise, women writers of the era also did not create a dichotomy between women's rights and Islam. The difference between the modernist and Islamist discourses of women was only in degree, not substance, since both discourses referred to Islam and modernity (Baron 1994). According to Margot Badran, Egyptian feminists of the 20th century found a space within Islam in this reformist period (1995). While they explicitly adopted a feminist identity, they did not consider this as a threat to their Muslim identity (Badran 1995).

In Egypt, women's rights have often been discussed around three main issues: religion, nationalism and Western colonialism. A justifiable reference point was necessary according to the conditions of the era. Accordingly, women defended rights by referring to various anchors such as the ancient Egyptian culture, nationalism, liberalism, socialism, and Islamism while often maintaining an anti-Western stance (Baron 1994). Mervat Hatem argues that "compromises between governments and other factions are often reached at the expense of women" in Egypt (2011).

The argument that liberal men had the leading role in defending women's rights and feminism in Egypt has been refuted by the feminist scholarly work of the last decade[23] (Hatem 2014, Booth 2001, Baron 1994). Mervat Hatem argued that men of the *nahḍa* era put women in an inferior position while they seemed to argue for more rights for women (2014, 5). Beth Baron and Marilyn Booth vividly showed the involvement of the 'woman question' in the women's press since 1892 and by novels and individual contributions to newspapers earlier.

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[22] With the exception of short-lived campaign of Napoleon Bonaparte between 1798 and 1801.

[23] It is a long standing argument in the literature that women's rights were firstly put forward by reformist male thinkers and religious scholars in the late 19th century. Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, Qasim Amin, and Jamaladdin Al-Afghani are presented as the forerunner of women's rights in Egypt since they had modernist perspectives. Al-Tahtawi wrote a textbook commissioned by Ministry of Schools (*dīwān al-madāris*) entitled 'The Trusted Guide for Girls and Boys' (*al-murshid al-āmīn l-il-banāt w-al-banīn*) in 1873 where he argued for non-discrimination in education for boys and girls for a happy marriage and education life (Zachs 2013, 127). Another important thinker of the time was Qasim Amin who published two cornerstone books on women's rights named Liberation of Women (*taḥrīr āl-mar'ā)* in 1899 and New Woman *(āl-mar'ā jadīda)* where he defended unveiling of women.

Muslim women writers mostly supported the slow reform instead of the fast secularism, unlike the era's modernizer elite Qasim Amin propelled (Baron 1994, 113). For example, 'Islamist' women like Fatima Rashid defended to look back to the example of women's rights in the early years of Islam. Rashid and Sarah Al-Mihiyya founded an association and journal called *jamʿīya tarqīya al-marʾā (Association of the Advancement of Woman)* in 1908. While urban elite began to unveil in 1900's in Egypt, Islamist women defended the veil as a "symbol of our Muslim grandmothers."[24] They criticized the materialism of Western thought and argued that it undermines morality. They criticized Qasim Amin's suggestion of unveiling by arguing that modesty, seclusion, and veiling were the edifices of Islam (Baron 1994).

On the other hand, 'modernist' women writers of the era also referred to religion when they discussed the 'women's question'. A writer and women's rights defender Malak Hifni Nasif, a contemporary of Qasim Amin, supported reform in family and education for girls, criticized polygamy and easy divorce for men. Yet, she also demanded Islamic component in schools and did not criticize veil or segregation, as Amin did. Similarly, teacher Nabawiya Musa, who was a staunch supporter of women's education and work rights with her life example and publications, did not prioritize unveiling (Voicu 2013). She elevated modesty for women when they entered into public space, yet she argued that sexual harassment was due to the fact that women did not have equal job positions with men (Voicu 2013, Badran 1988). Women like Nasif and Musa criticized blind copying of Western lifestyle 'to protect women from the predatory behavior of men towards unveiled women in the streets' (Hatem 2014, 8). Baron argued that this could be a reaction from middle-class writers to upper-class women (1994). While Baron defined Nasif as a modernist, Elsadda argued that she was the earliest critic of the modernist project (Baron 1994; Elsadda 1999, 112). This points at the tensions of women's writers of this era with modernization, as well as, the difficulty of applying the term 'modernist' retrospectively.

Another important writer in this era was Nazira Zeineddine, a Druze woman from Lebanon, who also influenced and interacted with Egyptian women. Zeineddine confronted religious sheiks with a thorough study of the Quran in the early 20th century (Cooke 2010).She wrote two books on the issues of veiling and women's seclusion in society "Unveiling and Veiling" (*al-sufūr w-al-ḥijāb)* and "The Young Woman and the Sheiks" (*al-fatā w-al-shuyūkh*) both published in 1928.

[24] Veiling discussions referred to the face veil in this era, not the head cover.

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She gave public lectures. *L'Egyptienne* (the Egyptian Woman) magazine followed and supported her writings. Her courageous and bold criticism of the sheiks in her time, some of whom her father's guests, makes Zeineddine a special figure and symbol for women's politico-religious empowerment in the MENA[25]. She stopped writing after the publication of the two books. Miriam Cooke (2010) connects this silence to the fierce criticism against her and overwhelming backlashes to women in her society, such as throwing acids to unveiled women, due to her 'offensive' writings (Cooke 2010, 90-9).

Beth Baron asks whether these women accept a kind of 'patriarchal bargain' (Kandiyoti 1988), or whether it is an indigenous defense under the attack by the West (1994). Baron argues that women's question became inseparable from national struggle and anti-imperialism and that other discourses could bring up charges of treason. In the early 20th century, the occupation of Western powers produced defensive reactions from women. Even non-Muslim women such as the founder of *ānīs al-jalīs* (*Sociable Companion)* (1898) women's magazine, Alexandra Avierino defended Islam[26] (Baron 1994). According to her, these women did not defend religious conservatism and their activism through associations and political parties attracted many women and widened the political options available in the woman question since the British occupation had narrowed down the scope of the discussion (Baron 1994, 115). Nevertheless, Baron argues that "intellectuals let foreigners shape the terms of the debate and moved away from substantive internal critiques toward discussion of images" (Baron 1994, 119).

Anti-Colonialism, Demand for Public Rights and Violent Backlashes

According to Nemat Guenena and Nadia Wassef, the 1919 revolution against the British rule marked 'the birth and union of the feminist movement with the nationalist one' in Egypt (1999,

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[25] Another remarkable women's rights defender in early 19th century was Tahereh "Qurrat-ul 'Ayn" (Solace of Eyes) a learned theologian and public orator in Iran, when the education was a male-domain. She problematized prescribed gender roles in Islam including the seclusion of women. In 1848, she publicly unveiled herself which shocked the public, including her community (Moghissi 1999, 128).

[26] Some Coptic Christians emphasized women's position in Pharaonic past. During the Muslim-Copt conflict in 1908, a Coptic women writer, Malaka Sad, wrote that the bad situation and veiling of women are results of Arabs coming to Egypt and Muslims governance. Coptic women were also veiled and secluded during the era. However, Sad also criticized the blind emulation of the West (Baron 1994).

18). During the 1919 revolution, upper-class women – some of whom were the wives of exiled nationalist leaders such as Safia Zaghlul, Huda Sharawi, and Ester Fahmi Wissa – were active in the nationalist campaign including letter-sending to European high commissioners, collaborating with the nationalist male elite and organizing women's marches (Baron 2014, 66; Badran 1996, 80-85). Upper-class women (with their veils), lower class women including courtesans and women from different religions attended these demonstrations against the British (Guenena and Wassef 1999, 18). This was a remarkable moment in Egyptian history when women crossed the public boundaries in a time of political violence and turmoil. While lower class female protestors were beaten up and some were killed by the Egyptian conscript police, upper-class women were sexually harassed (Guenena and Wassef 1999, 17).

After the nationalist demands are accepted by the British rule in the early 1920's, and the nationalist Wafd (*Delegation*) Party[27] joined the government, a group of women including Huda Sharaawi formed Wafdist Women's Central Committee. Despite the promises after the revolution in 1919 and formation of a nationalist government in 1920, the British ruled under the disguise of local Egyptian governers until the nationalist coup in 1952. Guenena and Wassef argued that the women and the Wafd had a "symbiotic relationship" in which the party used women in their mobilization against Britain, and to support detained Wafd members, and in return, women gained legitimacy through their activism in the Wafd (Guenena and Wassef 1999, 19). However, when the constitution was drafted in 1923, the women were left out without their political demands being realized, including the right to vote.

Disillusioned from the political exclusion, Huda Sharaawi and some upper and middle class Muslim and Coptic women founded the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) in 1923. Until 1947, EFU was one of the most active women's organization in Egypt. After returning from a conference in Europe in 1923, Huda Shaarawi and her protégé Ceza Nabarawi unveiled their faces at the train station in Cairo with a judgment that society was ready. This generated an unveiling wave among the upper-class women in Egypt in the coming days. This marked a historic moment in women's active role in unveiling in Egypt.

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[27]The flag of Wafd Party carried a cresent and cross referring to the two main religions in Egypt.

Women's movements focused on demanding education[28] and political rights during the 1940's and 1950's. Doriya Shafiq was one of the most active and radical women's rights activists during this period. She founded *Bint al-Nil (ittiḥād bint al-nīl - Daugther of the Nile Union)* and it championed the demands for women's political rights with radical repertoires of action with the EFU. Shafiq and 1500 women marched to and stormed the parliament for the right of vote in 1951.

Arab Socialism

The 1960's and 1970's were ambiguous decades for women in Egypt (Guenena and Wassef 1999). During the era of Arab socialism under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser, women were incorporated to educational, social, economic spheres exponentially. Mostly middle-classes benefited from Nasser's socialist reforms and there was a modest social mobility. Yet, political demands of women were turned down despite the inclusion of women in other public spheres.

After the revolution in 1952, Doria Shafiq registered Bint al-Nil as a political party. She organized sit-ins and a hunger strike with 18 other women in 1954 for women's suffrage (Guenena and Wassef 1999). The religious scholars, issued *fatwas* that claimed that the suffrage would degrade the women and it would be against the nature of women (Ibrahim and Ibrahim 2003, 16). Islamists also defended 'to keep the women within bounds' (Ibrahim and Ibrahim 2003, 16).

Shafiq had defended her dissertation on 'Women and religious rights in Islam' in Sorbonne University, Paris in 1940. Shafiq engaged in a public debate with the Mufti of Egypt, Hasanain Muhammad Makhlouf, in 1952 who went against women's rights. She compared him to the previous mufti, Alam Nassar Bey, who called for equality between men and women. She stated that the Mufti deviated from Islam and its teachings in contrast to the advanced Islamic nations (Badran and Cooke 2004, 353). Shafiq was put under house arrest on the accounts that she was agitating for the US[29]. This accusation towards dissenting women is still a common phenomenon in the MENA as I will discuss in the coming chapters. Thanks to Shafiq's outstanding efforts the

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[28] In 1908, Huda Sharawi and other upper-class women organized lectures in Fouad I University (today's Cairo University) on Fridays, when the university was empty. Yet, they received death threats and women's section was closed down in 1912 (Guenena and Wassef 1999).

[29] After a decade of house arrest, ban on her publications and following isolation from people Doria Shafiq committed suicide by jumping from her balcony in the affluent district of Zamalak in Cairo in 1975 (Nelson 1996, xxvi, 261)

Egyptian women gained the right to vote in 1956 constitution (only literate women unlike men) (Ibrahim and Ibrahim 2003, 16).

Nasser suppressed and imprisoned political opponents from a wide spectrum including the Muslim Brotherhood who had supported his coup against the British rule. Sayyid Qutb, the ideologue of Muslim Brotherhood, was executed in 1966 on the charges of plotting an assassination for Nasser. Like Mustafa Kemal Atatürk of Turkey, Nasser abolished the religious courts, seized the lands of the religious establishments and limited the activists of the religious endowments. He canceled the internal selection of Grand Azhar Sheik and instead attached the post to a presidential appointment.

However, unlike Atatürk who removed all religious courts, including the ones dealing with family affairs, "the terms and conditions of existing personal status laws [based on religious denominations] were left intact, and the basis of the maintenance-obedience relation remained unchanged" during Nasser's rule (Sonneveld 2010,111). The authoritarian triad in Egypt comprises of the military, al-Azhar and the Coptic Church (Adar 2013, Sedra 2012). The authority over the personal status laws – up to this day – belongs to the above mentioned religious establishments in exchange for their support for the regime.

Islamic awakening (*al-ṣaḥwa al-islāmiya)* and Its Legal and Social Effects

The rise of Islamist movements in the 1970's in Egypt had a direct legal and social influence on women's politico-religious empowerment. The defeat of Egypt to Israel in the 1967 war during Nasser, and Sadat's Islamization policies speeded up this trend. Anwar Sadat who came to power in 1970 promoted himself as a 'believer president' (*al-ra'īs al-mu'min*) to receive support from Islamists by counterweighting the Nasserists and leftists, and outweighing the radical Islamist groups (Esposito and Voll 1996; Khafagy 2005). Sadat released Muslim Brothers from the jail and turned a blind eye to their activities, unlike Nasser (Khafagy 2005). He reiterated in the Article 2 of the 1971 constitution that 'Islam is the state religion' (Article 3 of the 1956 constitution) and added that 'the principles of Islamic law are a main source of legislation'. The phrase was amended

as 'the principles of Islamic law are *the* main source of legislation' in 1980. Subsequent constitutions of 2012 and 2014 kept these statements despite different constitution-makers.

A revival in religiosity in society was observable in the early 1980's and it is institutionalized through mosques, Islamic banks, social welfare services, and media. During the 1970's, the number of private mosques doubled from 20.000 to 40.000, while only 6000 mosques were under the control of Ministry of Religious Endownments (Esposito and Voll 1996, 176). These independent Islamist centers were opposing and providing alternatives to the state controlled religious establishment, al-Azhar. Some prominent leftist and secularist intellectuals returned to Islam, including Safinaz Kazem. Veiling increased among female students and professionals, led by educated university students who were often first in their families (like Kazem) which transferred down to working and lower-middle classes (Abu-Lughod 1998, 250).

Sadat got assassinated by a militant Islamist organization in 1981.While the 1970's were a decade of confrontation between Islamists and the state, Islamists entered into the mainstream in the 1980's and institutionalized their activism under Hosni Mubarak. Mubarak differentiated between direct threats to the state and politico-religious dissent, the later being tolerated (Esposito and Voll 1996, 176). In the end of the 1980's, Mubarak also expanded the battle on Islamists including the moderates whom he had given space on public TV and media. The 1990's witnessed a violent confrontation between the Egyptian state and Islamist groups. While Islamists assassinated prominent statesmen and organized terror attacks against tourists; the state tortured, imprisoned and killed the Islamists. The width of crackdown targeting not only militants but also moderate Islamists threatened the independence of professional syndicates, associations, and universities. This created an uneasy alliance between Islamists and secularists against the repression of the state (Esposito and Voll 1996, 186).

Prominent Islamist women

There were some influential women active in Islamism such as Zainab Al-Ghazali or Safinaz Kazem during the second half of the 20th century. However, they did not leave a legacy that provides a sustained gender equality discourse. The most notable was Zainab Al-Ghazali (1917-2005) who formed the Muslim Women's Union in 1936. According to her account, Al-Ghazali had first joined to EFU yet after feeling the need for an Islamic approach to women's advancement,

she left EFU and formed Muslim Women's Union (Hoffman 1985). Later, she merged her association with the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) after the insisting calls from Hasan Al-Banna, the founder of the MB. Al-Ghazali could be regarded as one of the most active and famous Islamist women in Egypt who called for *d'awa* (call for religion). She also wrote a Quranic exegesis. Despite her extraordinary public presence including giving lectures in all-male gatherings, she argued for women's domestic roles (Karam 1998).

Dr. Zahira Abdeen (1917-2002) was another Islamist woman active in public during the 1970's. Abdeen deserves attention not only for carrying a remarkable charity work under an Islamic framework and for her professional medical achievements but also for being an inspiration to her daughter Dr. Mona Abul-Fadl who became very influential in bringing up an Islamic feminist generation in Cairo in the late 1990's and early 2000's (see Chapter 6). Abdeen was the first Egyptian woman to become a member of the Royal College of Physicians and a Fellow of the Royal College in the UK (Fadl 2007) and she was awarded the honorary title of "the mother of doctors" (*umm al-ātibā'*) in Egypt. Abdeen founded 'Muslim Young Women's Association in Cairo' (*jam'īat al-shābāt al-muslimāt b-il-qahira*) in 1975 (ILS nd). The association was geared towards charity work in central Cairo including running a nursery for small children, a female university student dorm, a medical clinic and a workshop to teach sewing and embroidery to girls (Ibrahim Said, nd).

Another prominent Islamist woman in the 1970's was Safinaz Kazem. Educated in the US, she was active in leftist groups during Nasser, but she later committed herself to Islam in the 1970's. She wrote letters to her female friends that if they did not embrace Islam and put on veil, she would cut her ties with them. However, she kept her contact (Rashid 1997). She was imprisoned for her Islamist activism. She also did not focus on women's issues in society nor promote a gender equality agenda.

Another important woman in the mid-20th century was Aisha Abdel Rahman (1913-1998), known as *Bint al-Shāṭi'* (*Daughter of the Riverbank*). She was a literature professor and one of the first women who undertook Quranic exegesis like Zainab Al-Ghazali. She touched upon gender relations and corruptness in society in her novels. She also produced biographies of women of the Prophet's household. However, it was argued that she did not have a gendered perspective in her exegesis of the Quran (Naguib 2013). In that sense, she was either conservative herself or cautious

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to enter into a male domain. These women were influential Islamists of their era; however, women's issues were of secondary importance for them. Some did not find a contradiction in women's public presence, but they remained antagonistic to feminism (Badran 1994, 209) and the emphasis on women's empowerment.

Secularism

The broader political-cultural context is a defining factor for the discursive field around women's rights. "Egyptian women activists have been discredited by different constituencies by being labeled western agents of colonialism or imperialism" as Nadje Al-Ali rightly argues (2002). Guenena and Wassef (1999, 5) hesitate to refer to 'secular' activists in Egypt because (a) the word has negative connotations in Egypt; beyond separation of religion and the state, it is linked to apostasy; (b) strategically, secularism would not work as an easy entry point to the society at large. Some significant events that rendered secular discourses dangerous were the assassination of secularist writer and a staunch critique of Islamist movements, Farag Fouda in 1992, and death threats that radical feminist Nawal El-Saadawi received. Several al-Azhar scholars also contributed to Fouda's murder. Days before the assassination, an al-Azhar University council issued a communique accusing him of blasphemy (Soage 2007, Mostafa 2000). Since the Islamic awakening, religion has been a constant idiom of discontent and accusation in Egypt (Guenena and Wassef 1999) which resulted in the assassinations of several statesmen and public intellectuals including the president Anwar Sadat in 1981 and exile of scholars who were convicted of apostasy like Nasr Abu Zaid.

In this environment women often legitimized their actions with religious references. The statement against the Islamist movements issued by a group of Egyptian women (including Mervat Ettalawy, the current head of National Council of Women) in 1988 was an example. The women issued the statement in response to the rising of a 'backward movement' on women. They highlighted family as the foundation of society and stated that unity in the family was important for strong societies. They gave Quranic references on the importance of family and love and compassion between spouses. (Badran and Cooke 2004, 373).

To overcome the difficulties of being labeled as secular or Islamist, women's rights activists and groups in Egypt emphasize that they are 'non-ideological'. An academic Islamic feminist confirms these observations:

In Egypt, we don't have [secularism] legacy. Even if on the individual level people are secular on their lifestyle, political and religious ideas, you never find a person in Egypt saying out loud "I am ʿ*almānī* [secular]". Because ʿ*almānī* in the Egyptian context is atheist. People would never say it. And you don't find. Even women's NGOs…lots of them working on human rights and women's rights, they don't approach it from an ideological point of view. So they are not going to say, "Now I'll form this NGO approaching women's rights from a secular perspective". No, they are just going to say "I'm working on women's rights, human rights, legal rights, non-discrimination". They will not approach it as a secular ideology… On the other side of the coin, it was also very rare to find an organization saying we are an Islamist organization, before the revolution (interview 2014).

There is a strong grip of this 'non-ideological' (read as non-Islamist and eclectic) women's rights platforms and NGO's in Egypt, especially in Cairo. Same problem with the term of secularism has applied to the term of feminism (*nisawīya*)[30]. However, secular-oriented women and women's rights groups have internalized the term feminism and took pride in it, especially after Beijing conference in 1995 (Al-Ali 1997).

Nationalism

Tahani Rached, a Canadian-Egyptian documentary film-maker, in her documentary "Four Women of Egypt" (1997), brings together four old 'friends' who chose different paths in life: Safinaz Kazem, the well-known Islamist journalist and writer; Wedad Mitry, a Christian leftist unionist and journalist, Amina Rachid, a leftist who was born into an upper-class family, and Shahenda Maklad, a leader in student and peasant movements. Rached explained what she saw common in these women was that they "had the feeling that they were part of the country and its history" (Hillauer 2005, 107).

Nationalism has been a common theme in women's movements in Egypt since the 1919 uprisings against the British colonial powers where women had joined collectively. Although

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[30] For discussions over term feminist in Arabic, see Badran and Cooke, 2004, xxv, 415; and Badran 1988

women sometimes avoid labels like secular, Westernist, feminist or Islamists, they much more easily utilize nationalist discourse, as Egyptian identity is a uniting factor in the country shared both by Muslims and Christians. By putting forward their Egyptian identity, women aim to increase their legitimacy. Islamist movements have historically been nationalist. This is not always the case anymore with increased transnationalism of Islamic movements. Comparison between current-day WIMs in Egypt and Turkey would shed light on the connections and separations of women's Islamic movements and nationalism.

3.2. Initial Formations of Women's Islamic Movements in Turkey

This section shortly portrays the initial contours of women's Islamic movements in Turkey from the late 19th century until 1995.[31] In the late Ottoman period, the press was a benchmark that symbolized the social acceptance of men in public, so Ottoman women also showed their presence via publishing in journals since 1868 (Zihnioglu 1999, 337; Cakir 2011, 60). Most women's journals had a positivist view supported by the developments in the West but they supported women's domestic roles like in the journal *Mahasin (Charms)* (Akpolat-Davud 1995). The journals had an Ottomanist perspective since the wave of Turkish nationalism was not strong until the first decade of 20th century. Early period Ottoman feminism[32] (*feminizm*) articulated their demands within the values of Islamic civilization (Zihnioglu 1999, 339). Ottoman women focused on three issues: women's access to public life, education, and equality in family. Fatma Aliye, Emine Semiye and Halide Edip wrote books on biographies of famous women from Islamic history to bring back women's pride and stop devaluation (*sülfiyet*) of women. 'Full equality' (*musavat-ı tamme*) was sought between men and women in the early period (1869-1908) (Zihnioglu 1999, 342). Fatma Aliye and Zeynep Hanım wrote about women's rights in Islam by challenging male scholars and they defended monogamy (Moghissi 1999, 128; Cakir 2011).

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[31] I discard Sufi movements of women like Samiha Ayverdi (1905-1993) and Cemalnur Sargut (1952-) who have focused on personal salvation and the individual's relation with Allah. Ayverdi founded TURKKAD (today Turkish Women Culture Association - Türk Kadınları Kültür Derneği) and Sargut is currently heading the Istanbul branch of the association.

[32] For a history of Ottoman women's movement (see Cakir 2011 , Demirdirek 1993) and religious discourse among pioneering women like Halide Edip, Fatma Aliye, Nezihe Muhiddin (see Zihnioglu 1999).

The Kemalist republic and women's political exclusion

1919 was also the year when the Turkish War of Independence officially started against the occupation of Allied powers after the World War I. Women massively participated in the war, by opening up shelters for wounded soldiers, smuggling guns and at times joining the warfare[33]. Halide Edip, alongside with male revolutionaries, gave several speeches across the country to mobilize masses for independence. However, during the first decades of the Republic, independent organizations of women outside the state apparatus were not welcome (Ecevit 2007, 189). Right before the promulgation of the Republic on October 29, 1923, the first political party that applied to register was Women's People Party (*Kadınlar Halk Fırkası*) led by Nezihe Muhiddin. However, the request was rejected on the account that it diverts the attention from the pressing problems of the country (Ecevit 2007, 188). Later, Muhiddin's organization Turkish Women's Union (*Türk Kadınlar Birliği*) was coopted, and Muhiddin was silenced due to her electoral demands in 1927 (Ecevit 2007, 188-190). The new republic soon promoted these rights, giving full suffrage rights in 1931 in local elections, and in 1934 in national elections. The women of the era could be regarded as 'emancipated but unliberated' (Kandiyoti 1987, 324) due to the contradiction between the Kemalist reforms and silencing of women's autonomous organizations.

The civil code (*Medeni Kanun*) in Turkey was incorporated from the Swiss civil code in 1926. The reform ended sharia law in governance of personal status matters. However, Islam was the state religion until 1928 and *laïcité* (*laiklik*) became the principle of Turkish constitution only in 1937 (Mardin 1991, 98). Turkish secularism was not designed as a separation of religion and state. Instead, it gave the state a mandate over religion through banning the existing religious orders and creating a directorate in charge of religion based on a version of Sunni Islam (Turam 2008, 478). Besides the legal arrangements, veiling and traditional clothes such as *fez* and *shalwar* were discouraged, while Western outfit was encouraged during the early years of the Republic. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk did not ban headscarf or veiling (except a ban on face veil for teachers in 1924) (Çalışlar 2006). Association of secularism with unveiling, but particularly with the rejection of headscarves, has been a more contemporary development. Headscarf bans, buttressed with the

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[33] There were women actively fighting; most notably *Kara Fatma* (Fatma Seher Erden) had her own militia unit. Halide Edip also worked under several military titles during the war, and she was often referred as *Halide Onbaşı* (corporal title).

principle of secularism, was systematically applied after the 1980 coup and has had massive influence on women with headscarves and women's Islamic movements in Turkey.

Revival of Islamism

Despite the suppression since the foundation of the republic, religion has never lost its impact on the society (Mardin 1969). With the migration from rural to urban areas since the 1960's, there was more open space for Islamic political parties and visible observance of Islam. Islamists or people with religious sensitivities claimed to reconstitute 'the traditional values' of the society as a reaction to the top-down Westernization of the Republic through their political parties like the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi)* in the 1990's. (Diner and Toktas 2010, 50).

Migration from rural areas to urban centers also increased the number of women pursuing higher education who had religious background in the 1970's and the number of female students who wear a headscarf in the cities and universities increased during the 1980's. Looking at the origins of the women's Islamic movements, we see that two main groups come from religious families and women who were active in right-wing nationalist and Islamist nationalist movements in the 1970's and 1980's. Many women who make up WIMs today claim that they have religious sensitivities (*dinî hassasiyetler*) or they are coming from families where religious values (*dinî değerler*) are respected (personal interviews; Tuksal 2000b, 132-135).

Most of these women have worn a modern type of headscarf that covers the hair tightly and is pinned on the head to fix it. Women call it simply *başörtüsü* (headscarf) while it has been commonly referred in secular media and society as *türban (*turban from French*),* to highlight the untraditional elements and 'foreignness' of this style of the headscarf[34]. The headscarf is different from the traditional *yazma* worn in rural areas which is a loose scarf under which the hair may be partially visible. While *yazma* is a more cultural-traditional element, the headscarf is an urban marker of religiousness (Göle 1999, 90). Nevertheless, mass observance of modern headscarf in the suburbs around metropolitan cities should also be explained by socio-economic and cultural factors rather than personal religiousness.

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[34] Throughout the thesis I use the word 'headscarf' instead of the loaded word 'türban'.

Religious women's literature in the 1970's and 80's: Entering the 'Right' Path with Veiling

Religious women in Turkey have started to become politically active through literature and writing since the late 1960's (Eraslan 2009). *Emine Şenlikoğlu* and *Şule Yüksel Şenler* were the two influential religious women figures in the 1970's in Istanbul in the spotlight[35]. Both are writers of Islamic guidance novels. They defended traditional gender roles for women, criticized Western lifestyle and especially encouraged veiling in their books and newspaper articles. Şenler had earlier worked in Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*) whose main voter base was religious and conservative people in Anatolia (central Turkey). She worked at Youth Commission and was the head of the Literature and Culture Commission of the party in the 1960's.

One of the bestseller Islamic guidance novel in Turkey was written by Şenler in that period. Named as *The Street of Peace (Huzur Sokağı)*, the drama novel (1969) represented the Islamist agenda and desires of young women and men. It was also turned into a movie, as *Birleşen Yollar*, in 1970, starred by Türkan Şoray, known as *the Sultan of Turkish cinema*. In the story, a young woman who is raised by a 'Westernized' family which does not carry 'moral' values – where mother and father are spending nights and days in gambling and alcohol parties – meets a devout young man who prefers a traditional and 'pure' way of living. She falls in love with the man and rediscovers Islam and tradition via him. Even though the couple cannot unite, she finds the right path, eventually puts on the headscarf, and raises her daughter accordingly, modest and religious.[36] Similarly, Emine Şenlikoğlu has also criticized Western and 'foreign' elements in society in her popular novels such as Fashion Model Daughter of the Imam (*İmamın Manken Kızı*) (1997).

It was a popular topic in the Islamist novels of this era, where main characters were Islamist men who called the female protagonists for *hidayet* (ar. *al-hidāya*, the true path that leads to Allah/Allah's guidance). The female protagonists lived a Westernized life and later embrace

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[35] Women like Süreyya Yüksel were less in spotlight, she was giving exegesis lessons for over 25 years, but she was another role model for religious women with her activism and studies. She was among the first women who went to protest headscarf bans in the 1980's.

[36] The story was turned into a TV series and screened between 2012 and 2014 in a pro-government popular TV channel.

religion after falling in love with the Islamist men. The Westernized women were the protagonists of these cultural productions instead of the religious women of the neighborhood (Aktas 2000). In Islamist popular culture, love and sexual desires of Islamist men have been used as a tool to *repatriate* 'Westernized' women, the 'victims of modernity,' back to tradition and religion. Meanwhile, religious women would be the secondary characters in the plots. Despite this popular image in the Islamist literature in which victims of modernity were Westernized women, religious women writers such as Cihan Aktaş and Yıldız Ramazanoğlu highlight that the biggest victims of modernity have been the Islamist women in Turkey, mostly as the victims of the headscarf bans.

First Associations and Mobilizations

Women who had a conservative and religious vision set up several associations in the 1970's and early 1980's. They focused on charity and highlighted women's role in strengthening traditional values. One of the oldest organizations, HİKDE (*Hanımlar İlim ve Kültür Derneği – Ladies Learning and Culture Association*) was set up in 1973, and it has focused on charity and spreading traditional values since then. Dr. Gülsen Ataseven, one of the founders and the honorary president of the association, states that they got together when they were university students or assistants. The main question they had in their minds was "how can we solve the social problems with our own essential values (*öz değerlerimiz*)?" (HİKDE, 2013). The main projects of HİKDE have been financial and material aid to people and women in need, providing scholarships for university students, making projects to develop social skills of children, and organizing conferences with invited speakers. Money was collected through charity sales, food counters, and fashion shows.

Women in HİKDE published a journal called *Şadırvan*[37] between 1976 and 1980 whose motto was "Do science/Seek knowledge from the cradle to tomb".[38] The journal dealt with issues of women, family, children; challenges of the modern life; and celebrated national and religious figures like the Sultan Mehmed II, the conqueror of Istanbul; and Yunus Emre, Sufi poet of the 13th century (IDP 2015). The journal had a nationalist-sacramentalist (*milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı*) vision. The founders and participants of HİKDE highlighted the importance of the association in raising faith (*maneviyat*), and giving an opportunity to work for Allah's sake (*Allah rızası*) and

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[37] Fountain usually located in mosque courtyards and used for ablutions
[38] "Beşikten mezara kadar ilim tahsil ediniz"

service to the country at an event celebrating the association's 40 years of anniversary (HİKDE 2013).

Few months before the 1980 military coup, Şule Yüksel Şenler founded Idealist Ladies Association *(İdealist Hanımlar Derneği)*, similarly for social projects like helping the poor (Okur, 2012). Both Ataseven and Şenler put on headscarf later in their lives as young women through their own personal conviction (Barbarosoğlu 2009). Şule Yüksel Şenler was also a fashion designer and she designed a new way of putting headscarf, what was commonly called as *Şulebaş (Head of Şule)*. She has influenced young women, most notably Emine Erdoğan[39], to put on headscarf via her novels and her fashionable scarf design (Şişman 2000).

These organizations did not directly react to the political contestations of the 1970's between leftist and rightist groups. However, they were close to the right-wing ideology in Turkey as they emphasized strong statism, traditions and values of Ottoman-Turkish civilization, women's essential roles as homemakers and mothers (IDP 2015). They prioritized stability in the country with an emphasis on life-long learning, charity to people in need, and long-term commitment to the service of the country. This statist vision coupled with the Turkish-Islam synthesis[40] would surface later in the divisions within WIMs in the post-2008 period.

Another important group of today's women Islamic intellectuals and activists come from right-wing nationalist (*milliyetçi*, *ülkücü – literally idealist)* and Islamist nationalist (*İslamcı milliyetçi*, such as Akıncılar)[41] activism during the left-right contestations in the 1970's and 1980's (Cakir 2000; Aktaş 2000; Tuksal 2000b). Some *ülkücü* women embraced Islam and put on the headscarf and continued their activism and intellectual production from an Islamic perspective during the 1980's and 1990's. Today's well-known intellectual and activist Islamist/religious women such as *Yıldız Ramazanoğlu, Mualla Gülnaz Kavuncu*, and *Hüda Kaya* have this pattern of historical transition (Kavuncu interview 2016, Kaya 2013). The anti-American and anti-imperialist discourse around the Iranian revolution in 1979 and mass participation of women in

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[39] Emine Erdoğan, the wife of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, worked in Şenler's association, and she met Erdoğan with the initiation of Şenler.

[40] Turkish-Islam synthesis is a right-wing political ideology from the 1970's that emphasized the bond between Turkish nationalism and Islam as a constitutive element of Turkishness (Dursun 2006).

[41] Akıncılar was the name of an independent cavalry group used as an advance guard and for raiding in the Ottoman army, especially during the wars and conquests in Europe

the revolution also impressed some *ülkücü* women of that time which seemed to accelerate this transition for some of them.

In the period of right-wing activism, female participants were called *'bacı'* (female sister) by their male counterparts. It has been used to a lesser extent in the leftist movements, as well. 'Bacı' position served to hide the sexuality of female activists. According to the writer Cihan Aktaş, this approach enabled young girls to join the political movements in a style and degree different than the past (2000).

The rise of Islamism since the 1960's disturbed the secular camps in Turkey, mainly the military, the judiciary and the Republican's People Party - RPP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*). Since the headscarves were seen as the most visible symbol of the political Islam, wearing headscarves in public institutions was officially banned for the first time after the military coup in 1980 (Vojdik 2010, 661; Sakin et al. 2008, 9)[42]. The bans were not regulated by law, but by internal regulations (*iç tüzük*) of universities and other public places such as the Parliament. This contradicted the equality principle in the constitution, and this contradiction was often recalled by the advocates of the headscarf freedom. The ban in universities was relaxed several times by governments of center parties during the 1990's; but, the Constitutional Court frequently annulled the decisions with the argument that "using democratic principles to challenge secularism is the abuse of freedom of religion" (Cindoglu and Zencirci 2008, 799).

The 1980 military coup harshly stopped the violent left and right conflicts. The leftists were the main victims of the coup, although both leftist and rightist organizations were confiscated, and their activists were jailed. The 1980's were marked by government's full endorsement of economic neo-liberalization by the efforts of Turgut Özal, who became vice-prime minister after the coup and the prime minister in 1983. As the leftist movements were suppressed and trade unions were coopted, Turkey entered a neo-liberal era. After the coup, the society got 'depoliticized' in terms of left and right politics. The generation who were born in the 1980's is known as the apolitical

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[42] Yıldız Ramazanoğlu accounts that it was 1981 February that a statement was issued, and the students with headscarves were not allowed to enter into Hacettepe University in Ankara where the ban in universities was applied for the first time (Sakin et al. 2008, 9).

generation of Turkey. After this period, other ideologies and movements entered the political landscape, most importantly, feminism, Islamism and Kurdish armed movement[43].

The leftist and socialist women pioneered the feminist movement and women's consciousness groups in Turkey during the 1980's, when the male activists were in jail. A similar pattern of transition to women's consciousness was also observed among the women of the right, as well. Dr. Mualla Gülnaz Kavuncu recalls that as *ülkücü* women they were politically very active during their college years and during the coup when the male counterparts were imprisoned, most of whom were husbands or fiancés. However, after the coup, *ülkücü* women noticed that their roles were diminished to being housewives and mothers:

> You marry the friends whom you struggled with; you have children, and you have the role of house-woman and mother. When we get together [as a bigger group], the men gather and discuss [politics] and we serve them. We started to question this, we could not adapt to the traditional roles, and this may be coming from our ülkücü movement history. In these questionings, we faced the religion and asked whether Allah created us this way and wanted this way. It didn't convince our minds[44]. It does not agree with Allah's justice. We started to question these, and so [we began] readings, the Quran readings, and discussions. (Kavuncu interview 2016).

Some of the women who had an *ülkücü* background had an interest in feminism, and some did not wear a headscarf (Kavuncu interview 2016). Claiming to be a radical Islamist with these traits was a contradiction for many other religious women they met, who were coming from religious families and theology studies background and who had a more conservative socialization within religious communities. Mualla Gülnaz Kavuncu and Tuba Tuncer published a monthly journal called *Ayça* which had an activist radical Islamist stance, where they criticized the military coup and the headscarf ban which was applied for the first time in 1981 in Hacettepe University in Ankara, right after the coup (Kavuncu interview 2016). They multiplied the journal by photocopies and distributed them by hand in Ankara for several months.

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[43] Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê – PKK) undertook its first attack in 1984.
[44] 'kafamıza yatmadı'

Another exclusion by men, in the public space, was experienced by women who were enrolled in the theology faculties. For those women who came from religious families but who studied in regular high schools rather than the religious vocational ones (*imam-hatip lisesi*), the atmosphere in the theology faculties in the 1980's were shocking: They realized that the male students perceived them as unwanted guests as if they were in a space where they should not be. Despite the fact that they were careful with their veiling and attitudes, they still remember the feeling of guiltiness they had whether they were covered enough or not (Tuksal 2000b, 140-141). Tuksal explains that as female students of theology faculties they developed self-confidence and asserted their space only later during the 3rd and 4th year of their studies (Tuksal 2000b, 140).

Women's movements have gained public appearance in the 1980s, with the economic and social liberalization process in the country. Islamic symbols and movements also gained more public visibility in Turkey, after the introduction of the liberal market and promotion of civil society and pluralism, shortly after the military coup in 1980 (Arat 2008). Women's movements have been the push factors in ameliorating women's conditions in Turkey by stimulating public discussions, mobilizing women and international agencies, demanding legal changes and tracking the implementation of laws and practices (Arat 2008, 416; Berktay 2004, 21; Ecevit 2007; Ucar 2009).

In the 1990's, divisions among women's groups began to be more visible. Today there is a variety of different interest and identity groups among women in Turkey. The main discernible divisions are socialist and radical feminist women's groups; secular/Kemalist women's groups; Islamic women's groups; and Kurdish women's groups (Karaca 2011, Diner and Toktas 2010). However, women from these different groups get together around several common platforms and initiatives. Recently, there are around 495 women's groups in different structures such as foundations, associations, platforms and initiatives in Turkey (Flying Broom 2009).

Part II: Women's Islamic Movements and Politico-Religious Empowerment in Turkey (1995-2016)[45]

In Part II, comprised of Chapter 4 and 5, I study the activism of women's Islamic movements in Turkey between 1995 and 2016 and analyze politico-religious empowerment of women in the discursive, legal and organizational spheres. I look at changes in WIMs' repertoires/types of contention; networks and resources; framings; and political opportunities and constraints in Turkey with an eye on the in-group differences. The two following chapters show how unique historical experience and institutional configurations explain some of the differences of WIMs in Turkey from WIMs in Egypt.

Post-2002 Turkey presents a particularly illuminating case to assess the developments in the politico-religious empowerment of women in a secular state that has since been governed by an Islamist-rooted party, AKP. How and why have WIMs changed patterns of mobilization, discourse and issue focus since AKP's coming to power? To answer the question, the chapters especially focus on the evolution of capacities, opportunities, and constraints of women's Islamic movements during AKP rule. What has the changing patterns of mobilization meant for the politico-religious power of women in Turkey?

Before proceeding, I explain what will be meant by 'mainstream Islamic gender order,' 'religious,' and 'mainstream feminist' throughout Chapter 4 and 5. The following definitions are limited to the Turkish political context between 1995 and 2016. I define the mainstream Islamic gender order as the one promoted by the *Diyanet*, moderate Islamic communities and AKP in Turkey (Keskin Kozat 2003). Both Diyanet and Islamic communities promote a Sunni interpretation of Islam (Sen 2010). Mainstream Islamic discourse on women is not necessarily misogynistic in Turkey, but it is conservative and patriarchal. It often attains a secondary status to women in terms of equality in family and public space, and exalts women as mothers. There is a tendency to monitor women's public presence and behavior in the mainstream Islamic gender order in Turkey. Speeches by AKP officials have been at times openly more misogynistic than the mainstream Islamic discourse and AKP officials have sometimes simply amplified the mainstream

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[45] All quotations in Part II are my translations, unless otherwise stated

Islamic discourse to a broader audience – making it heard also by liberal sections of the society since they have spoken from the authority position.

There are various definitions of 'Islamist' in the literature. I use Hürcan Aslı Aksoy's definition (2015, 146) of Islamist movements as 'religiously oriented and politically motivated' movements. I refer to 'religious' (*dindar*) women and 'religious feminist' (*dindar feminist*) only for women who define themselves as such. It does not refer to personal piety of women, but their self-description in public and how public defines them as such, in return. I take religion as their distinct characteristics to be compared to other women activists. However, I will talk about the problematization of the definition as 'religious' especially in the current era in Turkey.

'The mainstream feminism' (*ana-akım feminizm*) is difficult to be defined. It has been the subject of discussions within feminists in Turkey about whom it denotes (Özdemir and Bayraktar 2012). In this dissertation, by mainstream feminism, I refer to the radical and socialist-feminists in Turkey who have specialized in mobilizations against violence against women, who have led the March 8 marches and those who developed a discourse on women's bodily rights and labor. I use 'secular' and 'Kemalist' for women who underline secular Kemalist reforms as their main guidance.

By Islamic community (*İslami cemaat*) or neighborhood (*mahalle*, used metaphorically by the Islamic activists), I refer to the broader segment of religious people and their political parties, NGO's, leading media outlets and intellectuals. I do not refer to a particular religious order (*tarikat*) such as *İsmailağa cemaati* or *Erenköy cemaati*, although they are part of the broader community that I refer to. On the opposite, by secular sector (*laik kesim*), I describe Kemalist (*Atatürkçü*) and secular people, their political parties (mainly RPP), NGO's and media as well as, until around 2008, the army and judiciary. We can speak about the existence of 'Islamic' and 'secular' communities with their different sub-cultures, rituals and expectations from their 'members'.

First of all, in Chapter 4, I demonstrate that strict secularism enforced in Turkey in the form of headscarf bans has led to separate movements of WIMs apart from secular and feminist counterparts since the 1990's. The demonization of women with headscarves, as I put it, by the

media and secular segments of society further reinforced the separation. The bans have limited religious women's access to higher education, and mobilizations against the bans have taken their energies away from other issues until late 2000's. The bans also increased women's dependency on the religious communities. Combined with a lack of access to critical Islamic literature, women could not produce a sustained, organized and loud voice for religious empowerment in Turkey.

The tensions with the secular feminists led WIMs to create a nationwide unified movement of religious women in 2003. I call this a molar movement – deriving the term from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) – since it aimed to build on the commonalities of religious women and highlighted their differences from others. This separate mobilization is in contrast to WIMs in Egypt where there have been more collaborations between religious and secular women.

Secondly, I demonstrate that the normalization of the headscarf – as I call it – after 2008 led to a diversification of issues dealt with by WIMs and to more variety of discourses among WIMs in Turkey. After lifting of the bans, WIMs became less dependent on the protection of their communities (*cemaat, mahalle*). Especially among the young generation of WIMs but also a few middle-aged women's groups, I found an increased focus on masculinity, violence against women and sexuality, as well as other human's rights issues such as the Kurdish problem. In this perspective, women's politico-religious empowerment has increased after 2008, notwithstanding the negative effect of increased authoritarian practices after 2011.

Thirdly, divisions among WIMs have surfaced since the third term of AKP in government (2011 and onwards) on two issues: the approach to women's rights and approach to authoritarianism. The divisions reached a climax during the Gezi protests in 2013 and led to the dissolution of the molar movement of WIMs. Some of WIMs have contested AKP in both issues, while others have stayed silent or showed support. Being against authoritarianism and the conservative agenda on women form a positive relationship among WIMs. This is in contrast with the experience in Egypt that will be discussed in Part III.

Fourthly, despite the variety of shapes and discourses of among WIMs since 2008, 'Islamic feminism' is not an embraced ideology in Turkey. While few women among WIMs prefer a simple 'feminist' self-definition, most prefer to call themselves 'women's rights activists' or as members

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of a Muslim women's movement. Few of them define themselves as religious feminists (*dindar feminist*). The reasons for the absence of 'Islamic feminism' as a stream in Turkey will become clearer after a comparison with the conditions in Egypt.

I explain this discursive choice about Islamic feminism with five main findings from the research, demonstrated in Chapter 4 and 5: Firstly, contentious and hegemonic relations with the feminists due to the headscarf bans and the disapproval of some feminist discourses deter religious women from identifying themselves as feminists even with an 'Islamic' adjective. Secondly, they do not need an Islamic feminist discourse to change laws due to the secular origins of the legal system in Turkey, unlike Egypt. Thirdly, lack of access to Arabic and English (unlike the Egyptian WIMs) and organizational difficulties of sustaining relations with the international Islamic feminist networks (unlike the Egyptian WIMs) have kept them at a distance to 'Islamic feminism.' Fourthly, lack of trust to the international Islamic feminist agenda have deterred *some* women from joining the international Islamic feminist networks. Finally, the fear of being ostracized and receiving threats have been deterring women.

The fifth finding is that there have been two diverging views on empowerment of women in Turkey for the last five years: AKP has started to promote the concept of 'gender justice' instead of 'gender equality' and the idea that women should be empowered within the family (Chapter 5). Several GONGO's and other groups among WIMs have also promoted this approach such as KADEM, AKDER, UKADER, and TÜRAP. However, a small number of WIMs agree with the feminists that women should be empowered as individuals and equality between men and women should be prioritized to achieve justice. The first perspective has been more promoted in recent years, as it is supported by AKP governments financially, organizationally and ideologically. On the other hand, WIMs which defend equality between men and women have insufficient institutional sources, such as the BKP and the Initiative. They collaborate with feminists in joint projects at times.

Finally, I argue that we are witnessing a move from a self-definition of 'Islamist' (*İslamcı*) to 'religious' (*dindar*) among the dissident Islamists in Turkey. The term 'Islamist' has gained a negative connotation as Islamism has become a political hegemony with an authoritarian edge in the recent years. Against AKP and its pro-authoritarian nationalist partners, a small group of 'ex-

Islamists' has been defending women's and minority rights (especially on the Kurdish issue) from a 'religious' perspective against the hegemonic political representations of Islamism.

Some have dissented from their Islamic community (*İslami kesim,cemaat,mahalle*)[46] which has been a solidarity hub since the bans, and from AKP whose constituency is mostly Islamic communities. Therefore, the dissenting WIMs act with double-courage for being visible compared to dissenting feminists, seculars, and leftists. They do not only risk getting benefits from the government or losing their jobs, but they also risk being ostracized from their own communities before joining to a signature campaign, press statement or making a comment on Twitter.

The structure of the Part II is as follows: In Chapter 4, I describe the emergence of WIMs from the street demonstrations against the headscarf bans and the first institutionalizations. I explain the period of 'molarization' of WIMs between 2002 and 2008 during AKP's initial years in power. I also demonstrate the new divisions and initial dissent among WIMs between 2008 and 2016, what I call the 'molecularization' period. In Chapter 5, I specifically explore the convergences of Islam and feminism in Turkey from the late 1980's to 2016 with a comparison of the transgressing, dissenting and accommodating WIMs. Then, I look at WIMs that mobilize against authoritarian practices and analyze politico-religious empowerment capacities of different WIMs. I also assess why religious women do not embrace Islamic feminism as an umbrella concept in Turkey as opposed to the Islamic feminism trend in Egypt.

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[46]These three concepts are used to define religious and secular communities in Turkey (ex: *İslami kesim* versus *Laik* (secular) *kesim*). *Kesim* refers to societal sector; *cemaat* refers to religious community as opposed to the larger community or society (*toplum*); *mahalle* means neighbourhood (It is often used metaphorically).

Chapter 4: Formation and Evolutions in Women's Islamic Movements in Turkey (1995-2016)

4.1 The Central Concern of the Women's Islamic Movements in Turkey: Headscarf Bans

Although the bans on headscarf started in the early 1980's in universities, the harshest measures against the women with headscarves in public were taken from 1997 on. The share of the Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) in the government and their local election successes during the 1990's was interrupted by a military intervention on February 28, 1997, known as the 'post-modern coup d'etat' (*post-modern darbe*). The coalition government was under the leadership of Prime Minister late Necmettin Erbakan, who was the leader of the Welfare Party and the Islamist movement *National Vision (Millî Görüş).* National Security Council (*Millî Güvenlik Kurulu*), under the influence of the military commanders, issued a memorandum stating a reactionary threat to the secular principles of the republic and dictated policy changes. Erbakan resigned due to the mounting pressure from the military and opposition parties in June 1997.

The military imposed several counteractions including tightening the bans for headscarves in official places after the memorandum (Çarkoglu 2010, 148). The Higher Education Council and National Security Council experts gave a briefing to all 71 university rectors in March 1998 reminding them the dangers of reactionary activities (*irticai faaliyetler*). They asked the rectors not to allow headscarves in universities and warned that the administrators who would not follow the decisions might be dismissed (Benli 2011, 55; Cindoglu and Zencirci 2008, 799). The limitations also influenced the female students of theology faculties (Tuksal 2000b). Furthermore, the graduates of theology faculties with headscarves had difficulty finding teaching positions in universities (Tuksal 2000b, 143).

The ban was not limited to the university students. Women employees in public and private sectors who wore a headscarf were either fired or sent to disciplinary committees during this process[47]. It is estimated that 5000 women with headscarves were fired from public positions, and around 10.000 women were forced to resign after 1997 (AKDER, nd). Public teachers with

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[47] The disciplinary punishment was lifted in 22.06.2006 with the law numbered 5525.

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headscarves received penalties ranging from condemnation to discharge even in religious vocational high schools (Tuksal 2000b, 143). Male public employees whose wives used headscarf were also warned or sent to disciplinary committees. Especially in military and judiciary ranks, such male employees were fired or not promoted.

Another shock to women with headscarves was in 1999 when an elected member of parliament Merve Kavakçı from the Islamist Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*) – that replaced the Welfare Party which was closed by the constitutional court – was expelled from the parliament due to her headscarf. During the oath ceremony, other elected members of parliament stood up, clapped and shouted in protest and did not allow Kavakçı to take an oath. Socialist Democrat late-prime minister Bülent Ecevit stated that women were free to observe freedom of clothing in private but the parliament was not a place for private life and he shouted at the podium "This is not a place to challenge the state. Please put this lady in her place!"[48] while the majority of the parliament supported him with applause and shouting to Kavakçı "Get out" (Akar and Dündar 2004). She left the parliament and later her citizenship was removed on the account that she became a citizen of the U.S. without informing the Ministry of Interior Affairs. Kavakçı's dismissal from the parliament became a symbol of the expulsion of women with headscarves in public spaces. Public and private space *(kamusal alan/özel alan)* discussions dominated the public discourse around the issue of the headscarf in the coming years. Dominating discourse was the one Ecevit put forward amidst the objections of Islamists and few liberal intellectuals who supported the right to veil in public institutions with liberal justifications.

Being a political tool and lack of support from male Islamists

The veil turned into a political impasse with the bans. Women with headscarves found themselves in the middle of a polarization between secular and Islamist camps. Secular sectors, and especially the media demonized the headscarf and women who wear it, by using the French-borrowed word *türban*, instead of *başörtüsü*, and depicting the female demonstrators for headscarf freedom as provocateurs who want to destroy the state. On the other side, the Islamist movements and parties deployed political meanings to the headscarves. For example, former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan stated that "the [university] rectors will stand in salute to the student [with headscarf]

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[48] "Burası devlete meydan okunacak yer değildir. Lütfen bu hanıma haddini bildiriniz"

tomorrow… They will not be standing in salute to the student, but society's belief and religion" in a rally in 1996 (MilliGorusVideolar, 1996). These polemical speeches put women with headscarves further in the middle of the contestation between seculars and Islamists (Çakır 2000).

One of the main arguments for limiting the public space for women with headscarves, discussed in legal cases as well, has been that veiling is not a natural state for women, but it is a political and religious symbol. However, women with headscarves do not necessarily see it as a political and religious symbol (field notes 2013). In contrast, some argue that *unveiling* is a political stance in this region; since "the headscarf has been the norm for women in the region for centuries" (field notes 2013). On the other hand, writers like Fatma Barbarosoğlu describe the veil first of all as an ontological issue, something that is between the person and God, rather than being a political symbol between the contestation of political parties (Şişman 2000). Islamist female writers have criticized secular segments of the society who often argue that women are forced to wear the headscarf (Ramazanoglu 2011).

Islamist women (*İslamcı kadınlar*) have also criticized the unsupportive husbands in that polarized environment, male Islamists of the 1980's and 1990's, who tried to convince or sometimes forced their wives to take their headscarves off to secure their positions at the job (Ramazanoglu 2011). Writer Yıldız Ramazanoglu and others have disapproved the double standards of the male Islamists who did not support the choices of their wives and meanwhile had easygoing relations with women without headscarves in the workplace (2011, Aktas 2000, Diner and Toktaş 2008, 51). Similarly, theologian Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal accounts that some male Islamist students in theology faculties were content that females were leaving the campus, while they were having friendships with the unveiled female students under the cover of spreading religion (*tebliğ*) (Tuksal 2000b, 141). From an early stage, Islamist women have contested their disparate power relations with the Islamist men while they have been mobilizing for headscarf freedom against the strict secular rules of the state.

The First Street Mobilizations of Religious Women

The mobilization against the headscarf bans constituted the central stream of women's Islamic movements during the 1980's and 1990's and became the symbol of the movement in Turkey[49] (Diner & Toktas 2010, 42). The protesting women attempted to redefine the public space (*kamusal alan*). Main discursive themes of their mobilizations were 'exclusion from the public space' and 'demands of public rights' (İlyasoğlu 1995, 8). Due to the bans, women with headscarves lagged behind in other fields of life, most importantly education and employment. In this sense, the bans, in themselves, have been a curtailment of women's empowerment in Turkey. However, the bans also reduced the contributions in women's politico-religious empowerment by occupying women who would potentially work for it most.

Repertoires of contention against the headscarf bans became more and more varied and disruptive each decade. Women with headscarves protested against the bans especially with sit-ins in front of the university gates during the 1980's. Hunger strikes and classroom boycotts were successful in 1987 in Ankara University Theology Faculty and it spread to the other faculties (Tuksal 2000b, 142). They organized marches, demonstrations, and other campaigns. According to Islamist Sibel Eraslan[50], Muslim women became more courageous and disruptive in their demonstrations during the 1990's (2009). With the heightened tension and further imposed bans after the military intervention in 1997, university students continued the resistance against the headscarf ban with more vocal demonstrations where they stood up, shouted slogans and raised their fists up, as opposed to the silent sit-ins of the 1980's (Eraslan 2009).

The hand-in-hand protest (*El ele eylemi*) in 1998 was a very important mass mobilization of women and men against the headscarf bans all over Turkey. The protest was mainly organized by students of the Faculty of Medicine at Istanbul University. According to the estimations, around 10.000 people joined the protests nationwide. The demonstration was planned as a hand-in-hand human chain from Istanbul towards Hopa in the North East and Diyarbakır in the South East of

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[49] There were also other demonstrations organized by the Islamist women besides the issue of headscarf bans in this period. Most of these protests were about the atrocities against Muslims around the world, especially during the Bosnian war and in Palestine.

[50] Journalist, writer, poet and organizer of headscarf demonstrations. She served as the head of Ladies Commission (Hanımlar Komisyonu) for Istanbul of the Islamist Welfare Party between 1989-1996

Turkey. The main motto of the protest was "Hand in Hand for the Respect to Faith and Freedom of Thought."[51]

The police interrupted some parts of the protest with water cannons, and 267 protestors got detained around Turkey (Bianet 2014). The organizers were interrogated by counter-terrorism units. In December 1998, a lawsuit was filed against 30 students at the Istanbul State Security Court (*Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemesi*) demanding 90 years of jail. They were accused of breaching the article 312 of the Turkish Penal Code (*Türk Ceza Kanunu*) which was about inciting racial or religious hatred and encouraging people to disobey the law[52]. After the dissolution of the State Security Courts in 2004 under a reform package for the European Union accession process, the lawsuit was transferred to Heavy Criminal Courts (*Ağır Ceza Mahkemeleri*) and it timed out afterwards (Bianet 2014).

Mobilization against the bans have been documented in personal memoirs and research studies. Despite the collective protests, some participants claim that they were isolated even from each other. One of the initiators of "We are not free yet" signature campaign about minority rights (section 4.3), Havva Yılmaz was part of a conversation among the victims of the bans for a book project. She explains that they realized in that conversation that "they all went through the same thing, but they had to experience it so individually" (interview 2015); because, at the end of the day, each woman had to consider for herself whether she could take off the headscarf to be able to go to university or whether she could forgo going to the university in order to retain her self-esteem.

Similarly, an AKP founder, a lecturer in political science and a human rights activist Fatma Bostan Ünsal complains about the negative impact of the bans on women:

> No other women's movements understand this: headscarf is the priority for
> us. Without it [the freedom], you cannot go to school, work, or you cannot
> enter politics. Even if you do, you are second-class citizens in every sphere.

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[51] İnanca Saygı, Düşünceye Özgürlük İçin El Ele
[52] Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had also been jailed for four months and was banned from politics under the same article of the penal code for a poem he read during a rally in 1997 when he was the mayor of Istanbul.

> We could not even express ourselves well, but the report of TESEV[53] did. The report talks about our learned helplessness and spillover effects (Ünsal interview, 2015).

Women's mobilization against the bans has been criticized from time to time by some Islamist female writers themselves. Women, who define themselves as religious, had expressed their difference from 'the Western woman' that they saw as an 'imposed norm' by demanding to attend universities with headscarves (Ramazanoglu 2011, 2). They had gone against the 'Western' standards of the Republic, which they saw as limiting the traditional and religious ways of being. Islamist writer Fatma Barbarosoglu endorses this difference of 'religious' women from the 'modern' women. However, she criticizes the usage of women's rights discourse by religious women to enter the public space:

> [Women] with headscarves were busy proving their differences from modern women in the public space in the 1970's and 1980's, while in the 1990's proving their similarities to them. There have been ideas which subordinate the difference only to the headscarf and which defend to understand it with a framework of women's rights (Şişman 2000).

Barbarosoğlu claims that the bans and the mobilizations against them distanced religious girls from 'the perfection model' (*mükemmellik projesi*) (Şişman 2000, 18). According to her, while women tried to enter into the public space (against an unjust ban), they forgot some of the Islamic values and overlooked the public space's potential of undermining religion and morality (Şişman 2000, 134). Barbarosoğlu represents a conservative approach within women's Islamic movements. Not all of them prioritize 'morality' in their public acts as will be discussed in the coming sections and Chapter 5.

Further Institutionalizations in 1990's

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[53] Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (*Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı*), a think-tank that promotes democratization, plurality and human rights. Ünsal is referring to report of Dilek Cindoğlu, 2011, "Headscarf Ban and Discrimination: Professional Headscarved Women in the Labor Market," TESEV Publications: Istanbul.

Women's rights agenda was institutionalized in the 1990's. Turkey had ratified United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1986. As a requirement of CEDAW, the General Directorate on the Status of Women was established in 1990 as a women's policy machinery. Over the years, the Directorate has adopted a feminist approach by responding to the demands of the feminist organizations (Ucar 2009, 5). A standing committee in the parliament was formed to oversee equal opportunities between women and men in 2009 as an outcome of the lobby of women's organizations and female members of parliament (Bianet 2009; UNDP 2009).

Women's organizations in Turkey have increasingly connected to the women around the world since the 1990's. UN International Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and Habitat II conference on Human Settlements organized in Istanbul in 1996 especially accelerated the process of NGO'ization and international interactions. Local governments and NGOs were mobilized in preparation for the Habitat conference in Istanbul and more than 500 organizations worldwide joined the event (Habitat 1997). Civil society (*sivil toplum*) became a buzzword and associations mushroomed in Turkey during the 1990's. Today, UN CEDAW committees and the European Women's Lobby are some of the most important channels that has enabled women to bring their problems to international arena (Ucar 2009, 5).

The 1990's were the period when women's movements got institutionalized through NGOs, like other human rights movements in Turkey. Feminist, secular, Kurdish and Islamist women formed platforms and associations. The headscarf bans reinforced the divisions among the women's movements. Due to the secular-religious polarization around the bans, the mainstream feminists also did not support the mobilization against the bans until the first decade of the 2000's. Islamist, secular and feminist women formed separate associations.

Islamist women were present in both of the global conferences with their own organizations. Besides continuing the headscarf demonstrations, they coalesced around journals and associations that touched upon the issues of justice in Islam and the problems that veiled women had since the 1990's (Acar 2010, Tuksal 2008, 41). Hidayet Tuksal explains that the bans led to unexpected results such as increased engagement in civil society, in legal cases and in lobbying abroad (2000b, 144). These made some of the victims of the bans more self-confident and active in public space (Tuksal 2000b, 144).

Women's Islamic organizations have been discernible from other women's organizations with their foci on headscarf bans and women's status in Islam. The most well-known and active organizations will be described below. Two organizations (AKDER and Hazar) were formed directly as a response to the bans. While another one (BKP) started as a platform to correct wrong interpretations of Islam regarding women, it also had to focus on the bans soon after its foundation due to the increased restrictions on headscarves after 1997. These associations had to channel their resources and energies to organize informal and formal meetings, seminars, and support schemes for victims of the headscarf bans. Another organization (GIKAP) has been less affected by the bans as it was set up by women who were already retired or elder housewives.

Higher numbers of women with headscarves in these organizations are also revealing the division among women in Turkey, compared to the lack of women with headscarves in feminist and secular women's organizations. Research in Egypt shows otherwise that women with and without headscarves, with and without religious discourse work together, as demonstrated in Chapter 6 and 7. I argue that women's movements lost time in Turkey by this division between secular and Islamic women's groups. Instead of collaborating against the bans and other women's rights violations altogether, women have become polarized. They have gathered in separate platforms and institutions, focused on separate issues and have not collaborated until the beginning of 2000's.

BKP: One of the first women's rights advocacy NGO founded by religious women

One of the most important organizations set up for women's rights advocacy by religious women is *Capital City Women's Platform Association - Başkent Kadın Platformu Derneği – BKP hereafter*). BKP was established in 1995 as a platform by a group of middle-aged women with 'religious sensitivities' (*dini hassasiyetler*) in Ankara who questioned their roles as mothers, wives and working women (Semiz, interview 2011). The founders were mostly members of several civil society organizations and other women's initiatives, but there were also members who did not belong to another organization. Importantly, women from the theology faculties in Ankara, mainly Ankara University, joined the platform. Theology Faculty of Ankara University is known for its rationalist approach on religion (The influence of this school on BKP will be analyzed in section

5.1) There are women who openly call themselves as feminist or 'religious feminist' in the association such as Berrin Sönmez, Zeynep Göknil Şanal, and Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal. There are also few women in the group who do not wear a headscarf or who later unveiled such as Zeynep Göknil Şanal and Nuriye Duran Özsoy.

The main reason for the establishment of BKP was to fight against the women's subordinate status in Islamic religious discourses (Semiz interview 2011). The two-fold mission of the association is stated on the website as: "to solve the problems that arise from religious interpretations that reinforce a traditional woman image; and to end discriminations against religious women in the modern society" (BKP 2010). Thus, the association situates itself "both against Islamic masculinities and also the secular rules of the modern state" (Karaca 2011). BKP joined HABITAT and Beijing +5 +10 action plans (Semiz interview 2011). However, after the military intervention in 1997 and following systematic headscarf bans in universities and public posts, BKP developed a continuous discourse on the headscarf problem against the secular rules of the state. The expulsion process in 1997 increased the participation to the platform, as women who were dismissed from their jobs and universities sought solidarity in the platform.

The platform was turned into an association in 2002 to respond to the increasing number of women associated with the platform and for being acknowledged on legal grounds. BKP has a rotating presidency system to prevent hierarchy, thus the president change about in every two years among members. BKP had less than 200 registered members and the monthly membership fee (*aidat*) is 10 Turkish lira by 2016 (B Sönmez interview 2016). Besides its activities on women's position in Islam and headscarf bans, BKP has provided courses such as reading the Quran, computer skills, accessories design, literature or English, to give women a space for their self-development (Baskent Kadin Platformu 2010, interviews). Courses are generally offered for free; however, participants contribute to the expenses of the office, a small apartment rented in a central district in Ankara.

Hazar Education Culture and Solidarity Association: An Informal Academy for Women

Another important and prolific NGO set up by religious women is Hazar Education Culture and Solidarity Association (*Hazar Eğitim Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği*). It was founded in 1993 by Ayla Kerimoglu and her friends in Istanbul. Kerimoglu had earlier worked at *HİKDE* in sending charities to widows and orphans. However, Hazar is envisioned as an educational center for young girls[54] and women whose access to education and public life were limited due to the headscarf bans. The association has an Islamic stance as its mission:

> Following the verse 'Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of
> a people until they change what is in themselves' (13:11), we accept
> and support taking civil initiatives, i.e. investment to human beings,
> support for education, responsibilities to create social ethics as part
> of Muslim consciousness. (Hazar 2014).

Kerimoğlu states that they started to 'work on women's problems, but *not* from the point of view of woman's identity back then' (interview 2015). Kerimoglu recounts that Bosnian war and rape incidences during the war created stimuli for setting up Hazar (interview 2015). Their first meeting was organized with Halida İzetbegović, the wife of Alija İzetbegović, the president of Bosnia-Hercegovina at the time (interview 2015). With their own means, they provided financial and moral support to Bosnian women, who had taken refuge in Turkey.

Women in Hazar organized reading and discussions groups about broader political and historical topics such as global politics, positivism, socialism, etc. They regularly invited intellectuals to give seminars on these topics throughout the 1990's. It was the period when the secularist-Islamist contestation was at the highest point with harsh measures and state surveillance on Islamists. Kerimoglu highlights that they organized the discussions in hotel conference halls to give the message that their activities were legal (Kerimoglu, interview 2015). That was the period of high stigmatization of women with headscarves in Turkey, since secular and mainstream media and groups portrayed them as pawns of reactionary (*gerici/irticai*) and bigoted (*yobaz*) movements. Kerimoglu states that some of the invited speakers were surprised when they saw a group of women with headscarves (interview 2015). She also recounts that their circles, including

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[54] In Turkey, women in university age is often called *kız* and *genç kız*, literally meaning girl and young girl, although they refer to young women. In the rest, I translate the term as simply women.

women, criticized them with the objection that Hazar invites seculars – 'the people who push us around' (interview 2015). HAZAR and BKP have at times collaborated in common projects.

AKDER: a Direct Outcome of Headscarf Bans

Another association which was set up by and for women who lost their education or employment rights due to the headscarf bans is AKDER (*Ayrımcılığa Karşı Kadın Hakları Derneği - Women's Rights Association against Discrimination*). It was founded in 1999 in Istanbul mainly by Faculty of Medicine students of Istanbul University, the group which was active in headscarf demonstrations. The founders got together in the courtyard of the university – when they were rejected from entering the classrooms (Görmez interview 2015). Leyla Şahin is one of the founders of AKDER, whose lawsuit against Turkey at European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) received a lot of attention. She was a student of medicine at Istanbul University before receiving a disciplinary warning in 1998 due to her headscarf. ECHR ruled against Şahin[55] in 2005.

AKDER has kept records of women who were discriminated in public life due to headscarves. The association also sent some young women with headscarves for higher education abroad and financed their expenses through donations (Görmez; Örgel interviews 2015). Becket Fund for Religious Liberty has supported the activities and lawsuits of AKDER on headscarf freedom (Becket 2009; Örgel interview 2015).

GİKAP: A traditional women's group to elevate morality of the society

GİKAP, (Gökkuşağı İstanbul Kadın Kuruluşları Platformu - Rainbow Istanbul Women's Organizations' Platform) was founded in 1995 in Istanbul. It is composed of several conservative and religious women's associations. One of the main founders of GIKAP is Dr. Gülsen Ataseven, also a founder of *HİKDE*. Ataseven is a famous pious figure with a busy career as a medical doctor who received several prizes including the Parliamentary Outstanding Service Award (*TBMM Üstün Hizmet Ödülü)* (2009). Explaining the goals of the platform in 1995, Ataseven states that "…[W]omen who make up the fifty percent of the population and undertake an important function such as motherhood should be guided to positive things[56]. Women should not only know how to

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[55] Şahin was elected as an MP from AKP in November 2015 snap elections.
[56] Müspete yönlendirilmeli

demand rights but also undertake responsibility" (Böhürler 1995). This is a response to feminist discourse in Turkey which emphasizes rights of women and problematizes the responsibilities attached to women including house care, child care, and double shift. Ataseven, instead, claims to represent "the emotions and desires of 'the silent masses' (*sessiz yığınlar*) – Anatolian women" (Böhürler 1995).

GIKAP's priority issues are different from those of BKP, AKDER and HAZAR. For Ataseven the main problems in the society are coming from neglecting the beautiful traits of the society. Some of the problems are alcoholism in young age, depression, sexual assaults, sexual diseases, couples who live without wedlock, etc. (Böhürler 1995). GİKAP focuses on cultural values by aiming to erase the 'bad habits' in society, 'rotten values' of modernity and to bring back 'good' with women's initiative. While AKDER and Hazar have a more conservative and accommodating stance in gender order vis-a-vis BKP, GIKAP represents the older generation and more conservative visions of pious women in Turkey.

4.2. Molarization: Silent Efforts over the Bans during the secularist-AKP clash (2002-2008)

This section analyzes the patterns of mobilization and immobilization of women's Islamic movements in Turkey since AKP's coming to power in 2002, until 2008 when the Constitutional Court rejected the party closure lawsuit against AKP. Positions and empowerment capacities of some of WIMs studied in this section can be viewed in Table 4 below. AKP's coming to power was a significant political opportunity for WIMs in Turkey who had suffered the headscarf bans. However, due to the secularist threats to AKP government, WIMs silenced their street mobilization against the bans to a great extent. In this period, women engaged in international lobbying against the bans to make it easier to lift the bans for AKP. In the same period, contestations and rejections by secular feminists led to an emergence of a nationwide *molar* movement among religious and conservative women around their common worldviews and problems. Accordingly, they formed the platform 'Women who Get Together' (*Buluşan Kadınlar*) in 2003.

Table 4: Suggestive (Non-Exhaustive) Table of Some WIMs' Politico-Religious Acts and Empowerment Capacities (2002-2008):

WIMs relation to political oppression / WIMs relation to mainstream religious gender order	Challenging	Members with both Inclinations/In between	Silent or Supportive
Trangressive (marginal &challenging)	**Transformative power/ empowerment capacity**		
Dissenting (mainstream&challenging)	• WGT Çorum meeting (against 2003 Iraq bill) • "We are not free yet" campaign	**Reformative power/ empowerment capacity** • *WGT Batman (2004), Antalya (2003) meetings* • *"We protect each other" platform* • *"Feminists are not Sleeping" platform*	
Accommodating (mainstream &confirmatory)			**Consolidating power/ empowerment capacity**

Power Contestations between AKP and Secular Camps (2002-2008)

There have been important changes in women's Islamic movements after AKP's coming to power in 2002. The period in Turkey between 2002 and 2008 witnessed a tense contestation of authority between the popularly elected Islamist-rooted AKP government and secularist-dominated state institutions. The central figures of AKP such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül, and Bülent Arınç were active in the closed-down Islamist parties – Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) and Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*). The secularist group consisted of the Turkish Armed Forces which has long defined itself as the defender of secularism; the Constitutional Court whose majority of jurists

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consisted of secularists, and the president Ahmet Necdet Sezer (between 2000 and 2007). I conclude this period at 2008 when the Constitutional Court rejected the closure case against AKP in contrast to the preceding Islamist parties. Until then, AKP was reluctant to introduce serious policy changes including lifting of the headscarf bans, as it was surrounded by formal and informal checks of the secularist camp. Since 2008, during its second term in office, AKP has become freer in its Islamist discourses and policy proposals.

In its first term in government (2002-2007), AKP engaged in the official negotiations with the European Union (EU) which had recognized Turkey as a candidate for full membership in 1999[57]. AKP government passed various reform packages and took many important democratization steps during this period. Thanks to the EU leverage and effective mobilization of women's movements with the support of the General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women (*Kadının Statüsü ve Sorunları Genel Müdürlüğü, KSSGM*) women's rights were legally enhanced with reforms in the constitution and the penal code (Ucar 2009). A new clause was added to Article 10 of the Constitution in 2004 that states "Men and women have equal rights. The State shall have the obligation to ensure that this equality exists in practice" with the support of the women's platform for constitutional changes (Constitution 2004).[58] Article 90 of the Constitution was also revised to state that international human rights treaties supersede Turkish laws in case of conflict in 2004 (Celik Levin 2007, 208). Other human rights were also enhanced such as the complete abolishment of the death penalty and higher penalties for torture (Başbakanlık 2007).

Presidential elections in 2007 led to a spectacular controversy between the secular groups and AKP. The main contention was over the wife of AKP's presidential candidate, Hayrünnisa Gül who wore a headscarf. Another controversy was that the candidate Abdullah Gül and other influential members of AKP had ties with Islamist *National Vision* movement in the past, and most

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[57] Turkey signed an association agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC), the predecessor of the EU in 1963 and applied for formal membership to EEC in 1987. After signing a Customs Union agreement with the EU in 1995, Turkey was officially recognized as a candidate for full membership in December 1999. The official negotiations started in October 2005 with several stalemate periods. EU parliament voted for a suspension of the negotiations in November 2016 due to the 'disproportionate repressive measures taken by the Turkish government' (EU 2016).

[58] A positive discrimination clause was added to the same article in 2010 that says "The measures taken in realizing this equality cannot be interpreted as a violation of the principle of equality" (Constitution 2011).

of their wives wore the headscarf. The possibility that the first lady of Turkey would wear a headscarf created an uproar in secular segments of the state, Kemalist political parties and society.

Against this possibility, Republican Rallies (*Cumhuriyet Mitingleri*) were organized in several cities before the 2007 presidential elections. Hosted by secular parties and NGOs, it was reported that from hundreds of thousands to a million of people attended the rallies in Ankara, Istanbul, Manisa, Çanakkale and İzmir (BBC 2007, Reuters 2007). Participants held flags of Turkey and pictures of Atatürk, and they chanted slogans such as "The roads of Çankaya are closed to sharia"[59], "Turkey is secular and will remain secular" "We are soldiers of Mustafa Kemal" (BBC 2007; Reuters, 2007).

During the rallies, General Staff of Turkish Armed Forces issued an online memorandum on April 27, 2007, which warned the government and assured the secular groups that the army is the guardian of secularism:

> Turkish Armed Forces are concerned about the recent situation. It should not be forgotten that the Turkish Armed Forces are a party in those arguments and absolute defender of secularism….It will display its attitude and action openly and clearly whenever it is necessary (BBC 2007).[60]

Known as e-memorandum, the army's statement was harshly criticized by Islamists and liberal intellectuals. Despite the pressures, Gül did not quit the candidacy, and he got 357 votes in the first round of elections in Parliament. The Constitutional Court canceled the election, following secular RPP's objection about the minimum number of votes that should have been 367. In the second round of the election, the minimum number of parliamentarians were not met – as RPP MPs boycotted the election – so the election could not be held. Following the crisis of presidential elections, AKP called for snap elections. After the elections, AKP became the leading party that formed the government again in 2007.

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[59] Çankaya is the district of Ankara where the presidential mansion was located until 2014. It should be noted that Atatürk's wife Latife Uşşaki was veiled during her marriage to Atatürk (1923-25) within his presidency to adopt to the societal norms (Çalışlar 2006).

[60] The memorandum is removed from the Armed Forces website in 2011, which reflects the change within the army

Meanwhile, the parliament voted for substantial changes for the president to be elected directly by citizens. Yet the president Sezer vetoed the changes, and a referendum was held on October 2007. With 68% of the votes, the majority of the citizens accepted to elect the president directly. Also, the presidential term was decreased from seven years to five years - enabling a second round of presidency; national elections would be called in every four years instead of five; the minimum quorum in parliamentary meetings would be 1/3 of total members, and decisions can be made with minimum ¼ of total members. All these changes meant to overcome the difficulties that AKP had in the previous term.

The last hope of the Kemalists was the closure of AKP for violating the secularism principle like its predecessors Welfare Party and Virtue Party in 1998 and 2001 respectively. The Chief Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals initiated a party closure case against AKP. However, Constitutional Court rejected the closure case against AKP in 2008 with six members ruled for closure while five rejected[61]. The court only ruled to cut down half of the state funding to the party.

The fact that the closure case was rejected marked a historic moment in Turkish politics. This was the first time that a party with Islamist background was safeguarded by the Constitutional Court. It should be noted that the head of the Constitutional Court, who also voted against the closure, was the judge Haşim Kılıç. Kılıç was *allegedly* close to Fethullah Gülen[62] community which were in supportive terms with AKP until 2012. After the rejection of closure, AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became freer in their discourses and policy proposals in the coming years.

Great Expectations on Headscarf and Silent Repertoires of Action

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[61] At least seven votes was necessary

[62] Gülen is a religious cleric based in the US who had a vast network of sympathizers in Turkey. He was trialed for threatening the state institutions and plotting for a sharia-ruled state in Turkey between 2000 and 2008. He was acquitted in 2008. Followers of Fethullah Gülen within the military and bureaucracy attempted to overthrow the regime on July 15, 2016. The coup attempt was prevented by the police and by civilians who took on streets and challenged the military tanks.

During the secularist-AKP contestation, women's Islamic movements supported AKP by voting for it and suspending street activism (personal interviews). Hopes for the lifting of the bans were in the parliament, and they silenced their protests and mobilization over the bans with some exceptions[63] (personal interviews; Turam 2008, Sakin et al. 2008). Even though they suspended street protests against the bans, NGOs like AKDER and BKP lobbied intensively for the headscarf freedom in the first two terms of AKP. They followed the legal proceedings, engaged in international lobbying through EU and UN CEDAW – despite prevention attempts by secular feminists – and organized solidarity projects for the victims. Berna Turam defines this period of passive resistance of religious women as 'pious non-resistance' (Turam 2008). Turam recounts that they showed passive resistance instead of vocal mobilizations to avoid 'social disturbance' which in return 'helped them to acquire more recognition and power' when religious people were viewed with suspicion (2008, 486).

However, AKP did not put the headscarf ban issue on the agenda until 2007 (Sakin et al. 2008). This was understandable, although not acceptable, as BKP member Nesrin Semiz states, since AKP was threatened to be closed based on alleged violations of secularism (interview 2011). That was why Islamic circles including women kept silent on many issues not to weaken the reputation of the government from *within* against the strict secular state institutions. Instead, several civil society groups were formed to support the government's attempt to get rid of the military tutelage.[64]

There were some exceptions of dissent from AKP in this period. Islamist women intellectuals especially went against the government's bill to send troops to support the Iraq War in 2003, despite the will of Erdoğan. They condemned unanimously the bill in the third meeting of Women who Get Together in 2003 in Çorum (this group will be discussed in the following sections) (Hazar 2003, BKP 2003). Intellectuals such as Yıldız Ramazanoğlu joined several protests and projects against the war such as the Eastern Conference (*Doğu Konferansı*) and the Global Peace and Justice Coalition (*Küresel Barış ve Adalet Komisyonu*). Islamist activist Fatma

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[63] Another Islamist party, Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi) continued mobilization.
[64] Young Civilians (Genç Siviller) platform was set up by young Islamist men and women in 2006 to raise a democratic voice against the threats to the elected AKP government.

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Bostan Ünsal went to Iraq become a human shield and many women in WIMs appreciated this effort [65] (interview 2015).

NGO activities and Oppositional Relations with Feminists

WIMs have participated in national and international women's meetings and collaborated with feminist, secular and Kurdish women in several projects. However, these collaborations were often shadowed by a distrust between the two women groups. Politico-religious empowerment of women in Turkey was not only hindered by patriarchal structures of power and headscarf bans but also by the blockages of some secular women during some of the international meetings.

Face-to-face relations between feminists, Kemalist, religious and Kurdish women began in common platforms for legal reform such as Turkish Penal Code Women's Platform (TCK Kadın Platformu) (2002-2004), Constitution Women's Platform, CEDAW national executive committees (2003-ongoing), European Women's Lobby, national NGO gatherings of Flying Broom and other formal NGO consultancy bodies of the Parliament and Ministry of Family and Social Policies.

The contribution of women's Islamic groups to the civil code (*Medeni Kanun*) reform campaigns (2001) was limited due to the well-organized feminist and secular women's movement around the reform process and due to the headscarf bans which preoccupied WIMs. Furthermore, the absence of religious reference in the code might have made articulation of a religious language redundant. The civil code has been the target of feminist campaigns since the 1980's due to its discriminatory clauses. Feminists mobilized for full equality after the ratification of CEDAW in 1985.[66] The code was radically reformed in 2001 with the elimination of its sexist language, freeing women from husband's legal control[67], and bringing equality in marriage, divorce, child custody, property ownership and employment (Ucar 2009, ESI 2007, 9). Feminist mobilization and EU leverage were crucial in the reform (ESI 2007, 8).

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[65] The bill was rejected in the parliament thanks to the mounting civil society pressure. Close to a hundred of AKP MPs voted against the bill according to the number of AKP seats and voting results.
[66] Turkey withdrew reservations on articles 15 and 16 of CEDAW in 1999.
[67] Before the reform, husband was the legal head of the household (ESI 2007)

Women's Islamic groups in Turkey do not problematize the secular basis of the civil code[68]. Many religious women activists regard the code as compatible with Islam's core message of equality and justice with a historicist perspective (interviews, 2013, 2015). Abolition of polygamy, equal divorce and inheritance rights benefit women from all kind of ideological perspectives. While WIMs were not mobilized collectively for the civil code reform back then, there have been several women among WIMs who have actively been working on equality in the law. For example, a lawyer Fatma Benli[69], currently an MP from AKP, has been working on equal inheritance, divorce, violence against women, women's surname law, and honor killings (Benli 2008, interviews 2015).

On the other hand, BKP was part of the Penal Code Women's Platform (2002-2004). Nesrin Semiz, former-president of BKP regards lobbying efforts of the platform as a success and an important collaboration between women's organizations in Turkey (interview 2011). Penal Code Women's Platform was organized by a feminist NGO, *Women for Women's Human Rights – New Ways (Kadının İnsan Hakları – Yeni Çözümler Derneği)* (KİH 2014). The platform was formed during the reform processes connected to the EU negotiations and the new penal code incorporated 24 out of 30 demands of the platform. The reform changed the overall approach of the code towards women's bodies and sexualities by highlighting the *individualities* of women and freeing women and their sexuality from men and societal controls. Some of the changes included a redefinition of sexual crimes as 'crimes against individuals' instead of 'crimes against public morality'; criminalizing sexual harassment, marital rape, and harassment in the workplace; and abolishment of the articles that discriminate between virgin and sexually active women (Arat 2008, 409). During the reform process, the Prime Minister Erdoğan opened a public debate on criminalizing adultery. The women's platform urged media and European networks through

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[68]Another issue that Muslim religious women in Turkey do *not* prioritize is abortion (one exception is Hayat Foundation (*Hayat Vakfı)* – as opposed to the Christian religious women's groups in the North America and Western Europe. In Turkey, the abortion is legal up to ten weeks and it is to be provided for free since 1983, although there are serious obstacles reported in practice in public hospitals (Mor Çatı 2014) especially after Erdoğan announced abortion as a murder (Milliyet 2012). In Egypt, the abortion is illegal and there is a high cultural stigmatization to defend for abortion rights.

[69] Benli was a consultant to Fatma Şahin, Minister Responsible for Family and Social Policies between 2011 and 2013, who worked closely with women's organizations to pass important laws on violence against women. Benli also prepared legal documents about headscarf bans at AKDER.

intensive press campaigns and lobbying to prevent the criminalization. The EU reacted and signaled a possible derail with Turkey, and the government stepped back (Ilkkaracan 2008, 41).

These collaborations between feminists and religious women activists – some of whom also call themselves feminist – show that religious women in Turkey do not have fundamental ideological differences with secular and feminist groups in reforming the source and content of the civil code, criminal code, as well as the constitution. The only difference might be their level of participation during these reform processes, as religious women mostly concentrated on the headscarf bans.

Religious women activists' approach to feminism has been significantly shaped by their relations with feminists in Turkey. Hegemonic struggles and opposition are defining the relations between them at two levels: First of all, secular feminists have long turned a blind eye to the demand of headscarf freedom until around 2008. Secondly, secular feminists have long had a suspicion about religious women's approach to women's rights, and gender equality. They criticized them for not being openly 'feminist' and did not find their actions and projects feminist and radical enough.

A critical juncture that convinced religious and conservative women to build their molar platform was the conflicts during the nation-wide CEDAW women's forum organized in 2003 in Ankara. The gathering, convened under the secretariat of a feminist NGO *Flying Broom - Uçan Süpürge,* brought 453 women together from women's organizations all around Turkey[70] (Güner interview 2011). Every five years national CEDAW NGO committees prepare shadow reports as alternatives to the official CEDAW country reports and accordingly CEDAW committee sends back recommendations to member states. The aim of this gathering was to prepare CEDAW NGO shadow report for 2005 (Flying Broom 2016).

Halime Güner, head of Flying Broom, explains that the aim of their NGO is to bring about the aggregate power of women regardless of ethnic background and different worldviews (interview 2011). The forum in 2003 was a critical turning point for inclusion of a religious women's NGO in the national CEDAW coordination committee, BKP. However, it also surfaced

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[70] This gathering was the second national women's gatherings in Turkey organized by Flying Broom. The first was related to UN Beijing + 5 Process in 2000, and the last one was held in 2013 in Ankara.

the grievances of Kemalist women against the headscarf freedom. Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, Zeynep Göknil Şanal and Berrin Sönmez from BKP and Ayla Kerimoglu from HAZAR argue that as women with headscarves they suffered a serious exclusion in the forum especially by Kemalist/secular feminists, while the majority of socialist and liberal feminists supported them (interviews 2015, 2016).

BKP member, theologian Dr. Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, who calls herself as a religious feminist (*dindar feminist*), was a member of the national CEDAW coordination committee which organized the forum:

> Beyond not being able to make our voice heard, we faced a lot of manipulations. The topic was to report the discriminations women face. The aim was to reach a wide participation, we (BKP) entered into [the coordination] despite my friends' [other feminists in coordination] unwillingness. I made a lot of effort to make women with headscarves to come to the gathering, and my friends made an effort on the contrary, to prevent the headscarf bans from being on the agenda. They tried to block participation by claiming that some organizations are not women's organizations… Flying Broom was among the most tolerant [to the headscarf]. This was their project; diversity…. One of the friends was preparing the opening speech. She did not even mention the bans. She said that 'you will speak about it anyway in the gathering'. (Tuksal interview 2016)

Around 50 women from WIMs attended the gathering. Ayla Kerimoglu from HAZAR stated that during the gathering they were not allowed to speak about the bans:

> They say this is not a place for [the headscarf freedom].You attend a meeting on discrimination to prepare shadow report. You are not listened to as religious women. The moment you speak, you are accused of making discrimination and politics. It is ironic. At the beginning of the workshops, they warn you by saying 'I hope we do not enter into politics here, this is Atatürk's Turkey', etc. Problems of all women − women in prisons, Kurdish women, sex-workers (*hayat kadınları*),

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LGBTİ, or women in Anatolia – can be a topic of discussion, but the problems of women with headscarf cannot be spoken. Therefore, our problems were not mentioned in the final report, except for the other problems we agreed with (Kerimoglu interview 2015)

Tuksal criticizes double standards of other feminists in the CEDAW coordination committee and and during the preparation of the final report. She highlights that she has addressed the fears of feminists about the effects of traditional religion on women which has created a trust between them. But in return, she argues that there has been no support from them for headscarf freedom:

They thought we would only speak about the headscarf bans. When they saw our positions in other topics, a trust was formed between us. They began to tell their problems about religion... However, this did not help us in putting the headscarf bans in the report… In the short final presentation, [name omitted] inserted the bans in the same sentence with homosexuality, so that we would not say it was forgotten. However, the bans were not in the general report. In juxtaposition, I had written the section about the problems stemming from traditional family and religion. They had even said that 'Hidayet you have written very courageously; we would not be able to write it this way'" (Tuksal interview, 2016)

International feminists have been more supportive of the headscarf freedom than local mainstream feminists in Turkey. Since the headscarf bans were not mentioned in the final report to be presented at CEDAW meeting in UN, AKDER and BKP made a separate lobbying effort in the 32nd session of CEDAW meeting at UN headquarters in New York in January 2005. They handed in their own separate reports about the headscarf bans (Örgel, Şanal, Tuksal interviews 2015, 2016). As a result, the report sent to Turkey by CEDAW committee stated concern about "the impact on girls and women of the ban on wearing headscarves in schools and universities" and "requests the State party to monitor and assess the impact of the ban on wearing headscarves and to compile information on the number of women who have been excluded from schools and universities because of the ban" within 'principal areas of concern and recommendations' section (CEDAW 2005).

Dr. Zeynep Göknil Şanal from BKP was a member of the Executive Committee for NGO Forum on CEDAW who went to 32nd session of CEDAW in New York in 2005. Şanal could speak English as she grew up abroad. She recounts the disagreement in the committee upon their return to Turkey:

> The CEDAW committee found our reports interesting as [the chairperson] did
> not tell them anything about it. Zozan Özgökçe[71] and I conducted a successful
> lobbying as most of the questions were directly on the headscarf and Kurdish
> women. Upon our return from New York, there was an outburst in the
> Executive Committee as to how the headscarf bans became the most important
> [issue in the report] and this led to a crisis which lasted for two years. Some of
> the secular women proclaimed that they could not work together with women
> with 'rags' – by using this word. However, the other colleagues such as Sema
> Kendirci, Nazik Işık, Yıldız Tokman defended us by saying "are we going to
> discriminate when we stand against discrimination?" So, those who did not
> want to continue left the committee (Şanal interview 2016).

Tuksal also talks about the incidents in the committee upon receiving the recommendations in the CEDAW report for Turkey:

> We burst into happiness. The first fight started in the CEDAW working group
> [with the accusation that] we secretly prepared and presented a report [in New
> York] and we messed up the discipline. I asked [name omitted], 'what kind of
> discipline? You didn't put us in, and we had said that we were going to do this.'
> The Executive Committee was divided into two: they wanted to expel us, but
> some objected to this. Thereupon they left. (Tuksal interview 2016).

The crisis shows the stark conflict between Kemalist women and women with headscarves in Turkey and demonstrates a vivid example of the divisions within women's movement due to a strict understanding of secularism by Kemalists and also due to the bans that have demonized women with headscarves. Around half of the committee member NGOs left in this crisis. Some

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[71] Founder of Van Women's Association (Van Kadın Merkezi – VAKAD), feminist, anti-militarist Kurdish woman activist

NGOs that had left later rejoined and by 2015 there were 11 NGO's represented. The Executive Committee for NGO Forum on CEDAW meets every week since 2005. BKP has been the only women's organization that defines itself as 'religious' in the committee (Şanal interview 2016).

AKDER also lobbied to make headscarf bans recognized as a discrimination against women and but also religion. They went to international CEDAW and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) meetings. In 2004, a group from AKDER went to Geneva to present at UN CEDAW conference. Since they did not have a consultancy status in UN, they worked under the umbrella of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. Becket Fund had also supported Leyla Şahin and Merve Kavakçı's cases against Turkey in European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). AKDER also presented a report at OSCE's annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw in October 2006 where governments and civil society review "the implementation of the OSCE's Human Dimension commitments and the procedures and mechanisms for monitoring and enhancing compliance" (OSCE 2006).

The female students whom AKDER had sent abroad due to the bans worked for translation of legal documents to English and also made presentations during these international meetings. Dr. Fatma Örgel was among a dozen women who went to Szeged University in Hungary to complete her medical studies with the support from AKDER. Örgel highlights her role as a person who can speak English:

> Upon returning from abroad, we, the Hungary team, started to translate
> the news on the headscarf bans into English as we studied in English. I
> made a presentation in Geneva about my expulsion from university due
> to the headscarf and Merve Kavakçı shared the story of her expulsion
> from the parliament" (Örgel interview 2015).

The testimony highlights the role and importance of English and international networks. The bans devastated and changed the lives of university students drastically; yet, the luckier ones who could go abroad to continue their educations came back to Turkey with a vital asset: English.

The international lobbying efforts of AKDER and BKP between 2004 and 2010 were crucial for women with headscarves to defend their cause in litigations in Turkey – despite the obstacles from secularist women's groups in Turkey, as the international agreements have been

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above the Turkish laws since 2004. Their aim was to receive the recommendations that the bans constituted a violation of women's rights and the international organizations supported the lift of the bans. The international recommendations helped WIMs to declare that the bans were a violation of women's rights and religious freedom in Turkey.

A Molar Movement Attempt: Women's Gatherings

The blockages they faced led religious women to create their own women's network in 2003 called *Women who Get Together* (WGT). The platform was initiated by around 50 religious women after the nation-wide CEDAW women's gathering in Ankara in 2003 (personal interviews 2015-2016, Kerimoglu 2010). The reasons behind the initiation were the *exclusion* they experienced during the CEDAW meeting, as well as the need to get to know each other more as religious women and organizations around Turkey. Participants emphasize the importance of these meetings as a platform to get to know their own problems beyond the headscarf bans, and strengthening the network of religious and conservative women's groups (interviews 2016, 2015).

WGT organized eleven women's gatherings between 2003 and 2013 around Turkey respectively as: Ankara (2003), Çorum (2003), Antalya (2003), Istanbul (2004), Batman (2004), Afyon (2005), Bursa (2006), Istanbul (2007), Konya (2008), Gaziantep (2010), and finally Diyarbakır (2013). They also created an e-mail group, where the participants discussed issues that are at the heart of the democratization and authoritarianism in Turkey. Via the e-mail group, they organized web blogs, signature campaigns, press statements and sometimes public protests after 2008 (see Appendix for the list of blogs) that will be analyzed in section 4.3.

The nationwide Women's Gatherings aimed at creating a *molar* movement among religious and conservative women in Turkey. Assuming the common problems faced (headscarf bans) and common religious sensitivities in public life, initiators of the group hoped to get to know one another, communicate, and act together for common problems as one coordinated unit. However, the experience in national gatherings, discussions in the email group and some of the signature campaigns they initiated showed that the potentials for a molar movement were very limited.

Each women's gathering had a different theme, based on the ongoing nation-wide discussions around the time of gathering such as the war in Iraq, family and women, EU accession process, reconstruction of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, and the peace process with Kurds. The first two gatherings in Ankara and Çorum was an overview of the CEDAW conference in 2003 and organizational set-up of the platform for the upcoming meetings. 118 people attended the first gathering in Ankara, representing 24 organizations. They agreed to have a flexible organization in Çorum meeting. The gatherings were mostly organized by the better funded organizations like BKP, Hazar and AKDER.

For example, the fifth gathering was organized in 2004 in Batman – a Kurdish populated city in South East Turkey. This gathering was described as an informative experience for WGT who were mostly coming from Western and central parts of the country (BKP 2004). The meeting was one of the first molar attempts of WIMs in these to get to know the Kurdish region's problems. The report in the website of BKP showed that WGT was not politicized in the Kurdish question by then. Some groups and members of WGT come from a nationalist-sacramentalist (*ülkücü* or *mukaddesatçı*) background. For example, they collaborated with and highlighted the importance of ÇATOM's (*Multi-Purpose Community Centre - Çok Amaçlı Toplum Merkezi)* which are state-led organizations for women in South East. ÇATOM's have been criticized by Kurdish women for having an assimilationist approach. Behind ÇATOM's discourse of saving women from customs, educating women and giving them tools for economic production, critiques mention that the aim is to control the growth of Kurdish population by family planning and Turkifying (*Türkleştirme*) and to exploit women's labor with little remuneration (Evrensel 2000). Secondly, the meeting report do not use the word Kurdish or Kurdish women, but instead prefers 'women of the region,' (*bölgedeki/yöredeki kadınlar*) 'women of Batman' 'women in Van and around[72].'

Another interesting example is the sixth meeting organized in Afyon, central Anatolia to discuss the EU in 2005 when the EU accession talks were accelerated. In a survey conducted at the end of the gathering, the majority of WGT members agreed that Turkey should join the EU. The reasons were listed as "the ideas (hopes!) that [EU] would contribute to democratization of

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[72] In contrast to this, Mazlumder (*İnsan Hakları ve Mazlumlar İçin Dayanışma Derneği - Association for Human Rights and Solidarity for the Oppressed*), an Islamic human rights organization, has had a much more identity-based stance on the Kurdish problem. Mazlumder's branches in Diyarbakır, Batman and Şanlıurfa were also among participants.

Turkey; there would be positive developments in human rights; and it would be in the interest of Turkey in terms of economy" BKP (2005).

Many participants expressed that there had always been differences among the groups that joined the Women's Gatherings. One layer of difference was the stance towards women's rights and feminism. For example, BKP has disturbed the Islamic masculinities (Ayata & Tutuncu 2008, 366) as opposed to some other women's Islamic groups. Presentations of some members of BKP who talked about feminism and touched upon structural inequalities between men and women in Muslim families at times were criticized during the meetings or were simply ignored by other women who prefer to socialize during the meetings instead of touching upon inequalities (personal interviews 2015). Second important division in the group was about the activism level and style. Willingness to have a public stance against authoritarianism and wrong policies of government on the one hand, and unwillingness to 'do politics' and an instinct to 'protect' AKP, on the other, was another central line of rupture in the group.

4.3. Molecularization: Disruptive Repertoires of Contention, New Issues and Divisions within WIMs (2008-2016)

This section explores changes among WIMs after AKP's stronger hold of power and the process of 'normalization of headscarf' after 2008, as I call it. Thanks to this process, there have been significant variations and divergences in women's Islamic movements. After lifting of the bans, WIMs have got more independent of the protection of their communities (*cemaat/mahalle*) and have more energy, time and resources to deal with other women's rights issues. The issues they deal with have been diversified and the discourses and style of actions have varied. The protests and signature campaigns of religious women and their collaborations with feminists, however problematic they were inside, helped the relaxation of the bans in many universities after 2008.

Secondly, I found out that divisions among WIMs have surfaced on two issues since the third term of AKP in government (2011 and onwards): the approach to women's rights and approach to AKP's authoritarianism. Being against authoritarianism and supporting feminism have correlated among WIMs as demonstrated in Table 5 below. The divisions have reached a climax during the Gezi protests in 2013. Discontent with AKP and willingness to protest it divided WIMs which became obvious with the dissolution of the WGT. In particular, among the young

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generation of WIMs but also few existing middle-aged women's groups, I found out an increased focus on masculinity, violence against women and sexuality issues, as well as other human's rights issues such as Kurdish problem. I also demonstrate the changing relations with the feminists. Headscarf freedom also let the divisions in WIMs in Turkey to surface more discernibly.

Table 5: Stances of Women's Islamic Movements on feminism and authoritarianism of AKP in Turkey (2008-2016)

	Critical or Suspicious of AKP for authoritarianism	Members with both Inclinations	Uncritical or Sympathetic to AKP
Feminist/Sympathetic to feminism	• The Initiative • Reçel Blog	• BKP	
Members with both inclinations		• Women who Get Together (WGT) (dissolved after Gezi protests) • Hazar	• AKDER
Suspicious of Feminism			• TEKH • KADEM • GİKAP • *TÜRAP* • *UKADER* • *İKADDER*

During AKP's second term in office (2007-2011), women became vocal again in their demand for headscarf freedom and criticized government's unwillingness to nominate women with headscarves. The silence was broken with disruptive protests that not only target the seculars but also the government. Several collaborations were built with secular and feminist women's rights activists and academicians to lift the headscarf ban in the universities for the first time in this period. *Visibility* has become more of an issue for religious activist women in Turkey who are

discontent with AKP's inaction on headscarf issues, its conservative discourse and authoritarian thrust. Overall stances and empowerment capacities of WIMs can be seen below in Table 6:

Table 6: Suggestive Table of WIMs' Politico-Religious Acts and Empowerment Capacities (2008-2016):

WIMs relation to political oppression / WIMs relation to mainstream religious gender order	Challenging	Members with both Inclinations/In between/ N/A	Silent or Supportive
Trangressive (marginal &challenging)	**Transformative power/ empowerment capacity** • *"Resist, the Headscarved" march (2013 Gezi Protests)*	• *Initiative* • *Reçel Blog (Example: Texts*: Was Adam a Man?; You are Great My Man)* **the texts do not talk about political oppression: N/A)*	
Dissenting (mainstream&challenging)	• *We want a deputy with headscarf' Initiative*	**Reformative power/ empowerment capacity** • *BKP* • *WGT Gatherings* • *WGT Blogs*	• *Hazar*
Accommodating (mainstream &confirmatory)			**Consolidating power/ empowerment capacity** • *GIKAP* • *AKDER* • *KADEM* • *TEKH (Example: Veiling Engineering Panels)*

Normalization of headscarf and Relations with Mainstream Feminists

Incremental lifting of the headscarf has been an important gain for women with headscarves in Turkey. Despite the slowness of AKP in lifting the headscarf bans in their first term in office, the

parliament voted positively for a constitutional change to lift the headscarf bans in universities in February 2008. Even though the constitutional court canceled this decision four months later, the bans have been informally relaxed in many universities and public offices since 2008[73]. Relaxation of the bans in universities has led to a process of 'normalization of headscarf' as I call it. It refers to the following legal relaxations in other public positions, but especially to a broader social acceptance of headscarf in feminist and secular circles.

As a legal empowerment, the normalization of headscarf led to mobilizational, organizational and discursive changes in women's Islamic movements in Turkey. Many women returned to their universities, as students or teachers, or returned to their workplaces in the public or private sector. "The life has started again as if it had stopped" as Tuksal puts it (interview 2016), and women began to continue their public lives to complete their 'mundane' dreams and aims. Several interviewees from BKP stated that few women were left to work in the association after the lifting of bans as some members have stopped activism and gone back to their lives (personal interviews 2016).[74] The lifting of the bans, without doubt, has been the most successful outcome of the decades of mobilization against the bans and collaborations women built around it and international support they brought back to Turkey from UN CEDAW conferences. This is an undeniable empowerment for women in Turkey 60% of whom put some type of headscarf (Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2007, 63).

There has been a 'mutual evolution' between feminists and religious women activists in Turkey since around 2007 after the conflicts and collaborations in broader platforms for legal change as analyzed in section 4.2. Feminists and religious women activists approached each other partially accepting the demands and sensitivities of the other, especially the headscarf rights of religious women and LGBTQ and bodily rights demanded by secular feminists. While some religious women think that this is a real change that will be long-lasting, others are suspicious of feminists' acknowledgment of headscarf rights.

There were informal platforms set up together by feminists and female religious activists, what I call *molecular* developments – deriving the term from Deleuze and Guattari (1987). These collaborations and experimentations may be regarded as significant steps in the process of

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[73] The bans were applied in some universities and faculties until 2012.
[74] BKP members complained that they cannot attract young generation (interviews 2016).

normalization of the headscarf in Turkey. One of the first such collaborations was the platform "We Protect Each Other" *(Birbirimize Sahip Çıkıyoruz)*, set up in 2008 during the climax of public and parliamentary discussions about the lifting of headscarf bans. Several secular academic feminists supported the headscarf freedom openly and collectively in this platform. The opening statement of their blog stated "Until we are all free, we protect each other" (BSÇ 2008). 1200 women from diverse backgrounds signed the declaration (Bianet 2008a). The platform has been one of the few collaborations between secular feminists and religious women's activists during the tensions over the headscarf bans. They organized protests against the bans, and other times against sexual harassment and violence throughout 2008, often in Istiklal Street in Taksim area, one of the most used location for protests in Istanbul (Bianet 2008b).

Even though the platform was a positive step for the collaboration between secular feminists and religious women in Turkey, the participants from both sides argued that there was a distrust in the group and each side questioned the boundaries and 'sincerity' *(samimiyet)* of the other side in being involved in the rights struggle of their side (Özdemir and Bayraktar 2012, 95-104). For example, Feyza Akınerdem, a feminist in the group who put on veil, claimed that the secular feminists tested their mindsets by asking whether they would meet in restaurants where they serve alcohol or by testing their positions on LGBTQ rights (interview 2015). She argued that even though she responded these questions positively for her personal account, the secular women in the group did not feel assured as if expecting a collective declaration from all religious women in the group (Interview 2015, Özdemir and Bayraktar 2012, 95-96). On the other hand, an Alevi participant got offended when the religious women asked them to break the fast together *(iftar)* in Ramadan month. She complained that Sunni people did not know the sacred days of Alevis and Christians who have historically been suppressed and she asked "why do I join their *iftar* while they are burgeoning" – referring to the Sunni Islamization context with AKP's coming to power (Özdemir and Bayraktar 2012, 100).

A much more open-ended, experimentation-based movement was also initiated at the same period. Similar to Deleuze and Guattari's *multiple roots* concept (1987), two academic feminists, Feyza Akınerdem, and late Dicle Koğacıoğlu, one of whom is religious and wears a headscarf, set up an e-mail group called "Feminists are not Sleeping" *(Feministler Uyumuyor)* in 2007. They organized two meetings bringing together around 15-20 feminist and religious women activists.

The participants call these gatherings very enlightening and as one of the few times to *touch* each other, listen to each other, as two *equals*. It was "an attempt to understand the differences and an attempt to talk about women's problems by women who think differently" (Hazar 2008). There was no imposed agenda on the meetings and women were to decide about the agenda together. This is an important reason for religious women to embrace this initiative, as they often complain about the ready-made agenda of feminists in Turkey influenced by international agendas (Akınerdem interview, Hazar 2008). It turned out to be a short-lived initiative until September 2008, as the group joined the politicized "We Protect Each Other" platform. I interpret this initiative as an attempt of a molecular movement, where binaries are invited to melt, the subjects of the meetings were open-ended and based on multiple roots.

Quotation from Nesrin Semiz, member of the BKP in Ankara and a signatory of "We Protect Each Other" declaration describes vividly the process of 'normalization'. She states that it is an important gain that feminists began to see the bans as a violation of women's rights:

> When we started [BKP] we had big problems with feminist and Kemalist (*çağdaş*)[75] women. They condescended to take us as equals[76], they never thought that we could defend women's rights. They said 'firstly you have to oppose men who suppress you and force you to veil'. They never wanted to think that we veiled with our own wish… However, when people get to know each other, 'touch' each other, [resistance] is broken. We communicate more easily now. Maybe their eyes got used to it [the headscarf]. Even though they don't support it vocally, at least they try not to say anything about it… They have seen that we also deal with [men] and struggle against our side; and, thus headscarf bans are also a violation of women's rights. This is an important gain. It took our decades, but it happened (Semiz interview, 2011)

The language of mainstream feminists in Turkey have deterred many religious women from defining themselves as feminist or Islamic feminist. The feminist movement in Turkey has

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[75] 'Contemporary women' (*çağdaş kadınlar*). It refers to Kemalist women.
[76] "Bizi direkt olarak muhatap kabul etmediler"

developed a radical feminist discourse since the 1980's unlike their counterparts in Egypt who use a more moderate liberal feminist discourse. Mainstream feminists in Turkey openly defend sexual freedom and LGBT rights. They criticize 'men' by condemning 'the male state' (*erkek devlet*) or 'the male justice' (*erkek adalet*)' and they do not prioritize family over women, unlike the mainstream Egyptian feminists, who do not talk negatively about men or family as an institution. On the opposite, they mock domestic responsibilities of women like house-work and child-care in their slogans.

Many religious activists – including those who are feminist – express discontent with the mainstream feminist discourse in Turkey. For example, Tuksal argues that popular slogan "My body is mine!" (*Bedenim benimdir*) in feminist discourse in Turkey does not make sense in a religious mindset which accepts that the body belongs to God and only the usage rights are for people and this type of discourse "devalues the experiences of religious women" (interview 2016). Feminist Feyza Akınerdem confesses that there is a tension "between the sexual freedom demand of feminism and the fact that Muslim women could never demand that." She adds that "the fact that the sexual relationship should be experienced under legal terms [in Islam] brings the marriage". She asks that whether the marriage has to bring 'this kind of a family' referring to violence and inequalities in the family. She adds that they discuss the space between 'marriage' and 'family' in the young generation of Muslim women (Ch 5) and states that the flexible relations without official marriage victimize women at the end of the day (Akinerdem interview 2015).

In terms of policy discussions on the state level, member of the Executive Committee for NGO Forum on CEDAW representing BKP, Zeynep Göknil Şanal argues that there are no more divergent issues left with other feminist NGO members in the committee:

> They completely calmed down about the headscarf issue and we calmed down about LGBTQ, we look at it from a human rights perspective. Their sexual orientation does not interest us, their right to live humanely interests us. When you say this, it is not discrimination[77]
> (Şanal interview 2016)

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[77] The word used is *ötekileştirme* which is a very common phrase in Turkish human rights discussions, literally meaning "making someone 'the other'"

Similarly, Berrin Sönmez from BKP state that there has been a rapprochement between both sides:

> From 2003 to 2013, women from feminist organizations came to understand
> that 'yes, headscarf bans are also one of the problems of women'. [They
> realized that] the bans were not an obstacle for [religious] men – whose ideas
> they were against – but only for religious women to participate in politics.
> And from our side, even though we did not like some of the slogans and words
> of secular organizations, we were aware that those slogans represent the truth
> in a very naked way (B Sönmez interview 2016).

Yet Tuksal and Ünsal are more cautious about the normalization of headscarf and rapprochement of secular women and women with headscarves. In 2010, AKDER and BKP went to New York for presentations of the shadow report of 2010 – same contestations happened with feminists.

> I see that [feminists] became further tough. Now they have begun to feel
> victimized. I have always found it normal to problematize the state of
> being veiled and the cost of it for women who do not use headscarf.
> However, after these disappointments/ruptures[78] I have become distant,
> and stopped attending meetings… I expressed this several times and
> they got offended (Tuksal interview 2016)

Fatma Bostan Ünsal is also suspicious of women's collaboration and she claims that normalization of headscarf is due to the political power. Yet she also criticizes Erdoğan for not allowing women with headscarves to be MPs until recently or heads of AKP's women's branch:

> This is the power of politics. Nobody discusses it after the politics
> (power) decide. Is there anyone now who says Kurdish should be
> banned? But when there was the ban, we saw what they did to Ahmet
> Kaya[79]. I wish it was women's [effort]. Tayyip Erdoğan is really clever,

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[78] Kırılmalar

[79] Ahmet Kaya, a singer and songwriter, was insulted by other celebrity guests in a music award event in 1999 after declaring that he will release a song and video clip in Kurdish when he received his prize. After two court cases were filed against him, he went to exile in France and died in 2000.

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he said [to feminists] 'first establish women to women equality.' (Ünsal interview 2015)

The Third Women's NGO's Forum in 2013 was an upsetting example that could prove the suspicious women right that there had been not much change in ten years on the side of the secular women. The forum was organized in June 2013 by the Flying Broom to write CEDAW report. The forum coalesced around more than 600 women from organizations all around Turkey for three days in a hotel complex outside Ankara. The forum resembled 'a women's parliament' with an almost mirror representation of society with all its conflicts as one participant put it (field notes 2013).

The forum presented in a shocking way the still tense power struggles and distance between different women's groups in Turkey. Especially the secular Kemalist-nationalist (*ulusalcı*) women's groups protested, at times rudely, the speeches of Kurdish and religious women[80]. Positive outcome was to see some other feminists who were supportive of the suppressed women groups. Women forum reflected the same tensions and tendencies in the political arena in Turkey. Gezi protests were still going on during the forum and the political camps around the protests were visible among different women's groups. The polarization of the protests might have made women more aggressive compared to their actions during their routine NGO work.

On the last day of the forum, several women with headscarves from the workshop 'Political Participation of Women' protested the final document of their workshop. The document did not mention de facto headscarf ban in the parliament. They claimed that other women did not include it despite their wish and objection. In the "Discriminations against Women with Headscarves" workshop there were dozen women, some of whom do not use the headscarf. The group prepared a report to be read in the last day from the stage and to be published. This workshop was constructive as women who did not use the headscarf had a chance to understand the problems of women with headscarves better.

At the same time, women who did not use headscarves raised concerns about the widespread expressions to describe women without and with headscarves, respectively as 'open'

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[80] A Kurdish woman's speech was interrupted with the sounds of forks hitting the plates after she used the word Kurdistan to describe the South East region. The organizing committee intervened and she could finish her speech.

(*açık*) or 'closed' (*kapalı*). In this language, there is a connotation for women who do not use headscarf as if they are not dressed 'enough'. An accepted definition in feminist movements has been '*başörtülü*' and '*başörtüsüz*' which are adjectives meaning 'with headscarf' and 'without headscarf'. These were also the definitions used by 'We Protect Each Other' platform (BSÇ 2008). The workshop participants, with and without headscarves, agreed to denounce the widely used 'open' and 'closed' expressions.

Other definitions which were problematized in the gathering were pious (*dindar)* or believer *(inanan)* which were often used by WIMs for self-definition. During the general presentations, a woman with headscarf was protested by Kemalist women after she described themselves as "believer women" (*inanan kadınlar*). Kemalist women's groups objected to her by shouting "Aren't we believers too?" Indeed, with 'pious' or 'religious' definition, there is a risk of categorizing the rest of women as unreligious. Women from the WGT had published an earlier statement under the name 'we, as religious women' (*dindar kadınlar*) (Haber 7, 2008); however, they later referred themselves as 'women who get together' in the coming blogs. Nevertheless, defining themselves as religious has been very common among WIMs when they want to show their positionality.

In the end, the report of "Discriminations against Women with Headscarves" workshop concluded with a hopeful note invented by an Alevi participant in the workshop: "Don't approach with prejudice, but with greeting".[81] While the overall forum manifested the still existing resistance of Kemalist women to the headscarves and Kurdish identity, the majority of feminists and Kurdish women in the forum supported the headscarf freedom which was a positive sign for empowerment. A religious human rights activist from Bursa, Fatma Özkaya Çiftçi, described colorfully the normalization of headscarf during the open-microphone session: "We who cannot tolerate each other, thank God, are over fifty and will pass away in twenty years, but our children are friends at the level of BFF (*kanka*) and they will create a better world, God willing" (field notes 2013). On the other hand, women who do not use headscarf had the chance to discuss the costs of particular definitions about women with headscarves on themselves. It seems that women in Turkey will need to engage in more of these discussions in an increasing Islamizing discursive context.

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[81] Peşin hüküm verme, selam ver

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Diversification of WIMs

A noteworthy result of the relaxation of bans for women's Islamic movements is an increase in the variety of political causes. Founder of the Hazar Association, Ayla Kerimoglu claims that they began to see the problems of 'the other' more after the relaxation of headscarf bans:

> We could concern ourselves with others' problems only after [solving] our problems. The most important success of the republican ideology was to divide the public as Alevi people, Kurds, pious people, Islamists, or Armenians. It made each of them 'the other of the other'. We always saw each other as the other….Only with this government we realized that there is a Kurdish problem, Alevi problem, Armenian problem. We could find the opportunities to concern ourselves more closely with our country. This is a very big opportunity. (Kerimoğlu interview, 2015)

One of the most popular examples of this diversification that Kerimoğlu talks about is the signature campaign in a blog named 'We are not free yet' (*Henüz Özgür Olmadık)*. Only three days after the parliament voted for the constitutional change to lift the bans in universities in 2008, three university students with headscarves (Havva Yılmaz, Hilal Kaplan, Neslihan Akbulut) initiated a signature campaign. They wrote that as Muslim women they will not be happy for entering universities with their headscarves until the problems of 'discriminated' (*ötekileştirilmiş*)[82] segments in society are also resolved such as of Kurds, Alevis or religious minorities (HÖO 2008). Havva Yılmaz argued that they wanted to go against a "hierarchy of importance" among societal problems and show that they support causes of 'others' when both secular supporters of the ban and liberal opponents of it agreed that the bans were not the most important problem in Turkey (interview 2015). She explained that they had prejudices about themselves whether there would be enough women with headscarves who would sign the text, as it addressed some of the most sensitive political subjects in Turkey (Yılmaz interview 2015). However, the campaign became so popular among female Islamist intellectuals and activists that the initiators later turned the project

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[82] Literally: "the people who are regarded as 'the other'"

into a book. The signature campaign "We are not free yet" was an initial signal that women's Islamic movements cannot be limited to headscarf issue in Turkey.

Initial Dissents from the Government and Conservative Islamism: Online Signature Campaigns of Women who Get Together

Signature campaigns of the group Women who Get Together (WGT) are other remarkable contributions of religious women on 'others' rights in Turkey. Since 2008, WGT published nine[83] online blogs open to signature for different public issues that were at the heart of democratization in Turkey. The initial signatories are mostly consisted of female professors, writers and human rights activists and journalists. A summary of the blogs with their main issue, theme and addressed parties can be found in the Appendix. All of the blogs are dedicated to human rights violations in Turkey and one about Palestine.

I argue that the diversification of issues within WIMs is a sign of empowerment of women in Turkey. Eluding themselves from the confined areas of debates on headscarf, the Women who Get Together has become one of the few religious women's groups who publicly defend and take action for "others" rights in Turkey by dissenting from the government and conservative Islamism. Despite the problematic language in some of them, the blogs have been an important contribution to the democratic discourse in Turkey.

First of all, the blogs of WGT frequently employed internationally accepted notions of human rights, democracy, rule of law, and 'civilianization' (*sivilleşme*). The last concept has significance in countries which had histories of military rule and it refers to the demands to make the rule more 'civilian'. For the WGT, democratization also mean to face the injustices towards the minorities and create a country where there will be no discrimination towards the ethnic and religious minorities and women. The concept of human rights and then- 'democratization process'[84] in Turkey were frequently referenced.

Secondly, besides direct Islamic references, the most frequent concepts in the blogs are 'justice' (*adalet*) 'conscience' (*vicdan*) and 'living together'. 'Justice' also has an Islamic

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[83] There are two more blogs that were published under a different platform name.

[84] Reforms made during EU accession negotiations as well as AKP's initiatives to curtail military power and 'Kurdish opening' *(Kürt Açılımı)*

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resonance. Emotional language enables the movements to maintain solidarity and 'transform claims into action' (Tarrow 2011, 153). The blogs used a very sentimental language with vivid and graphic descriptions and references to human emotions, which has been common in women's movements worldwide (Ferree and Mueller 2009). Due to their identity as both women and religious, they are able to use such emotional language without restraints. They frequently defined justice and benevolence as emotions that are inside the human essence.

Related to this, in the earlier blogs, they addressed PM Erdoğan in a polite tone and remind him of 'the sense of justice' in a 'sisterly' way. This tone changed drastically in the subsequent blogs around 2011 (especially in the blogs about Uludere Massacre and 'MP with headscarf campaign'). In these blogs, WGT put a clear distance between them and the government.

The blogs of WGT depict a tension between the ideal Islam and existing practices. A common analysis in the literature suggests that while Islamist women try to alter their contract with the state, they promote a contract with God (Arat 1998; 2000, Moghissi 1999). Arat argues that in the sacred contract with God, it is God who dictates the rules, thus these women may actually limit the capacity to shape their lives (2000, 284). Another line of argument instead suggests that knowledge and human agency is always subjective and that we cannot dismiss the agency of the religious women (Mahmood 2002). WGT shows that 'negotiations' within religion is possible as they emphasize 'positive' Islamic principles such as diversity, respect to life and justice.

Kurdish issue

I analyze two of the three blogs that deal with the Kurdish issue: the death of 12 years old Ceylan Önkol in 2009 and Uludere bombing in 2011. Since the first attack of the Kurdish guerilla (PKK) in 1984, the Kurdish problem has been the biggest political and social problem in Turkey. In 2009, 14 years old Ceylan Önkol died in Diyarbakır due to an unknown explosion near her house. WGT asked how Turkey can start a "democratic opening that benefits the Kurdish people when the government deprive a support message from the mothers of Ceylans." WGT addresses the prime minister Erdoğan in a kind tone (addressing him as 'our dear prime minister' '*sayın başbakanımız*') and ask him to give the family a support call and assure them to find out the perpetrators, like the way he supports the families of children in Palestine. They use a very emotional language in the

blog repeatedly referring to the words of Ceylan's mother and questioning the 'sense of justice and benevolence' (*iyilik ve adalet duygusu)* of the governers.

The discursive style of their blogs changed in a few years' time. In December 2011, Turkish Air Force bombed a group of Kurdish citizens who were smuggling goods from Iraq, mistaking them for the guerilla. 34 people, mostly teenagers, died in the airstrike. The incident known as Uludere (Roboski) massacre received tremendous reaction from the public after it was publicized in social media (there was a censorship on mainstream media). WGT organized a field trip to Uludere to give condolences to the families and published a blog with a slogan "We want justice!" In the blog, they asked for a transparent and just legal procedure for the incident. They called the government to include 'others' problems into its agenda like the headscarf problem that was being solved:

> While the government has been trying to open up the tightly sealed boxes in which there is our pain [referring to headscarf bans], if now it tightly seals our brothers into another box who were shattered in Uludere, we will not believe that these boxes are being opened with the intention to make this country a home for all of us to live together!" (WGT-Uludere 2011)

Instead of appealing to Erdoğan in a sisterly manner as in the previous blog, the blog used a critical language against the government by referring to it with the negative connotation '*muktedir'* (potent)[85], and they complained about government's 'bragging' to legitimize the violence. However, using the Turkish name of the town Uludere, instead of the original Kurdish name Roboski hints that WGT in general was not sensitized to the demands of the Kurdish political movements. This was also visible in the women's gathering they organized in Batman in 2004.

Religious minorities

Two other blogs, one on the anniversary of the Sivas Massacre[86] and the other about Hilal Kaplan also have inclusive messages for religious minorities in Turkey. In the Sivas Massacre, 35 people, most of whom were Alevi artists and intellectuals were killed by ultra-religious Sunni groups who

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[85] *Muktedir* is often used to describe the rules which use its power to supress people
[86] Women who Get Together in the Sivas Mourning (2010)

set fire their hotel in 1993[87]. The artists were invited to Sivas, a city in the central east of Turkey for an Alevi-Bektashi festival. WGT engages in a self-criticism about their inactiveness and silence on the subordination and killings of Alevi minority[88] in 1993 as Sunni women. The blog very vividly states self-responsibility:

> In a state of shock, I was not responsible enough to define and question that atrocity, when I was rebelling against the accusations [for that matter] when Sunni Muslims were shown responsible for an atrocity that human mind cannot grasp. That fire has also touched me and seared me. If I had had the chance to go back to July 2, I would have stood at the door of the *Madımak Hotel* to be a wall. (WGT-Sivas 2010)

After the self-assessment and self-criticism, the blog ends with wishes for a country in which there will be no "atrocity/darkness (*zulmet*) that can enslave the masses." Despite good intentions, the blog does not directly name the perpetrators but prefers to define the act as *zulmet* and *zulüm*, which in Turkish political usage, refer to oppression, atrocity and tyranny. There is an implication that *zulmet* as an outside force captured the imagination of the mass and made them violent, thereby the blog blurs the agents of the violence. The incident is often referred as a massacre (*katliam*) in Turkey, but the blog does not define it as such. Secondly, they use the word '*mazlum*' for the victims – which is a broader word for oppressed people (derived from *zulüm*). The word *mazlum* put the victims in a more generic position of oppression, than naming them as victims (*kurban*) of this specific incident. *Mazlum* also hides the identity of the killed people who were mostly Alevi intellectuals and artists. In contrast, Alevi groups often refer to them as 'Sivas martyrs' (*Sivas şehitleri*).

WGT also supported diversity and 'living in peace' with the people from different religions. In another blog, they backed one of their members, Hilal Kaplan, a journalist who was photographed in a church and became a target by an ultra-conservative Islamist news site called *Habervaktim*. The WGT showed support to Hilal Kaplan by saying that "we acknowledge the

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[87] The mob was especially galvanized with the presence of Aziz Nesin, a famous atheist writer and humorist. Nesin was planning to publish Salman Rushie's Satanic Verses to Turkish. He survived the attack.

[88] Alevi people is a minority religious group in Turkey, and they have historically suffered from violent attacks by mobs and by the state. In Dersim massacre between 1937-38, 13.000 people (most of whom Alevi Zaza) were killed by the state and 12.000 people were subjected to forced migration

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church as a religious place and we visit it." Again, the emphasis here is on living together with the differences in society. They state that:

> To declare being in a church a "crime" and to question our 'Muslimhood' is not the business of *Habervaktim*. Moreover, this language is also hurting and discriminating the Christian citizens who make up the community of the church." (WGT-Hilal Kaplan 2012)

The blog also stated that the religious and ethnic monotypification is a project of the nation-state and it is against the Islamic principles.

First Mobilized Dissent from AKP, Crossing the Boundaries, and the Issue of Visibility

One of the first direct contestations of WIMs against AKP was the campaign "*No Vote If There is no Candidate with Headscarf*!" The campaign called political parties to nominate women with headscarves as members of parliament before the 2011 general elections in Turkey. The chief target was AKP which was the governing party for eight years and which represented the most of the Islamist constituency. The organizers of the campaign were members of *"Women who Get Together"* especially from BKP. However, some WGT members did not want to participate and lend their group name for this protest. Therefore, the participating women organized the campaign under a new platform named 'We want a deputy with headscarf' (*Başörtülü Vekil İstiyoruz İnisiyatifi*).

This campaign was part of the efforts of the redefinition of public space by women with headscarves. It was the first and largest campaigns that targeted at the Parliament for headscarf freedom. Around this campaign, women made several press statements, organized public protests in front of the Parliament, lobbied and created a blog. Some feminist organizations like *KA.DER*[89] and some feminists from 'Feminists are not Sleeping' group such as Nil Mutluer who do not use headscarf also supported the campaign.

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[89] Kadın Adayları Destekleme Derneği (Association for Supporting Female Candidates)

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Even though, there has been no legal obstacle to enter the parliament with a headscarf, the expulsion of Merve Kavakçı from the parliament in 1999 and the subsequent closure of her party, had prevented the parties to nominate women with headscarves. In the blog, women first of all, used a rights discourse (No Vote 2011a). Journalist Hilal Kaplan reminded that women have right to be elected to parliament since 1934 in Turkey, but de facto 60 % of women cannot use this right (Güneş 2011). Secondly, the women sarcastically referred to their barriers (*had*) in public space referring to ex-Prime Minister Ecevit's fierce rebuke to Merve Kavakçı in 1999[90]. They declared that now they 'crossed their authorized boundaries' (*haddimizi aşıp*) that the secular state and social circles imposed upon them 'by asking for their rights' (No Vote 2011c).

Thirdly, they referred to direct representation. For them, the democracy means reflection of the society in the parliament. Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal states that "it is not right that the parliament is *that sterile*" meaning that there is only female MPs who do not use headscarves (No Vote 2011a). She argued that with the inclusion of the women with headscarves in the parliament and other public bodies, they will be able to fight the visible and non-visible problems they face in their own 'neighborhoods' better. Tuksal and Cihan Aktaş stated that the representation of women with headscarf was crucial to fight for other discriminations that they face in the public space (No Vote 2011a).

The campaigner women not only challenged AKP, but also *men* in their religious community (*mahalle*). The campaign was harshly criticized by journalists and opinion-makers from AKP government circles. As Nesrin Semiz mentions, what is interesting in this concept of 'authorized boundaries' is that men in their own religious circles also criticize them when they want to step out of these boundaries (Interview, 2011). For example, Islamist writer Ali Bulaç in the popular Islamist Zaman newspaper[91] harshly criticized this campaign by blaming women as spies who wanted the Islamist party to lose votes and aimed to destroy the 'Islamist movement' within:

> Most of the people in this platform have good will and they struggle for
> women with headscarves to use their political rights. I exempt these ladies.
> However there are some among them, who aim to destroy the Islamist circles

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[90] Ecevit said: Please explain this lady her limits; i.e. put this lady in her place (*Lütfen bu hanıma haddini bildiriniz*)

[91] It was a Fethullah Gülen newspaper that has been under government control since March 2016.

and movements inside... Those 'white spies' have to some extent succeeded in recruiting and changing the mental map with fifth column activities….. In my opinion, spies[92] are creating a new plot against AKP. AKP may still face a party closure lawsuit. (Timeturk 2011).

Bulaç criticized the campaign by claiming 'some ladies' make the headscarf a commercial and social status object and they victimize themselves to seek rents from the government. Bulaç was also critical that headscarf was being defended not anymore on religious grounds, but on women's rights, personal choice and freedom grounds inspired by feminism (Timeturk 2011).

Responding to Bulac, women in the blog maintained that "we are known by our names and profession in the society" and that they had a rightful demand (No Vote 2011b). Women attempted to use their *earlier* public visibility to legitimize their demands- as many of them were recognized academicians, writers or journalists such as Yıldız Ramazanoğlu, Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, Cihan Aktaş, Nihal Bengisu Karaca and Hilal Kaplan. Still their demands were rendered illegitimate from both religious and secular sides. During the elections, no party nominated a woman with headscarf. The campaigners in Ankara openly supported an independent candidate with headscarf, journalist Aynur Bayram, and they managed the election campaign together with her including collectively renting an office and facilitating her daily commute in the city (B Sönmez interview 2016). Bayram could not receive sufficient votes to become an MP.

In 2013, Ali Bulac apologized from the campaigner women and claimed that if they would do a campaign again he would be the first supporter (T24, 2013). This change may be explained by the division between AKP and Gülen movement since 2012. Bulaç has been jailed since the coup-attempt in July 2016.

Fatma Bostan Ünsal, member of BKP and also founding member of AKP is known for her publicized criticisms to AKP governments. She declared that she would nominate herself as an independent candidate in the 2011 national elections if the party did not propose a candidate with a headscarf, in one of the consultation meetings of AKP. This remark brought her popularity and visibility on mainstream media channels "as an AKP member who challenges (*rest çeken*) AKP." However, in a TV interview in 2010 with the famous anchorman Fatih Altaylı she argued that she

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[92] "İyi saatte olsunlar"

did not challenge Erdoğan in that meeting. Arguing that AKP was not a one-man's party, she stated that she offered to be an independent candidate *not to risk* the party's existence with a possible party closure law-suit by seculars (Altaylı 2010).

This defense of Ünsal of AKP and Erdoğan hints the complex nature of the party, as well as women's relationship with it. Bearing this complexity, Ayla Kerimoglu, founder of Hazar, who did not take part in this campaign, also defended AKP and Erdoğan by highlighting the party closure case against the party due to the headscarf bans. She argued that AKP was careful not to create a social tension when they tried to remove the bans and they tried to convince the people and other political parties in the process. For her, this turned out to be a durable solution:

> Rather than acting quickly on the issue of headscarf, I find it wiser to act
> more cautiously and in a long-lasting way – to minimize the problem areas
> in the country and also to decrease the difficulties that MP candidate
> women with headscarves may face... I do not think that there is a tendency
> [in the government] such as "these are women; so they are not important
> and it is OK if I resolve this ban later". I believe that the governers (*kadro*)
> who had wives and daughters with headscarves cannot have such a
> mentality (Kerimoglu interview 2015).

Another WGT participant who did not take part in the campaign was discontent that some women seemed to act on their own interests to become members of parliament, while the aim of WGT was to do 'good things' for society (Anonymous interview 2015). Her main reason for not attending was to focus on her studies that she had to postpone for a long time due to the bans, but also her perception about a rent-seeking attitude of some women in the campaign (Anonymous interview 2015).

With a clear goal, an organized campaign, and a following open support for a specific candidate, this campaign could be regarded as a molar movement which did not produce an immediate outcome.[93] The campaign did not reach its goal in the 2011 elections, namely having

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[93] With a cabinet decree in 2013, AKP repealed the article that barred female public employees from wearing headscarf in the regulation of 1982 about the outfit of public employees (Regulation 2013). Following the decree, four women MP's entered into parliament with headscarves in October 2013 after their return from a visit to al-

women representatives in the parliament with headscarf. However, there are also molecular dimensions of the campaign. First of all, the fear of dissenting visibility played a crucial role in the formation of this campaign. Organizers could not use the name WGT in the campaign, as some members did not want to be in a challenging position against AKP and some did not believe in the campaign. In a way, the participants of the campaign risked their reputation in the eyes of the government circles and decreased their relative leverage power vis-à-vis the party. Calculating these risks, not every participant of the WGT joined the campaign. Tuksal argues that a widespread fear of exclusion immobilize women with headscarves:

> Due to the bans, opportunities of *the movement* were so limited for many women. They had to cling to solidarity networks to do *something*. To be excluded from these networks meant that they would not do anything. So they could not cross the red-lines and this is very understandable (Tuksal interview, 2016, my emphasis).

With this immobilizing fear of exclusion among religious women, the campaign sowed the seeds of first divisions in the larger network of WGT. It could be regarded as a molecular movement in its experimentation of a direct confrontation with the power, a power that came out from religious and conservative base, a power that claimed to represent them, and a power that had been a solidarity network for them for decades. The protesting women were disappointed by a lack of support from most of their male counterparts during the campaign, like in the late 1990's.

In this chapter, I have shown the evolution of WIMs in Turkey for the last 20 years especially focusing on the mobilization against the headscarf bans, changing relations with the mainstream feminists, the normalization of the headscarf and diversification within WIMs. The chapter has traced the *political* empowerment of women who define themselves as religious, which has been an important part of women's politico-religious empowerment. The next chapter will particularly concentrate on the *religious* empowerment of women in Turkey, which is a very critical component of women's politico-religious empowerment.

Ka'bah (Guardian 2013). Without objection of the opposition parties, they entered the parliament with their headscarves. The decree did not change the article about the outfit of military and police personnel, as well as judges and public prosecutors. Police personnel were allowed to wear headscarf in 2016. As of 2017, women with headscarves can assume any position including the post of judge and military ranks.

Chapter 5: The Convergence of Islam and Feminism and Politico-Religious Empowerment in Turkey

This chapter concentrates on the religious empowerment of women in Turkey, which is a crucial component of women's politico-religious empowerment. It deals with women's contributions and responses to debates in Turkey regarding women's status within Islam. The chapter sheds light on the movement opportunities and obstacles in front of women for this matter as well as the different discourses and styles within WIMs regarding empowerment. The chapter addresses the discussions of Islamic feminism or the convergence of Islam and feminism, as Fatima Seedat (2013) puts it.

5.1 First convergences

The headscarf bans, lack of access to Islamic knowledge and fear of being ostracized from the religious community have disabled women to have a sustained, organized and loud voice in matters of women and Islam in Turkey. One of the first attempts of bridging feminism and Islam in Turkey was in 1987 when Mualla Gülnaz Kavuncu, Tuba Tuncer, Elif H. Toros and Yıldız Ramazanoglu separately responded to an article of nationalist-Islamist Ali Bulaç in *Zaman* newspaper. Bulaç had criticized the emerging feminist movement in Turkey in his article named "*The Short Mind of Feminist Ladies*"[94]. The three women from nationalist-Islamist background like Bulaç, criticized him and defended feminism. Kavuncu argues that Bulac's reference to 'short mind' referred to the derogatory phrase for women in Turkish: 'long haired, short minded'[95] (interview 2016).

Kavuncu was among the first Islamist women who had joined the first feminist conscious-raising gatherings in the late 1980's in Ankara, the Thursday (*Perşembe*) group. Kavuncu read translations from by Simone de Bevouir, Betty Friedan and Egyptian feminist Nawal al-Saadawi. After the debates in the *Zaman* newspaper, then-popular *Nokta* journal invited Kavuncu and Tuncer for a special issue about feminism and joined them in a conversation with feminists Aksu Bora and Kumru Toktamış. Kavuncu recounts that they received a lot of criticism and attacks from their own circles after these publications. The critiques questioned their Muslimhood, and whether they performed ritual prayer (*namaz*). They also attacked Kavuncu's preference of putting on and

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[94] Ali Bulaç, "Feministlerin Bayanların Kısa Aklı," *Zaman*, March 17, 1987.
[95] Saçı uzun, aklı kısa

off headscarf in different stages of her life (interview 2016). Adding to private life hassles like marriage, children and divorce, they winced from these backlashes and entered into a silence period. Kavuncu argued that they were unprepared and did not know enough about Islam and they wanted to prepare themselves further for discussions in this silence period. They continued to meet and read among themselves without being publicized (interview 2016).

Networks of feminism in Islam and the Dissenting WIMs

There are institutional networks of modernist religious interpretations in Turkey. Faculty of Divinity in Ankara University is known for its modernist approach to Islam. It is referred as the Ankara school *(Ankara ekolü)* to indicate the modernist approach. When it was established in 1949, it was the only faculty of theology in the new republic[96]. The aim of the government was to enable scientific studies of religious matters and set up a theology department similar to examples in the West (Ankara Divinity, nd,b). The faculty aims to pair traditional Islamic values with 'the advantages of critical thinking in religious matters' (Ankara Divinity,nd). Openness to criticism and change are highlighted as the main mission and vision of the Faculty.

In the 1990's professors of the faculty translated works of Islamist reformist scholars like Fazlur Rahman (Aktay 2005, 85). There has been an influence of translations from Islamist thinkers on Turkish Islamists, such as Sayyid Qutb from Egypt, Fazlur Rahman from Pakistan, and Ali Shariati from Iran. Many Islamist intellectuals were influenced by these sources (interviews 2015-2016).

Secondly, BKP (Capital City Women's Platform Association) has been the main hub of religious women who have 'a woman's perspective' in Ankara. Although not all members define themselves as feminist, the actions and discourse of the association are close to Islamic feminism. BKP's member profile is mainly composed of intellectual, employed and retired women. Most of them are university graduates, while some women are pursuing MA and PhD degrees (personal

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[96] Faculty of Theology at Darülfunun (Istanbul University) in Istanbul was originally founded in 1912 but later abolished in 1919 due to the pressures from the educators of *madrasas* (Ankara Divinity nd, b). The faculty was reopened up in 1924 after the foundation of the republic in 1923 and abolishment of *sharia* and *khilafat* in 1924 (Ankara Divinity nd, b). It provided higher religious education for nine years until the abolishment of Darulfunun in 1933. The faculty was turned into Islamic Studies Institute (*İslam Tetkikleri Enstitüsü*) until its reestablishment in 1992 (İstanbul Theology, 2013).

interviews 2011-2016). There are several female theologians in the association, Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, Hatice Güler, Emine Noyan Eravcı, Fatma Akdokur, and Nuriye Duran Özsoy.

The most well-known woman in Turkey regarding the issue of women and Islam is Dr. Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, one of the founders of BKP and a graduate of the Ankara School. Her feminist approach to Islam brought her popularity in media. She has often been invited to panels and TV shows on the subject since the early 2000's. Tuksal calls herself a 'religious feminist' (*dindar feminist*) (interview 2016; Özkan 2005). She does not define herself as an Islamist, but she sees her feminism limited with her religiosity, that is why she prefers 'religious feminist' definition (interview 2016).

She wrote her PhD thesis (1998) on the anti-women discourses in hadith literature which was published as a book in 2000 named "*Reflections of Anti-Women Rhetoric in Islamic Tradition*" *(Kadın Karşıtı Söylemin İslam Geleneğindeki İzdüşümleri).* In the book, Tuksal invalidates anti-women hadiths based on a specific methodology: She takes her reference point as 'subject/agent women' (*özne kadın*) which she claims to be revealed in the 'totality of the Quran' (Tuksal 2012, 46). She takes the 'subject women' in the Quran as a yardstick to interpret 'women depicted as (bad) object' in Islamic narratives, mainly in hadiths (Tuksal 2012, 46). Tuksal criticizes famous Islamic scholars like Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Egyptian Mohammed al-Ghazali and Abdulhalim Abu Shaqqa for having a double standard in their methodology when interpreting women's issues. She argues that they accept hadiths derogatory for women if they fit true hadith *(sahih hadis)* criteria, while in other issues they do not look for true hadith criteria if the hadith contradicts the spirit of *sunnah/ sünnet*. Tuksal argues that these scholars, who are known for their modernist approach otherwise, cannot get rid of 'patriarchal determinism' (Tuksal 2012, 43-46).

Significantly, Tuksal accepts the existence of a 'patriarchal background' (*ataerkil fon*) in the Quran (Tuksal 2000) unlike many other religious people in Turkey. She wrote in her book:

> …[T]he patriarchal structure in minds, language and worldviews; and dogmatic judgments that influence this structure have an important place in all cultures. It is a clear matter of fact that there is an attitude presented in the Quran that reflects completely the patriarchal custom of the first addressee

generation; that sometimes rejects it, and that often tries to keep it within reasonable bounds (Tuksal 2012, 78, my translation).

Hence, Tuksal advocates a historicist approach to the Quran in her public speeches and publications. Many scholars from Ankara school agree on the historicist approach to religious sources. Some feminist Muslim scholars like Kecia Ali also argues that the Quran is an androcentric text – but not misogynist (2006, 132). Several BKP members also carry a historicist perspective. Former head of the Social Status Department at the General Directorate on the Status of Women (KSGM), Dr. Zeynep Göknil Şanal argues that reforms are necessary for countries that apply Islamic family law:

> My idea is that the Quran is a guide. All the examples in the Quran were prepared for the people and minds of that era. If we do not update it according to today's people and minds, we are lost. They try to rule today based on the mindset of 600's… Then you extinguish the Quran's eternal characteristics (Şanal interview 2016)

A BKP member, professor of Political Science, human rights activists and co-founder of AKP, Fatma Bostan Ünsal states that Turkish civil code that gives equal inheritance to male and female siblings represents a correct vision that is in line with Islam's message:

> One of the most misunderstood aspects of Islam is to see women only as part of the household (*ev içi*). Islam exalts women to the agent status. In a period in history where men brought the booty (*ganimet*), women were introduced with inheritance rights. Today we are in a very different economic level. Women work equally and sometimes more [than men]. The civil code enabled equal inheritance, but due to the wrong understanding of Islam in society, there are still problems in inheritance for girls. The message of Islam (*İslam'ın tebliği*) has still not been understood for 1400 years" (Kanal 5, 2015).

The head of BKP in 2011, Nesrin Semiz similarly highlighted the role of men in stripping women of the rights they were endowed by Allah in a partially historicist manner:

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"[F]or a Muslim woman it is regarded shameful (*ayıp*) to say 'I want my rights', as Islam has given her all rights....What is being overlooked here is that men who apply the rights have taken back all of them from us." (Semiz interview 2011)

Thirdly, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı – Diyanet* in brief) is the state institution that regulates the activities of mosques and the content of sermons all over the country. It works as a consultancy body in religious affairs without legal enforcement. Established in 1924, Diyanet was attached to the prime minister and mosque imams and employees became state employees to control their education and finances and to monitor religious activities (Mardin 1991; 97-98, 123). Diyanet promotes a moderate understanding of Sunni Islam. Yet, there are problems from a women's perspective in Diyanet, as it often promotes traditional gender roles for women. For example, Diyanet often refers to women as 'mothers, sisters, wives and daughters' in its official *hutbe's (ar. khuṭba).*[97]

Women in WGT (Women who Get Together) discussed the stance of Diyanet on women's issues at the 3rd Women's Gathering of WGT in Antalya in 2003. The gathering was hosted by Mediterranean Ladies Culture and Help Association (*Akdeniz Hanımlar Kültür ve Yardımlaşma Derneği*) and organized by BKP and the women's branch of Diyanet's workers' union (*Türk-Diyanet Vakıf Sen Kadın Kolları*). 119 people joined the gathering where 22 conservative or Islamist NGO's were represented (BKP 2003). The gathering focused on the experiences of female employees in Diyanet with the idea that the Diyanet's stance towards women, in general, would be clearer in its treatment of female employees (BKP 2003). At the end of the gathering, they wrote a report about the perception of women by Diyanet and religious jurisdictions (*fıkıh/fiqh*) in general. The report concluded that Diyanet's perception of women was problematic; the male employees do not treat female (*bayan*)[98] counterparts in an equitable relation; and the equality principle is not applied between male and female workers. The report also states that:

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[97] Friday sermons delivered in mosques

[98] *Bayan* is a modern version of *hanım* (lady). Feminists have problematized *bayan*, arguing that it is used to replace *kadın* (*woman*) which has acquired a sexual connotation, since the difference between *kız* (girl) vs *kadın* (woman) refers to virgin vs non-virgin in legal and colloquial language. Hazar and BKP reports sometimes use this word to refer to woman, especially in the summary of the presentations. Most likely, they transcribed it directly from the presentations of female Diyanet employees.

> Defining women's (*kadın*) bodies with reference to men's bodies in the *fıkıh* literature in general and in Diyanet's publications creates very serious difficulties in religious life. There is an urgent need to review the *fıkıh* issues about women with women's perspective and publish the results (BKP 2003)[99].

23 participants from Istanbul, Ankara and Bursa visited the Diyanet on March 17, 2004 to present the report to the leadership of the Directorate. This attempt is one of the first warning and suggestion to Diyanet by a religious women's movement in Turkey to correct its vision on women and treat its female employees in a respectful way. It should also be noted that the wife of the vise-president of the Directorate Dr. Mehmet Görmez was a member of BKP. In 2004, around 100 women got officially appointed for the first time as preachers (*vaize*). In 2005, Diyanet appointed two women to vice-mufti positions in two cities, which was a landmark in Muslim countries. Whether the change was for EU accession process, or response to the demands from women and women's organizations was not clear.

Visible Transgression and Murders: the case of Gonca Kuriş

Women have always been regarded as the symbol of cultural authenticity across cultures and religions (Yuval-Davis 1997, Kandiyoti 1991). For this reason, liberating discourses of women within religion or culture have been seen as a transgression and threat by conservative and fundamentalist groups. As Flavia Monceri states "…transgression has to face the usual means of exclusion at the majority's disposal: prejudice, marginalization, discrimination, physical and psychological violence, and even extermination" (2012, 31).

One acute question is whether the brutal murder of self-claimed Islamic feminist Gonca Kuriş in 1998 has made women fearful of using an Islamic feminist or religious reformist discourse in Turkey. Is it another reason that explains the lack of 'Islamic feminism' in the country besides the lagging effects of the headscarf bans? I argue that possible fears of life threats might still deter women from using a religious reformist discourse in Turkey, while the danger of being ostracized from one's own community may be more imminent.

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[99] This critique was not mentioned in Hazar's report of the same gathering

The 1990's was a period in Turkey with an increase in the number of unsolved murders of intellectuals and investigative journalists from various backgrounds including Kemalists, religious reformists, and Kurdish activists. Several scholars and lawyers with reformist or critical views on Islam were assassinated such as Bahriye Üçok, Muammer Aksoy[100] and Turan Dursun[101] in 1990. Among them, Üçok was a historian and the first female faculty member of Ankara University Theology Faculty in 1953. Coming from a secular background, she had published research on Islam, including female rulers in Muslim countries. In a TV interview in 1988, Üçok proclaimed that veiling and fasting are not must (*farz/ farḍ*) in Islam. After this, she had received threats from an organization called the 'Islamic movement' (*İslami hareket*) until her assassination in 1990. Üçok's works represent transgression from *without* – as a secular woman she often referred to Atatürk and she commented on Islam based on her academic research.[102]

Gonca[103] Kuriş's murder by Hizbullah in 1998, on the other hand, is an example of the costs of transgression from *within* and being visible with dissenting and transgressive ideas in religion. Kuriş's dissenting visibility might be more daunting for *takfīrī* groups than the secular academician Üçok, as Kuriş was a middle-class woman who was connected to the Islamist groups, including the *takfīrī* Turkish Hizbullah in the past. She was a women's rights activist and researcher in Mersin, a metropolitan city in southern Turkey on the Mediterranean coast. She joined a feminist women's organization in Mersin, Independent Women's Association (*Bağımsız Kadın Derneği*) where her aunt was the head of the association. Some members left the association after Kuriş's membership as she wore a headscarf (Demir 2000). Kuriş devoted herself to opening women's shelters and began signature campaigns against violence against women (Demir 2000).

Kuriş also organized seminars and published a research named "Women in Islam (*İslam'da Kadın)*" in 1996. In her writings and activities, she claimed that the Quran was being interpreted

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[100] Aksoy was a professor of constitutional law, Member of Parliament, and one of the founders of Atatürkist Thought Association (*Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği*).

[101] Dursun was a former imam and mufti. He resigned from his mufti position after becoming an atheist and he published books critical of religions, and Islam and the prophet Muhammad, in particular.

[102] The risks of being assassinated mainly existed for women who use a religious language in Turkey, not necessarily for the secular feminists. Feminists in Turkey do not produce a discourse within religion or try to reinterpret it. Thus, they have not been the main target of fundamentalist religious groups. However, radical feminists who did topless protests received online threats.

[103] Her official name was Konca, but she prefered using Gonca (interviews 2016).

in a dogmatic and misogynistic way by men. She reinterpreted some of the Quranic verses and questioned the hadith where women were regarded as second-class citizens (Kuriş 1996, Mason 2000). Although she wore the headscarf, she argued that it was not a requirement in Islam. This argument is a dissenting and marginal stance among Islamists (Keskin-Kozat 2003). She also argued that women could pray, read the Quran and fast during their menstrual period (Kuriş 1996, 25). She analyzed the words '*tahara/ṭahara*' (to clean) and '*eza/ādhā*' (damage, harm) in the Quran and argued that the menstrual period is not defined as something dirty to be cleaned from – as others had interpreted – but as a difficulty for females to overcome (Kuriş 1996, 25). In the introduction to her research, she lists several narratives that put women in a secondary position in religion, and she underscores that 'they' revolt against this:

> They present all the fabricated narratives as religion, especially on the women's issue… We, as Muslim women and men who read the Quran, revolt against such oppression. By disdaining us who are half of the society, you cannot explain Allah's religion to people on earth. You trapped us at home despite the fact that Allah proclaimed that we were protectors (friends) of each other as in the verse 9:71. Now we invite you to RISE UP[104], men and women all together, sisterly and brotherly, while protecting our chastity. COME OVER! TO THE HOUSE OF WELL-BEING, TO SALVATION, TO PEACE, TOGETHER AS MEN AND WOMEN. (Kuriş 1996, 1)

What put Kuriş most as a target were her TV interviews. She gave interviews in broadcast media including the biggest daily newspapers and TV channels in 1997. In her viciously edited last TV interview, her sentence "We are not descended from Adam and Eve" was aired without her earlier interpretation of the relevant references to the Quran (Mason 2000). After this, she was kidnapped and killed after nine months of captivity[105] by Turkish Hizbullah, which was a militant Islamist group in Turkey. Hizbullah proclaimed her as "a secularist-feminist and an enemy of Islam", and

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[104] *Kıyam* means rise up and revolt, and also it is the part of Islamic prayer when the prayer stands up.

[105] The majority of the newspapers and accounts state that she was tortured like other victims of Hizbullah. However, Whitney Mason gives the account of her relatives who stated that there was no signs of torture in her body (Mason 2000, 17).

that she was punished "due to her discourse and actions that were against the Quran and Allah" (Mater 2000, Yalçın 2011).

Several women, including those who knew Kuriş personally, claim that her earlier alleged participation in Hizbullah group led to her killing more than her *discourse* (anonymized personal interviews). Still the fact that she was kidnapped one month after her viciously and speculatively edited TV interview hint that being popular with a dissenting discourse and transgressive style made her a target (Mason 2000).

Kuriş represents female dissent and transgression in religion, not only due to her ideas and discourse, but also her self-confident style. She had the *double courage* to think about religion and to talk publicly and provocatively about it as a woman, the latter not being a common style and practice among intellectual and activist women in Turkey. Tuksal warned Kuriş not to give TV interviews on these issues in that political context (Tuksal 2000), possibly referring to the state's severe suppression of Islamists including the headscarf bans after February 1997. However, Kuriş insisted on doing so despite receiving threats from Hizbullah (Tuksal 2000). Her *power* was her thinking, her research, and her provocative self-confidence. She tried to open up a new *space* in religion for women. If we would regard the existing religious communities, institutions, and traditions in Turkey as a molar representation of religion, her public visibility and words would be a *molecular* movement which sprang out of this molarity. Kuriş transgressed her borders with her discourse and style; and she was kidnapped and killed in response. However, she did not prioritize the political suppression of the Islamists and headscarf bans in her public speeches. That is why I do not locate her at the transformative capacity in Table 7 below. This may explain her limited influence and legacy among WIMs in Turkey. An interviewee who knew her argued that she would have defended headscarf rights if she would be alive.

Table 7: Suggestive Table of Some WIMs' Politico-Religious Acts and Empowerment Capacities (1995-2002):

WIMs relation to political oppression / WIMs Acts in relation to mainstream religious gender order	Challenging	Members with both Inclinations /In between	Silent or Supportive
Trangressive (marginal &challenging)	**Transformative power/ empowerment capacity**	*Gonca Kuriş*	
Dissenting (mainstream&challenging)	• *BKP** • *AKDER** • *Hazar**	**Reformative power/ empowerment capacity**	
Accommodating (mainstream &confirmatory)	• *GIKAP** *(*Challenging political oppression related to headscarf bans)*		**Consolidating power/ empowerment capacity**

5.2 New Actors

Young Generation in the Convergence of Islam and feminism:

Molecular developments occurred in Turkey regarding the convergence of Islam and feminism after the lifting of headscarf bans. Diverse Muslim women's groups have emerged in the last few years – especially from the younger generation – which deal with issues like violence against women, sexual harassment, Islamic masculinities and daily problems based on patriarchy, the

Kurdish issue and anti-authoritarianism. The diversity is connected to the fact that women who use headscarves became active in universities and the public sphere in larger numbers. The choices, focus areas of female religious intellectuals and activists in Turkey have become much more varied and colorful. These women often challenge AKP for its conservative and misogynistic discourse, as well as authoritarian practices. They have engaged in contestations with the government over gender equality and lifestyle discussions. Some supported the Gezi Park protests against the government in the summer of 2013.

One of the groups that reflect this diversity of young generation of religious women's activity is *Muslim Initiative against the Violence against Women* (*Kadına Şiddete Karşı Müslümanlar İnisiyatifi*) – (the Initiative hereafter). It is the first religious women's group in Turkey whose primary objective is to fight violence against women from an Islamic perspective. It was founded by several young women (and a few men) who defined themselves as Muslims in March 2013[106]. The members are mostly undergraduate or graduate university students and working women. Although it was a very new organization, they received a widespread media coverage[107] during the Gezi Park protests, as they organized two demonstrations and signed a declaration to condemn the harassments of female detainees alongside four leading Islamic-oriented rights organizations (BKP 2013).[108]

The Initiative could be regarded as Islamic feminism in action and mobilization, while not all members agree with the definition. It fights for the 'correct' representation of Islam in their public and private activities. The initiative deals with violence against women, harassment and rape, divorce (which is known as 'the most disliked halal[109]' in Islamic circles), femicides after divorce, the definition of women as *fitne* (ar. *fitna*, meaning sexual provocation or social disorder) in some Islamic resources, and the silence of pious society (*dindar kesim*) on violence against women. They propose solutions such as supporting women's shelters and women's and men's

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[106] The Initiative meetings are only open to women by 2017, although it was open to men in its start (participant observation 2013).

[107] Including diverse popular newspapers: liberal *Radikal*, Islamist *Yeni Şafak*, Kemalist *Sözcü*, leftist *Sol*.

[108] The initiative has connections to other Islamic human rights organizations such as Mazlum-Der or Islamic left-wing groups such as Labor and Justice Platform (*Emek ve Adalet Platformu*). Some members work both in the initiative and these Islamist platforms. The initiative has been using common spaces with Labor and Justice Platform and Eğitim-Bir-Sen, an Islamist trade union of educators in Fatih.

[109] Halal refers to acceptable deeds according to Islamic rules and rituals

equal role in family and society. They use Islamic language against violence against women and harassment with colorful stickers and stencils. They have organized and joined public protests against violence against women and public awareness desks for women's shelters (see the Appendix for a list of their activities in 2013).

Violence against women (*kadına karşı şiddet*) has been one of the hottest subject in Turkey for the last ten years[110] thanks to the collective mobilization of feminists since 1987[111]. Between 2009 and 2013, 155 women on average were killed yearly in Turkey mostly by their husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends (KCDP 2013). Mainstream feminist women's groups have succeeded in the problematization of violence against women in the media and making it an urgent political issue. State institutions, political parties, municipalities, secular or religious oriented NGO's have worked against violence against women with research commissions, campaigns, projects, and panels. Among WIMs, BKP and Hazar, and pro-government ones such as KADEM and AKDER have also recently prioritized this topic.

Street campaigning against violence against women with an Islamic discourse is new in Turkey. The street stickers of the Initiative are very original in this sense. They mainly warn the Muslim men with Islamic references:

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[110] Directorate General on the Status of Women (KSGM) prepared a three-year long National Action Plan in 2006 to combat violence against women (Ucar 2009, 8).

[111] First feminist mobilization against 'battery' (*Dayağa karşı dayanışma yürüyüşü*) was organized in Ankara in 1987 (Tekeli 2010, 31)

Picture 1: Stickers (May 2013, Istanbul)

The first four stickers read as: "*Elhamdülillah*![112] I am against violence against women," "The Prophet never hit any women, what about you?" "I fear [punishment] from Allah for being silent in case of harassment, rape and violence!" "Don't find an excuse for harassment. Take your eye away from *haram*[113]!" (Sticker collection 2013)

They also produced stickers without religious references and with common feminist slogans. The last two stickers say:

"Don't turn a blind eye to harassment and rape!" "Provocation is only an excuse." (Sticker collection 2013)

Another important platform in the young generation of religious women is Reçel Blog. It is an edited online blog founded by the members of the Initiative in 2014, where they publish short texts written by ordinary women (mostly from religious communities) who articulate daily problems and concerns regarding womanhood. To question women's inequality (especially in religious

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[112] Praise to Allah.

[113] Haram refers to forbidden things in religion. The sticker hints that it is your responsibility to look away from people who do not dress in Islamic ways.

families in Turkey), the blog has opened up a space for theoretical and practical discussions. The blog aims to create space "for women, especially Muslim women, to express their daily experiences, opinions on social issues, interests, problems, hopes, worries, and struggles" (Reçel 2014).

The name of the blog, Reçel (*fruit jam)*, refers to the kitchen, traditionally constructed as women's space. It denotes the writings of a famous Islamist intellectual and author, *Dücane Cündioğlu* who criticized women for not knowing how to make jam (Cündioğlu 2004). His writing represented the fact that intellectual male Islamists demand home-maker female Islamists. In response, a young generation of 'Muslim women,' as they define themselves, opened up this blog to express and share their frustrations regarding daily encounters in the family, workplace, and street.

The editors of Reçel Blog expected that in the course of time they would receive more analytical texts; however, the outrage and emotional outcry in the texts about women's lived realities have not yet come to an end (Akınerdem; Helvacıoğlu interviews 2015). This is a signal that women from religious communities have recently started to disclose their problems of private relations and inequalities in their daily lives, as opposed to feminists' conscious raising groups which began in the late 1980's. I argue that this time lag is partially due to their concentration on the headscarf bans.

Visibility of dissent is an important issue for the contributors and guest writers of the Reçel blog. Most often, they use pseudonyms to avoid direct attacks or criticisms, since the writings often complain about Muslim masculinities. Several writers who used their real names became a target of trolling campaigns in social media. One of the editors emphasizes that visibility (*görünürlük*) with one's real name in the blog and social media such as Twitter is a tough choice (interview 2015). In the end, they may risk losing their job or being vulnerable to insulting campaigns organized by pro-government anonymous Twitter users, known as *AK-trolls* (initials from AKP). A softer criticism to Reçel Blog came from anonymous Islamist men who established a counter-blog named *Turşu (Pickles) Blog* where they publish anti-feminist texts and target specific texts written in Reçel Blog.

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The Initiative and Reçel Blog represent the diversity of the women's Islamic movements after 15 years of an Islamist-rooted party being in power in Turkey. They agree that this critical Islamic space has been enabled by AKP's long-term stay in power. Most of them have a critical stance against the policies of AKP and question the patriarchal tendencies in religious communities (interviews 2013, 2015). When they dissent and transgress *visibly,* they risk being ostracized by their religious communities or Islamist circles – what they call 'our neighborhood' (*bizim mahalle*).

Transgressive Acts: Sexuality, Masculinity, and Interpretation of the Quran

Since 2013 with the formation of the Initiative and Reçel Blog, there has been an increase in the transgressive acts and expressions by religious women in Turkey on issues of sexuality, masculinity and interpretation of the Quran. Problematic constructions of masculinity and the situation of men in Islam are being discussed in events of BKP, Hazar and the Initiative, instead of the earlier focus on 'women and Islam.' For example, the first public event of the Initiative was organized to discuss 'Men in Islam in the context of their responsibilities regarding harassment, rape and violence' (*Taciz, tecavüz ve şiddet karşısında sorumlulukları bağlamında İslam'da erkek*) in May 2013. In the opening speech, Nebiye Arı, one of the main founders of the Initiative, quoted intellectuals from the Islamic community that blame women in case of violence and harassment. Arı argued that they would not tolerate people who claim to represent Muslims or Islam to use religion according to their interests (*nefisleri lehine*) and stated that Muslim men should take responsibility for their *sins* instead of searching for woman-centric excuses.

In Reçel Blog, women mostly question masculinity and criticize religious leaders in a way that dissents from the mainstream religion or transgress the 'borders' of the religion. Very rarely, a few women attempt to reinterpret the Quran. For example, a text posted in March 2015 titled "Was Adam a man?" (*Adem erkek miydi*?) represented a transgressive attempt of an ordinary Muslim women in Turkey to read Quranic verses about creation to dissolve gender binaries (Zeynep 2015a). The primary point of the writer Zeynep Ö is that Adam represents the humankind as a prototype in the Quran instead of being a male person in the real sense. She backs her argument by looking at the language around Adam and argues that there is not a single masculine attribution to Adam in the Quran unlike in the Old Testament. Zeynep Ö opens up new possibilities for

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understanding the creation from an Islamic point of view that is starkly different from the accepted version of creation –Adam as male and Eve as his wife created from him[114]. Thus, the text is transgressing the gender borders of the mainstream creation story.

Zeynep Ö was harshly criticized and mocked for the content and methodology of her text especially by male nicknamed readers in the blog but also on Twitter. The fact that she did not use an exaltation remark before mentioning 'Adam' particularly convinced some readers that she was not religious and she was writing about the Quran *from without*. Zeynep Ö simply wrote *Adem* instead of adding the widespread veneration title '*Hazreti'* in front of his name like *Hazreti Adem*. Thus, in terms of its discursive style as well, the text can be regarded as transgressive by 'humanizing' Adam from his exalted heavenly and prophetic position in the Turkish language.

Due to the methodological criticisms and insults, the editors felt the need to state that Zeynep Ö was a theologian in the comments section and Zeynep Ö herself wrote another text to affirm her theological qualifications and Arabic proficiency and explained the methodological issues with further examples. However, she added that the primary reason of the criticisms is the belief that understanding the Quran is the monopoly of the men of religion (*din adamları*) (Zeynep 2015b). Furthermore, a reader Büşra Aytekin, who received insults after sharing the text on Twitter, also felt the need to write a response on the blog (Aytekin 2015). Aytekin publicized the insults, highlighted that she shared the text to rethink about the Islam from this new angle and that she did not agree with all the points of Zeynep Ö, and criticized people who tried to monopolize religion and excommunicate (*tekfir etmek*) all others. As Flavia Monceri states, the transgression is not necessarily a conscious and intentional act (2012, 38). The reactions, however, can make the actor realize her 'transgression' as in the case of Zeynep Ö.

Sexuality and patriarchy has also become an issue that some religious women have started to problematize openly in the blog. The poem "You are Great, My Man" (*Adamım Büyüksün*) (Arı, 2014a) is a critical transgressive act due to its style and content. It is a bold questioning of sexuality and patriarchy by an openly religious woman. It received many criticisms as well as praise. The poem was written by a poet and an activist Nebiye Arı. She is also the main founder of the

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[114] This view is influenced from the creation story in Old Testament, as Tuksal (2012, 75-78), Kuriş (1996, 2) also argued.

Initiative, and she has been a leading figure among the dissenting young generation of Muslim women in Turkey.

The poem was written from the perspective of a woman during sexual intercourse with her "Islamist" man. The woman expresses her disgust of sex with him who sees her (and women in general) as lacking capacity, rationality, and power – who almost takes her out of the 'human' category while raises himself to a divine level:

> …
> Turn my mouth into a garbage bin like a cheap tobacco
> Drag your pride that makes everything stink like a carcass
> Then bone the woman as much as you could
> …
> I'm either the mother of *umma* or nobody, or the angel of mistakes or nobody,
> Now tell me a bit about my nature, the reason for the shame and resistance
> …
> Make me believe in the deity of your sex, send me towards the obedience unconditionally
> Then in the prostitution of Mary and witchery of Adolfina
> …
>
> (Arı 2014a, my translation)

Published in 2014, the poem led to an uproar from both female and male readers of Reçel Blog. Many criticized her vulgar language and the topic of 'sex'. Some also ostracized her: "These are the most disgusting, most arrogant and most vulgar verses to be written by a woman who claims to be religious and puts a headscarf," a woman reader responded in the comments section. Another woman disapproved it as 'an unveiled poem' (*tesettürsüz şiir*), while another confessed her confusion that she liked the poem but she questioned the limits of nudity and sexuality in Muslim art by comparing textual and visual arts. On the other side, some women are thrilled by the poem, and some called it a type of *jihad*. Fatma Özkaya Çiftçi, a middle-aged religious activist in Bursa and member of WGT mentioned how this poem influenced her perceptions about the relationship between women and men (interview 2015). Creating a heated debate among the young Muslim generation about female writers, obscenity and critique of patriarchy, and making people think of the limits of Islamic art is a molecular effect of this poem, I argue.

Arı wrote an explanation below her poem and commented that many of her friends said that a woman with a headscarf should not publish such a text, and one of them even told her to

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unveil herself if she wants to publish it. She justified her decision to publish with a comparison with Islamist male poets: "I don't know it is because Muslim men don't have an Islamic image to throw away, so they write a lot of such poems; but if this poem is of me, then I am of this poem, too. If publishing this poem is a sin (!), then also writing it, so why?" (Arı 2014a). After the reactions, she published another text to explain that she would not be able to publish this poem in Islamic literary journals (*Müslüman mahallesi*), because "they would not publish a woman's poem that crosses the red line by containing invective to manhood – despite not containing sexual desire – whereas they publish fancy poems written by men with words like 'cocotte' (*yosma*) 'love-making' 'breasts' and 'lips' " (2015b). She gives examples of such poems from famous Islamist poets like İsmet Özel and Cahit Zarifoğlu. She stated that she did not want to send the poem to the journals outside the 'neighborhood,' as if she was changing the 'neighborhood,' adding that she withdrew her poem from one of such journals when the editor opened up a discussion on feminism.

As visible from Arı's reactions, transgressing the constructed borders of religion does not mean to embrace feminism automatically. The stances and clarifications of Zeynep Ö and Arı show clearly the negotiations of Muslim women in the convergence of Islam and feminism. The protective attitude towards the Islamic community and the desire to belong to the community has been apparent in the activism of the Initiative, in the texts of Reçel Blog as well as in the interviews with their members (Helvacıoğlu interview 2015, Initiative interview 1, 2013). Due to the hegemonic Western-centric secular feminist ideologies in women's rights in the Middle East and due to the suppression of Islamist movements and women with headscarves in Turkey until the mid-2000's, religious women emphasize being part of the community and showing solidarity to the community, in its different forms (sometimes a religious order, sometimes intellectual Islamic community, sometimes the broader, often 'imagined' community of religious people). It is a political stance not to write in journals of 'the other neighborhood.' At the same time, writers of Reçel Blog and some members of the Initiative want to express themselves freely and on an equal footing with the men of their community. That is why I agree with Fatima Seedat's (2013) emphasis on the convergence of Islam and feminism, rather than labeling these acts as feminist or Islamic feminist right from the start, however transgressive they are.

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Accommodation: Pro-government NGOs and conservative young generation of Islamists

Despite the reforms for equality in the constitution and the penal code during its previous governments, AKP has been promoting 'gender justice' instead of gender equality in a systematic manner since its third term in office (2011 onwards) and redressing the state institutions accordingly. It has also started to approach women's issues with a family focus. The name of Ministry Responsible for 'Woman and Family' (*Kadın ve Aileden Sorumlu Devlet Bakanlığı*) was changed as Ministry of 'Family and Social Policies' *(Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı)* in 2011. This should be understood as a suspension of the empowerment of women as an individual. Instead, women's issues are being addressed within the family. Directorate of Women's Status, the women's machienary, was also attached to the Ministry Responsible for Family and Social Affairs to control the agenda of Directorate in 2011. However, Zeynep Göknil Şanal from BKP, who served as a department head in the Directorate, argued that AKP could not change its main structure. Due to the requirement of its constitutive law, the directorate should promote gender equality (interview 2016).

A pro-government civil society that champions the family values has also mushroomed. Among them, most visible ones in media have been TÜRAP (*Türkiye Aile Platformu, Family Platform of Turkey*) founded in 2012 as a common platform for NGOs which work on family, UKADER(*Uluslararası Kadın ve Aile Derneği, International Women and Family Association*), Family Academy Association (*Aile Akademisi Derneği*), and İKADDER (İstanbul Kadın ve Kadın Kuruluşları Derneği – Istanbul Women and Women's Foundations Association, AKODER (*Aileyi Koruma ve Destekleme Derneği – Association for Protecting and Supporting Family)* founded in 2006. These groups began to have more financial and institutional resources available to them due to the proximity of their agendas with the AKP governments. These groups present an accommodating and conservative stance within WIMs. Gezi protests in 2013 were the climax of the polarization within WIMs (interviews 2016). These groups have a 'protective' attitude towards AKP against the 'enmity' towards AKP and Erdoğan by other political groups.

One of these organizations, KADEM (*Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği, Woman and Democracy Association)* was founded in 2013. It is a government organized non-governmental organization (GONGO). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's daughter Sümeyye Erdoğan is the vice-

president and member of executive committee of the association. The founding president of the association, Dr. Sare Aydın Yılmaz served on various executive boards of AKP including the women's branch between 2006 and 2012. She is also the director of Women & Family Research and Implementation Center at Istanbul Commerce University. KADEM promotes the conservative women's agenda of the government, such as 'gender justice' instead of gender equality; and balancing domestic and public lives of women through part-time employment schemes.

Significantly, KADEM positions itself against the mainstream feminist discourse in Turkey. One of the missions of KADEM is "Fighting With Every Kind of Violence Against Everyone, without gender discrimination" (KADEM 2016, translation and capitalization in original). This is a direct retort against CEDAW and the overarching feminist discourse in Turkey about fighting 'violence against women' which has been a mainstream discourse in state policies and civil society projects for the last decade (Ucar 2009, 8).

Another mission of KADEM is "establishing a collective consciousness in society on women's rights and equal opportunities for *balancing the domestic and social roles of women*"[115] (emphasis added) (KADEM 2016). The other missions highlighted in the English website are about women's contribution to 'the development of the existing political, social and economic systems' in the country and importance of democracy and protection of human rights and women's rights (KADEM 2016).

As such, KADEM has an ambiguous mixture of missions which aim women's contribution to existing systems, balancing women's domestic and social roles and women's rights and democracy. The first indicates a developmental perspective where the priority is the development of the country by utilization of women's power. The second highlights that women have domestic roles (while men's domestic roles are not mentioned) and one of the important ways women can contribute to society is to balance her domestic and social roles. This parallels President Erdoğan's reproductionist agenda in his public speeches where he demands 'at least three children' from women. The third mission emphasizes strengthening of democracy and importance of human and women's rights, whose definition does not show itself clearly in the other activities of KADEM.

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[115] This mission is listed at the third row in the English website, while listed at the second in Turkish version.

Another discursive shift that KADEM tries to promote is 'gender justice' instead of gender equality which has been the main feminist and state discourse for a decade. They organized "International Women and Justice Summit" on November 24, 2014 in Istanbul, where Erdoğan gave his infamous speech that "you cannot make women and men equal, it is against the nature (*fitrat*)… women's rights movements focus on equality but overlook justice" (Hürriyet 2014). KADEM's head Yılmaz explains why they focus on justice instead of equality in a pro-government journal:

> How much does equality serve to women? Maybe we are equal, but are we living a just life? We are equal in law, but we never carry an equal burden in terms of roles. Today both men and women works. But when they return home in the evening, women's duties begin. Men rest at a corner in front of TV. Household chores and responsibilities of children are often on women's shoulders. Therefore we say that equality does not always benefit women, it is not a discourse that gives women space and comfort. We need to replace equality with 'social justice' concept. That means men and women are to carry just roles when they live together. There is a pre-acceptance in Turkey that women have more responsibility at home. However, in Europe men have no issues with doing chores. Justice should be built first at home and then in other fields (Arseven 2014).

The public speeches of Yılmaz and KADEM's declarations are contradictory. It is not clear whether Yılmaz looks for a society where men do equal work at home, since she acknowledges the current situation is unjust. Ambiguity remained in the Women and Justice Summit's final declaration in 2014. The first article of the declaration stated:

> In the relationship between men and women, an approach considering equality for the rights, but justice for the distribution of the social obligations and roles is required…. It is a fact that today women do not have equal positions in the politics, in decision making mechanisms and in economy, despite the policies that promoted equality. A fair approach taking the women's multidimensional victimhood into consideration is of great importance in this sense." (KADEM 2014, original text)

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KADEM has an important diagnosis about 'multidimensional victimhood' of women by acknowledging that 'obligations arising from the traditional roles, as well as their obligations in the public space' create difficulty for women (KADEM 2014). Yet, the declaration does not propose any solution how to solve this dilemma. KADEM's solution becomes clearer in their support for the part-time work proposals (Aydın 2015), where women can 'balance their domestic and social roles'.

Furthermore, KADEM's public campaigns on violence against women have problematic aspects from a feminist perspective. With the collaboration of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, KADEM organized a campaign in 2014 with a slogan "First, be a man" (*önce adam ol*). In a short video, they present some neighbors who does not socialize with a man who beats his wife. A male voiceover says "Do you think we would put you in men's category[116]? He who beats a woman is not a man."[117] The campaign had a broad coverage on billboards, bus stops and TV's as part of public service broadcasting. While giving a message against violence against women, the campaign recreates a different type of hegemonic masculinity with the emphasis that being a man has a high status. Several civil initiatives asked KADEM to change its sexist language. Similarly, KADEM categorizes the perpetrators of sexual harassments as 'perverts' (*sapık*) or 'pedophile' (KADEM 2017, 2016) as opposed to the mainstream feminist discourse on 'male violence' (*erkek şiddeti*) which has attempted to highlight the systematic gendered violence in society.

In line with KADEM's and government's perspective, AKDER and GİKAP have embraced the justice concept and highlight the importance of family. Aynur Görmez and another member from AKDER agree on the importance of family and that they have different views than feminists (interviews 2015). They highlight that, as religious women, they do not regard men and women as completely equal and state that relationships should be based on equity and justice. They criticize feminist critique of the family, and claim that they in fact ask for more rights and demand positive discrimination for women with the argument that women carry a bigger burden in the modern world and that they naturally have more role in child care (interviews 2015). KADEM, AKDER and GİKAP represent an accommodating stance towards the mainstream gender order of

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[116] It means "hold in esteem" in Turkish
[117] "Seni adam yerine koyacağımızı mı sandın? Kadına el kaldıran adam değildir"

religion. Their collaboration with the repressive state and silence about human rights violations give them a consolidating type of power in keeping the status-quo of politico-religious power of women.

Younger generations in accommodation

There are also young women who set up conservative and pro-government intellectual platforms in the recent years. *Intellectual Women's Movement of Turkey* (*Türkiye Entellektüel Kadın Hareketi/ TEKH*) was set up by young university students in 2012 in Ankara and Istanbul (Anonymous interview, 2015). The goal of the movement is explained as "to provide intellectual accumulation to our young lady friends (*genç bayan arkadaşlarımız*) by orienting their interests to academic studies under the guidance of responsibility that our faith values have brought, within the life conditions of the secular world." (TEKH 2013). It is also stated that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is closely following the project and one of the consultants is Gülsen Ataseven (the head of GİKAP). TEKH has often collaborated with the government and pro-government organizations on women's entrepreneurship projects like KADEM and MÜSİAD (*Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği- Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association*). MÜSİAD is an association founded by conservative and Islamist businessmen. Members mostly come from middle and upper classes.

TEKH organized a panel called "Veiling Engineering" (*Tesettür Mühendisliği*) in 2013 in a municipality conference hall in a residential neighbourhood of Üsküdar in Istanbul. The event was announced with large canvas posters across Üsküdar, printed by the municipality (Anonymous interview 2015). The widespread announcement of the event shows the contrast between the rich and official support circle around TEKH and the limited means of dissenting groups such as the Initiative. Most speakers during the panel advised docility and proper veiling to the audience full of young veiled university and high school students. The panel presented a conservative, accommodationist and apolitical approach to women's issues. Emine Şenlikoğlu, the famous writer of guidance novels (see Chapter 3), talked about the importance of sustaining a healthy family life for children's wellbeing and prevention of homosexuality. She advised women to be very feminine at home not only for a healthy marriage but also to show children different sexual roles between men and women. Şenlikoğlu went against some hadith literature which warned that *angels* did not enter into houses when women and men were not veiled properly. Şenlikoğlu,

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nevertheless, acknowledged a widespread hadith that if women accepted having sex with their husbands despite unwillingness, that would be counted as a worship. This perspective is very problematic from a feminist perspective, especially in the light of increased violence against women in Turkey.

Another speaker, writer of Islamic guidance books, Halime Demireşik emphasized the role of motherhood by highlighting that women bore the prophets and that first veiling order was given to men. She criticized a widespread veiling trend among young women known as *şallı* in which the shawl was not pinned onto the hair, and the neck and earrings are visible. She argued that this was a *cahiliye* tradition (ar. *jāhilīya*, state of ignorance/pre-Islamic period). Demireşik also condemned make-up, tight clothes and wearing trousers for women. She gives the example of Fatima, daughter of Prophet who put a pillow to her back in order not to be recognized. At this point, Şenlikoğlu intervened by saying that these suggestions were based on weak hadith. Yet, Demireşik defended her point that even if they were not true hadith, they represented an ideal model which women should strive to reach.

On the other hand, an ex-bureaucrat and professor of education sciences at Istanbul Commerce University, Dr. Ayşen Gürcan[118] criticized the disproportionate emphasis on women's veiling in the panel and criticized religious men for hiding their religiosity:

> [There are] men whose appearance is secularized and who flatter themselves when others learn about their piety… Who are these men whose Muslimhood is invisible? Let's set aside the 'shawl' debates [on women]…I used to tell men when our appearance was subjected to suppression that if women could not enter universities, you also should not. They used to respond: "They are girls anyway, they don't have to study". They regarded the bans against women, not against Islam (Gürcan speech, 2013).

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[118] She shortly served as the Minister Responsible for Family and Social Policies in the temporary election government between August and November 2015, becoming the first woman with a headscarf to serve as a minister in Turkey.

Despite the critique of Muslim masculinity by Gürcan, the symposium of TEKH mainly represented an accommodationist perspective for (and of) young generation of religious women in Turkey. In their second event on 'veiling engineering' in 2014, TEKH invited Merve Kavakçı to talk about her expulsion from the parliament. One of the founders of TEKH discussed the organizational psychology of veiling in business life (*İş dünyasında tesettür*).

TEKH's projects have focused on veiling, the history of the headscarf bans, women's entrepreneurship and education in Turkey and Islamophobia in Europe. They also organized social projects on Syrian refugees and panels on Syria. It is an important organization for intellectual and entrepreneurial progress of young women in Turkey. However, they turned a blind eye to repressive measures of the government and the business sector that the government collaborated with. Unlike the Initiative, TEKH shares the accommodationist view of KADEM on gender relations exemplified by their emphasis on women's participation in public, economic and social life, without politicizing and criticizing the unequal relations between men and women in private. Overall, TEKH has a potential to consolidate existing politico-religious power of women, rather than reforming or transforming it.

5.3. Equality and Family Debates since 2011: Dissenting and Accommodating WIMs in Opposition

Women's Islamic movements in Egypt and Turkey contribute to the discussions of gender equality. While in Egypt these discussions have often centered around reforming personal status law (*al-qānūn al-aḥwāl al-shakhṣīya)*, in Turkey, the discussion on equality between men and women have moved towards the discursive level after the successful reforms in civil code (2001), penal code (2004) and incorporation of equality and positive discrimination into the constitution in 2004 and 2010 respectively (discussed in Chapter 4). Dissenting and accommodationist WIMs have challenged each other about equality and family in the recent years.

Many members of BKP and Hazar advocate for gender equality rather than justice. Furthermore, several BKP members are against government's and KADEM's insistence on family and justice instead of gender equality and empowerment of women. Berrin Sönmez from BKP recalls her conversations with Erdoğan in the meeting where he invited female academics, activists, politicians and journalists to discuss violence against women in March 2015:

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I told Erdoğan that we needed to pronounce gender equality clearly and that the concept of gender justice is wrong. He was shocked. Sare Yılmaz (the head of KADEM) and other religious women objected to me. I clearly said that justice is an abstract concept and there is a need for tools to make it work in daily life… and equality is one of these tools. You cannot assure justice without accepting the principle of equality. Equality is not in itself justice, but without equality you cannot assure justice… Finally, he said that 'Yes, there is equality in terms of rights'. (B. Sönmez interview 2016)

Sönmez claims that the women from the Islamic community defended the justice concept at Erdoğan's meeting, while secular women agreed with her on the equality emphasis (interview 2016). Likewise, Zeynep Göknil Şanal from BKP argued that the discussions on equality and justice were made long ago and that they did not have a luxury to go back:

If the President utters that women and men cannot be equal, then some random men use this as grounds and make nonsensical comments: People like Huseyin *Hodja*, or whoever, say that it is licit to marry a nine-year-old girl. It creates a platform for this and gender-based violence, too. (Şanal interview 2016)

Şanal recalls the 4th Women's Gathering organized by WGT in Istanbul in 2004, where the theme was family. She argues that a famous writer, in her speech, 'unknowingly' implied that freedom and rights belong to men, and duty and responsibilities to women. It triggered a heated discussion in the hall after Şanal objected:

I said that my Allah would not do such an injustice... People are not aware that they are making this distinction. But there is such a perception in the traditional Islamic literature. Allah is impeccable to say such a thing… The Package Law on the Reconciliation of Work and Family Life is totally built on the responsibilities of women as care-takers. Ensuring the children and the elderly are taken care of is the responsibility of the government in a social society, not of the women (interview 2016).

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As the quotation above demonstrates vividly, several BKP members emphasize gender equality in sharing responsibilities in family, and demand child-care services from the state. Şanal adds that those who criticize feminists are responding to the first wave feminism of the early 20th century and that today's feminists are not necessarily against the family, and that many are married with children:

> We are not enemies of the family, but people who defend the family are enemies of women. What are you going to do with women who are not married and cannot have children or women and men who are single parents? Today there is a single family model, [while] there are many various family models. The government needs to accept this fact (Şanal interview 2016).

Fatma Bostan Ünsal, BKP member and AKP founder, also promotes women's roles outside home in her public speeches. In a TV interview, she highlights that it is a divine duty to work outside home as opposed to the mainstream religious discourse:

> The role of the caliphate (*halifelik*) [referring to representing God's will on earth] is given to all human beings… When you conceptualize women only inside the home, it means that you do not comprehend the burden fully that Allah has given. It is a wrong understanding of religion. Women must undertake the burden of the caliphate. Actually, there is a comfort at home for women. So this is women's trial…. We will be with the truth and against the wrong everywhere: at home, in our neighborhood, in our city and if we can in international arena…. Staying at home means negligence of women's divine duty. Of course, here I blame the system which tells that she can be a better Muslim the other way (Kanal 5, 2015)

As opposed to the mainstream and official religious representations of women as part of the family, as a wife and a mother, several religious female writers have highlighted the individuality of

women in Islam. Sibel Eraslan[119] and Hidayet Tuksal argue in their books that a woman is one of the pair of human being (*insan teki)* and her individual identity is meaningful on its own (Eraslan 2009; Tuksal 2012). The Initiative of young Muslim women also emphasizes the individual character of women. They prepared a hutbe to call attention to the violence against women among ordinary men in 2013. As opposed to the official hutbes prepared by Diyanet which define women mostly as mothers, wives and sisters (Demir 2013, Hutbe 2012), the hutbe of the Initiative underscores, first and foremost, the individual character of women. They presented their hutbe to the office of Istanbul Mufti, but did not receive a response. The Initiative recorded their hutbe in a Youtube video where female and male members read it out loud in the garden of a mosque in 2014 (Initiative 2014).

In the preparation of the hutbe, some members argued that emphasis on family roles limited the identity of women; while some others stated that it was important to mention these roles to convince the male audience (participant observation 2013). Most members of the Initiative position women in between their individuality and their roles in society. A university student member says that there is a reality of *cemaat* (community), and the individual has a responsibility towards the society. However, she does not see the woman as a cultural indicator or the identity of *cemaat* as it is always understood (Initiative interview 1, 2013). Another member of the initiative, a psychologist, similarly argues that Islam is a religion of balance; it neither sanctifies the family, nor the individual. In this respect she disagrees with feminists who are against family values in any condition, and disagrees with the government who wants to protect the family at the expense of women (Initiative interview 2, 2013). Like Heba Raouf Ezzat in Egypt, she avoids using the language of the 'hegemonic' ideology. She does not prefer to use the term individuality (*bireysellik*) instead she prefers to conceptualize women as equal human beings (*insan*) like men (interview 2, 2013).

The dissenting WIMs are not against family and societal values. However, they dissent from the mainstream emphasis on family and community values that put women's individuality to a secondary position. That is why they highlight the need to approach women's issues from a woman's perspective in the first place. They collaborate and side with the feminists and value the

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[119] While Eraslan presented a feminist stance at times, she has openly supported Erdoğan despite the discourse of AKP on gender equality. Her eulogistic poem for Erdoğan named 'The Tall Man' (*Uzun Adam*) published in 2014 has become very popular among pro-government circles and recorded in quasi-religious Youtube videos.

gains made by them, which they see being threatened by the wave of conservatism. Accommodating WIMs on the other hand, promote family and social values as a reaction to the discourse of gender equality in Turkey spearheaded by mainstream feminist movements.

Masculinist Restoration?

While women in Turkey have been empowered legally since the 1980's in an ascending trend, from the third term of AKP onwards there has been a discursive backlash coming directly from Erdoğan and high-level burocrats, ministers, conservative intellectuals and religious leaders. AKP officials have begun to stigmatize feminist and gender equality discourse. Deniz Kandiyoti argues that gains made by women in the last decades created a specific masculinist reaction in conservative circles (2013). She calls the phenomenon as 'masculinist restoration':

> [A] new phenomenon I call masculinist restoration comes into play at the point when patriarchy-as-usual is no longer fully secure, and requires higher levels of coercion and the deployment of more varied ideological state apparatuses to ensure its reproduction. The recourse to violence (or the condoning of violence) points not to the routine functioning of patriarchy or the resurgence of traditionalism, but to its threatened demise at a point when notions of female subordination are no longer securely hegemonic (Kandiyoti 2013).

Confirming these observations, BKP members state that there is a difference between praxis and discourse since AKP's last terms in power. Tuksal mirrors Kandiyoti's observations and claims that since men have lost their privileges at the practical level, "right now there is an extraordinary defense of traditional discourse on the issue of woman" (interview 2016). They argue that AKP's negative discourse on gender equality contradicts the legal equality (interviews 2015, 2016). They highlight improvements in the legislation on violence against women, especially in the law numbered 4320[120] and the law numbered 6284[121]. Turkey became the first country to ratify

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[120] Law about protection of family, come into effect in 1998, was the first law on prevention of domestic violence, reformed in 2007

[121] Law about protection of family and preventing violence against women, came into effect in 2012

the Istanbul Convention[122] in 2012. Şanal argues that the people who focus on women's responsibilities and family cohesion at the expense of women have become consultants to the government and this may influence the new legislations (interview 2016). Indeed, Family Academy Association (*Aile Akademisi Derneği*), a member of TÜRAP, issued a press statement before the 2015 general elections and asked AKP's MP candidates to annul the Istanbul Convention to bring an end to gender equality policies and pursue justice-based policies based on Islamic values (AAD 2015).

The discursive backlash has also been apparent in the lifestyle debates for the last few years. We can define this backlash as an *imposition* of the mainstream Islamic gender order – an order that had mostly set the rules among conservative and religious communities – to other liberal and secular segments of the society. Especially since their third term in government, high-level AKP officials, including prime minister Erdoğan and his ministers, have made controversial comments not only about the equality between men and women, but also on abortion, opposite sex students who share the same apartments, and women's outfit. Back in 2007, leading Turkish sociologist Şerif Mardin pointed to a 'neighborhood pressure' *(mahalle baskısı)* in Turkey, referring to control mechanisms for preserving differences between men and women in public via 'gaze' (Çakır 2008, 102). With a Kantian perspective, Mardin argued that the 'good, right and beautiful' (*iyi, doğru, güzel*) were sustained in neighborhoods with gaze – by monitoring others' public behaviors – since a philosophy about 'good, right and beautiful' was missing in the Republican ideology (Çakır 2008, 102). Although Mardin emphasized that this pressure had long existed independently of AKP (Çakır 2008), the concept was still relevant in understanding the increased disapproving statements of AKP officials and pro-government religious scholars against the liberal lifestyles in the country.

Both feminist and religious women responded to such speeches in conventional or online media. Especially, BKP members gave interviews on newspapers and TV to dismiss such comments on women's lives in the name of Islam. Members of BKP and the Initiative highlighted that such comments reflected a conservative agenda and mindset, not an Islamic one (interviews 2016). For example, responding Erdoğan's condemnation of mixed-gender cohabitated student houses, head of BKP and AKP's women's branch reserve member Nesrin Semiz argued at a panel

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[122] Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

on TV that the state could not intervene in private lives. She stated that the 'general morality' (*genel ahlak*) criteria – that was proposed to be applied to unmarried housemates – could violate people's lives (CNNTURK 2013). Likewise, Fatma Bostan Ünsal stated in a newspaper interview that "homosexuals had a place in the mosque of the Prophet" responding to the absence of sexual identity and orientation in the preparation of 'hate speech' law reform (Kaos GL 2013). Ünsal argued that LGBT people were the biggest target of hate speech and crimes, much more than those victimized based on their lifestyles (Kaos GL 2013).

The Initiative is also against imposition of ideal life on women. Members of the Initiative also argue against intrusions to women's lives by an authority. They do not focus criticizing the West and 'Western lifestyle' unlike mainstream conservative religious groups. A member argues that "if God wanted, he could make everyone believe in him", meaning that it is no one's business to impose rules on lifestyle (Initiative interview 2, 2013). Likewise, another member says that even though she does not approve exposing the body and 'fetishizing' it, she is against discrimination based on dress (interview 1, 2013). She refers to a female TV presenter who was fired in 2013 after the vice-president of AKP, Hüseyin Çelik, condemned her low-cut dress. She draws an analogy between her view and defending the right to wear headscarf when seeing it as a domination over women (interview 1 2013).

Intimidation and Risks of Life Threats for Dissenters and Transgressors

The politico-religious space Kuriş aimed to expand for women has not yet been reclaimed in the same visible way by religious women since 2000's. First of all, her legacy is not popular among religious women in Turkey from her generation and later generations. This may be related to the fact that Kuriş did not have an open stance on the political oppression of Islamists in the late 1990's. Intellectual and activist religious women confess that Kuriş and her murder is something that they do not often discuss in their meetings (personal interviews). Tuksal accepts that if there is a fear among religious women, this has not been put into words (*dillendirilmedi*) (interview 2016). When she was kidnapped, around 18 women – mostly members of BKP – signed a petition for the state authorities to find her safely (interviews 2016, Tuksal 2000). Her earlier alleged connection to Hizbullah and rumors about her of being a state spy within Hizbullah deterred her

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friends and other religious women activists to protest publicly for her (Tuksal 2000). It was difficult for women to mobilize for her:

> Even among our own friends, there were women who said that we should not stand behind her, that she distorts religion and makes unnecessary remarks... When we called some important names [for help], they told us that Gonca was working for the state and she would come out soon and that they would never give any support (Tuksal 2000).

Islamist writer Emine Şenlikoğlu validated that Islamic circles did not regard Kuriş as part of their circle, since 'the half of her words was against Islam" (Demir 2000). She added that they did not support her ideas but she wished that they could have discussed what was right and wrong about her ideas and that they could have supported her when she was kidnapped" (Demir 2000).

Tuksal rejects the claim that the murder of Kuriş had scared the religious women away from producing an openly feminist discourse. Kuriş was coming from the periphery of Turkey, and Tuksal argues that she was not someone who could (and can) address the upper-class society of religious people (*dindar sosyete*) in Istanbul (interview 2016). However, currently pro-government Islamist Sibel Eraslan stated in 2000 that "Kuriş's death gave a menacing message to all women, especially to the veiled women who is 'on spot/in the middle (*ortada*)" (Demir 2000). Similarly, Berrin Sönmez argues that they, as BKP, could not return back to their main mission of fighting back traditional religious discourse after the lifting of bans. The fears of being a target by fundamentalist (*tekfirci/takfīrī*) groups still exists among religious women in Turkey:

> It takes a tremendous courage to voice it loudly as some stupid women amidst an environment where new Salafi streams are being empowered such as ISIL[123]. This thing… the trauma of Gonca Kuriş still haunts us[124]. And threats are being received all the time. Our piety, Muslimhood and humanity are being insulted continuously with this ultra-religious discourse from Twitter, Facebook and orally from other places… This prevents us from throwing ourselves into a discussion when we hear anti-equality words and

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[123] Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
[124] 'üzerimizden gitmiş değil'

words that suppress women about traditional Islam… In our meetings, we wire-draw everything we want to say, and at some point we do give up (B Sönmez, 2016)

Sönmez adds that they have continued to work on women's empowerment 'with less noise' (*daha az gürültü ile*) but still with determination after Kuriş (e-mail correspondence 2018). She says that producing an empowerment discourse with various methods, without restricting themselves only to responding to the daily debates, is a safer and efficient method. Despite this, the intimidation has still been present. Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal was targeted during a live TV show in 2013. In a discussion on women and Islam, Tuksal's opponent theologian Ali Rıza Demircan received a phone call during the show. The voice on the phone shouted "*Khodja*, put this woman in her place"[125] (Böhürler 2013), the exact sentence that the late prime-minister Ecevit shouted to dismiss Merve Kavakçı in the Parliament in 1999. As such, the intimidation of women who dissent from the mainstream religion or who transgress continue to be present.

Hizbullah in Turkey was dissolved in 2000 when its members were detained. After years long court proceedings, several members were convicted to life-long imprisonment in 2009. The decision was appealed to the Court of Cassation (*Yargıtay*) and due to a new regulation on the period of detention, most of the convicted members were released in 2011 on the condition of daily legal control (Milliyet 2011, Arsu 2011).

Risk of Ostracization for Dissenters and Transgressors

While the life threats may be a low probability for women who dissent or transgress the borders of the mainstream religion, being ostracized from their Islamic community is a more imminent danger. Headscarf bans increased the dependency of women to the Islamic community in Turkey. Tuksal argues that being ostracized from one's own community is a more realistic threat than life threats and women have not got over the fear of bans even today. She states that it is still hard for women to criticize patriarchy in their communities in which they have taken a refuge during the

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[125] 'Hocam şu kadına haddini bildirin'

bans (interview 2016). The immobilizing fear of exclusion was observable in the campaigns against AKP discussed in the Chapter 4.

Tuksal, as the one of the most visible faces of dissenting women, has been ostracized herself. She is much less invited to public talks including TV discussions or student club meetings than before (interview 2016). "Supporting the discourse of the government brings you a statue, you are invited to meetings, and TV discussions, you become the acceptable citizen (*makbul vatandaş*). Many NGOs follow this" (Tuksal interview 2016). One of the editors of Reçel Blog whose dissent from government policies has become visible during the Gezi protests talks about the costs and benefits of visibility:

> The visibility in social media is the hardest – that everybody knows what I do and what I think. I cannot assess the long-term effects of this in my life due to the polarization in Turkey. I feel insecure and vulnerable. People begin to ignore you all of a sudden. However, it is also what supports me most. People who I don't know begin to say "your existence makes me feel that I'm not alone" (Anonymous interview 2015)

Dissenting women argue that it has been more difficult to be called a feminist in women's religious circles especially since 2011. BKP member, Zeynep Göknil Şanal claims that their relations with the Muslims (*Müslüman kesim*) have been more problematic than of that with the feminists. She argues that the Islamic community is disturbed that feminism and Islam are in the same dialogue (Şanal interview 2016). Similarly, Fatma Bostan Ünsal argues that nowadays it is more difficult to say 'I'm a feminist' in Islamist circles compared to early 2000's and that the discourse has become much more conservative (interview 2015). Fatma Özkaya Çiftçi from Bursa likewise states that she feels very lonely as a feminist in the Islamic community, among women and especially in her provincial city, Bursa (interview 2015). A female theologian recounts how a female colleague who studies feminist theology rejected being called a feminist in the newspaper where they prepared an Islamic information page during Ramadan (anonymous interview). Hidayet Tuksal argues that "in order not to be stigmatized you don't deal with the discourse, but

you keep doing what you believe" as "it is very dangerous to deal with the discourse, there is a risk of being stamped and stigmatized" (interview 2016).

Conservative socialization of religious women

A researcher and journalist of Islamic movements in Turkey, Ruşen Çakır argues that, with few exceptions, women of the Islamic movement have worked a lot, but talked less even on issues that directly effecting them since 1985 (Çakır 2000). Sibel Eraslan had defined this silence as 'a silence with wisdom' (*hikmetli bir sessizlik*) when she wrote about why they did not react to Welfare Party cadres when women were not given high-level positions after the electoral success (2000, 221-2). Berna Turam also conceptualizes the silence of pious women as pious non-resistance during the period of secular and AKP contestations around 2007 (2008). Although Turam argues that this non-contestation helped women to acquire more recognition and respect in that polarized period, she also adds that "the refusal to mobilize prevents the pious from articulating their needs and negotiating their rights and freedoms" (2008, 482). The findings of the dissertation validate this finding: the *form* of contention defines the type of empowerment that can be reached.

Despite the increase in the vocal mobilization among WIMs, as analyzed, several religious women who has attended those mobilizations confess that they do not feel comfortable in shouting slogans in the street (B. Sönmez interview 2016). In this respect, the Initiative has been more active in street mobilization for various causes from violence against women to police violence. However, they also explain that they prefer community activism where they can reach out the Muslim community (interviews, 2013) and they want to be more active and visible in the Islamic neighborhoods (in the real sense of neighborhood), rather than giving press statements in the middle of Taksim, since they do not want to be part of the political interests of the leftist or secularist media (Arı interview 2013). Some neighborhood activities that Nebiye Arı suggested were praying and distributing rice[126] for the women who were murdered by their partners or families (Arı interview 2013). Indeed, the Initiative has revived some traditional rituals in their recent protests. They have performed woman-led 'funeral praying in absentia' (*gıyabi cenaze*

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[126] It is a tradition in Anatolia to distribute food and dessert (*helva*) to neighbors after a family member dies

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namazı) for the raped and murdered women, followed by press statements against the violence against women (KŞKMİ 2015, 2017). This form of public praying has been a common form of protest among Islamists; the novelty of the move by the Initiative has been to perform it for the victims of femicides and to lead it by women.

Tuksal was discontent about the fact that they could not realize Kuriş's last wish (that her funeral praying be led by women) due to fact that they did not want to cause a tumult (*arbede*) in 1999. Her account hints at the conservative socialization of religious women in Turkey:

> We had a promise given to Gonca, but we prayed her funeral prayer in a house. We wanted to do it in a mosque, but thinking that journalists would come, we gave up…I blame men. This was her last wish and she gave her life for this, so it should have been performed. Yet, we know men, they wouldn't allow. I don't like a tumult to break out in such situations. And I don't think the media covers these issues with a good will to open up spaces for women or to let them do the funeral prayer freely (Tuksal 2000).

The conservative socialization coupled with the risks of ostracization limits the dissenting visibility of religious women, including the public remembrance of pioneers who were killed.

Resources: Access to Foreign Language

WIMs in Turkey have limited access to literature written in Arabic, English or French on feminism and Islamic feminism (personal interviews), compared to WIMs in Egypt, Tunisia or Morocco. Translations of Islamist reformist thinkers have been very influential in the Islamist circles (personal interviews, Aktaş 2000). Since Arabic is the official and often native language in these countries, women have an easier access to the Quran, *tefsir*/*tafsīr* (interpretation of the Quran), ijtihad (independent reasoning), as well as recent Islamic feminist literature in Arabic. The foreign language proficiency is quite low among the overall public in Turkey. Turkey ranks very low throughout 2011 and 2016 worldwide on English proficiency (EF EPI 2016). Egypt ranks lower than Turkey, but Egyptian women's rights NGO activists and intellectuals have better English skills than NGO activists and intellectuals in Turkey based on my observations.

As mentioned earlier, the headscarf bans had a double effect on women's education. First of all, it limited religious women's access to higher education, thus access to English, since the education in leading state and private universities were in English. However, a limited number of women who could afford to study abroad or whom NGOs like AKDER sent abroad came back with an asset of English. As analyzed in molarization section at 4.2, those women lobbied against the headscarf bans in international fora. I expect the new generation of religious women to speak better English due to increased access to higher education after 2008. It is to be seen in the next decade whether this would result in a higher number of women interested in rereading the Quran and other religious sources from a women's perspective.

Limited Connections to Muslim Women's International Mobilization

As mentioned in the Introduction, the contextual borders of Islamic feminism are very broad today – across the North America, South East Asia, Europe, North and South Africa and the Middle East (Abugideiri 2010). WIMs in Turkey have fewer connections with the international and global Muslim women's organizations, compared to WIMs in Egypt. The first reason is that most of these organizations such as Musawah and WLUML target to change Islamic family laws. Since the civil code in Turkey is not based on Islam, women in Turkey have fewer reasons to join these organizations.

Secondly, lack of resources such as language and organizational barriers incapacitate the connection with these global organizations. The communication is often sustained through one or two people who speaks English (interviews 2016). Furthermore, many women's NGOs are voluntary-based in Turkey, therefore it takes energy and time to sustain the connection. Zeynep Göknil Şanal represents BKP in international meetings as she grew up in Australia and speaks English. Şanal is following the Musawah newsletters as a representative of BKP and she attended global Musawah meetings. Musawah, meaning equality in Arabic, was launched in 2009 in Kuala Lumpur. Its goal is 'equality and justice in the Muslim family' (Musawah 2016). It aims to merge the international CEDAW with an enlightened reading of Islam (Musawah 2015). They especially focus on article 16 of CEDAW which is about equality in family and on which some Muslim countries have reservations. Şanal described the global meeting in 2010 as 'wonderful' and she

testified that the Muslim women in the Musawah meetings wished Diyanet of Turkey to be more active since they thought Diyanet had a more 'advanced' perspective (Şanal interview 2016). Musawah invited scholars around the world to add their studies on Islam and women to its database. Yet, members of BKP did not have the motivation to send their research to Musawah:

> When I came back [from the global meeting in Singapore], I was very excited, I told the girls to upload their theses, but it looked difficult for them. We could not even translate Hidayet's book (2012) [to English]. (Şanal interview 2016).

Besides the language and distance obstacles, hegemonic relations between Western feminism and Islamic feminism create tensions for religious women in Turkey. Despite being an active religious feminist in her local context, Tuksal thinks that Western hegemonic interests are dominant in global Islamic feminist organizations (interview 2016). Unlike Şanal, she is somewhat suspicious of the international agenda of Islamic feminism:

> If I were confident of my English correspondence level, I might continue. Yet, I find the concept problematic – to discuss Iran in Europe and the US. The Muslimhood of the female friends [in these meetings] is related to their being born on the Muslim land. Their lives are in the West and they internalized it. Therefore, there is not enough empathy (*duygudaşlık*) between me and them. We did not suffer the same problems; so, my participation was limited. (Tuksal interview 2016)

Some Islamic feminists in Egypt have similar reservations about global institutionalization of Islamic feminism, which will be discussed in the Chapter 7.

On the other hand, not all global Muslim women's organizations support feminism. Some instead promotes a conservative agenda such as International Muslim Women's Union (IMWU), founded in Sudan in 1996. A participant in WGT, Hüda Kaya has been connected to this organization since her exile period in Pakistan. For a religious activist who is coming from a nationalist (*ülkücü*) background, Hüda Kaya's intellectual and activism transformation is worthy of attention. Kaya was judged with her children due to their activism for the headscarf freedom and she was jailed for 20 months between 1997 and 1999 (Kaya 2013). She went to Pakistan with

her children after one of her daughters was convicted to jail for protesting the headscarf bans. Since 2013, Kaya has been supporting the Kurdish political movement in Turkey with her Islamic discourse on equality of people, and she has been an MP from pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi – HDP*) since 2015.

I followed a group of women from Islamic circles in Turkey at International Women's Conference organized by International Muslim Women's Union (IMWU) in Islamabad, Pakistan in 2013.[127] Hüda Kaya was the delegate of IMWU from Turkey. There were participants from Pakistan, Sudan, Yemen, Jordan, Tunisia, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia and Indonesia. Most of the presentations at the conference highlighted the importance of women's attachment to the family for the benefit of the Muslim community. There was a lot of criticism to West and Western interests and agenda in the presentations[128]. Overall, the participants from Turkey were very disappointed with the conference and they found most of the presentations very patriarchal.

In her blunt speech at the conference – where I translated her words to English – Hüda Kaya told that she felt like a *feminist* in the conference. She stated that while she was in a fight with feminists on issues of family in Turkey, in this conference familial roles of women were exaggerated and men's responsibility in family was overlooked. Kaya also criticized that the presenters frequently accused the West for the problems in Muslim communities. She instead suggested that Muslim communities should notice their own mistakes. Kaya gave examples of the publicly active women from the Quran and Islamic history and highlighted that many of them shared familial responsibilities with their husbands. Especially addressing the male participants in the conference, she said that it was an oppression to put the responsibility of family and children only to women's shoulders, since the examples in the Quran and prophets' lives show otherwise (personal notes 2013).

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[127] Since, the most of the Turkish group did not speak English, I and a student from Istanbul University, provided translations for the group.

[128] One of the reasons as to why there was a significant emphasis on women's responsibilities in the family and criticism of the West during Pakistan meeting can be explained by the Jamaat-e-Islami background of Pakistani IMWU members. Jamaat-e-Islami was founded by influential Islamic awakening leader and scholar Sayyid Maudoodi. Although many women from the Jamaat have careers and involve in social work, they prioritize women's role in family and child-raising in their speeches.

Özden Sönmez, another rights activist among the participants from Turkey and the head of ILKDER[129], similarly stated that women's familial roles as well as women's honor and purity have been emphasized too much in the conference (interview, 2013). She maintained that family and honor are equally important for men and women. Hüda Kaya told the Turkish group that they should show the other Muslim women alternative viewpoints besides a patriarchal understanding of Islam (personal correspondence 2013). Accordingly, Kaya offered to the IMWU delegates to host the next meeting in Istanbul, however it was not realized. Overall, connections of WIMs in Turkey with international Muslim women's networks have been initiated and sustained on a personal level rather than on a sustained organizational level, whether it is Islamic feminist Musawah or conservative IMWU.

5.4 Stance against Authoritarianism: Gezi Protests and Kurdish issue

The secular, feminist and Kurdish women's movements have been critical to the Islamist-rooted AKP since its first term in office in 2002, while women's Islamic groups have been mostly supportive during the first two terms of the party as explained earlier. However, starting with AKP's third term in office since 2011, there have been increasingly dissident voices within WIMs against AKP's increasing authoritarian and conservative tendencies. This has created further divisions within WIMs. Roboski massacre in 2011 was a turning point for some Islamist circles and women to show a firmer disapproval to government. Some groups among WIMs contested AKP for both its authoritarianism and conservatism, while others stayed silent or showed support. Being against authoritarianism and being against the conservative agenda on women correlated among WIMs in the last decade in Turkey as opposed to Egypt. This section analyzes why some WIMs have dissented from AKP and others have not. How is 'visibility' played out as opposition to authoritarianism?

[129] ILKDER, (*İlke İlim Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği – Principal, Science, Culture and Solidarity Association*) is based in Ankara. It has mainly focused on charity and supported several orphanages in Pakistan. ILKDER often collaborates with BKP in campaigns and press statements on women's rights.

A spectacular disagreement within WIMs occurred during the anti-government Gezi Park protests that spread all over the Western and Southern parts of the country in the summer of 2013. The divisions within WIMs have reached a climax during the protests and led to the dissolution of the molar movement of women built in 2003. First of all, the Initiative held two demonstrations to condemn the attacks towards women with headscarves by some secular protestors during the protests, but they also condemn the government's use of the attacks as a way to invalidate the protests altogether. While during their first protest, they publicly supported the protests, in the second they refrained from doing so.

The first protest was a march from Kabataş that ended with a press statement in Taksim during the peak of the protests on June 7. It was attended by many experienced feminists and well-known middle age generation of Islamist women such as Yıldız Ramazanoğlu and got highly publicized in media (Bianet 2013). The main message of the protest was "Stop the harassment [against women]; keep on the resistance" (*Tacizi durdur, direnişi sürdür*). They chanted both well-known Turkish feminist slogans such as "The world turns upside down, if women become free[130]" "We want the streets, the squares and the parks[131]!" "Long live women's solidarity"[132] and some new slogans coming from religious women such as "Those who attack the headscarf are not from us."[133] However, the common conclusion among the Initiative members was that they could not fully handle this protest as they were outnumbered by the feminists who came to support them. The Initiative members raised concerns that the feminists could suppress their voices in other collaborations and that they might unintentionally approach to feminist discourse more than an Islamic one (interviews 2013).

As Guo-Juin Hong argues, visibility is not about simply being visible, but also about controlling your visibility in the media which can distort your desired visibility (2013). Although the Initiative tried to maintain a balanced political stance, the ability to convey its message was limited due to the high level of polarization in media in Turkey. As such, the anti-government media presented the demonstrations with the headlines "Women with *turbans* support the protests" and "They are also fed up with AKP" (Sözcü 2013), and pro-government media only mentioned that "Women protested the harassments against women with headscarves" (Yeni Şafak 2013).

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[130] "Dünya yerinden oynar, kadınlar özgür olsa!"
[131] "Caddeleri de, meydanları da, parkları da istiyoruz!"
[132] "Yaşasın kadın dayanışması!"
[133] "Başörtüye saldıran bizden değildir!"

Therefore, the two-fold message of the Initiative was selectively highlighted by the polarized media.

Possibly to avoid a 'wrong visibility', the Initiative organized a second demonstration a week after in Fatih, a conservative district of Istanbul, chosen specially to show their belonging to 'the neighborhood.' The Initiative specifically protested a publicized attack by the Gezi protestors to a woman with headscarf, known as Kabataş incidence[134], the authenticity of which was questioned by feminists and Gezi supporters. They conceptualized the attack both as an attack on freedom of religious expression and as violence against women. They argued that since a similar attack was not oriented towards religious men, this was also violence against women. They had a clear stance on accepting the authenticity of the attack based on the sole testimony of victim which was a common feminist principle in Turkey (Günaçtı 2012). A majority of Gezi protesters, including feminists, questioned the authenticity of this attack and regarded it as a fake news to delegitimize the protests.

In contrast to their first protest walk to Taksim, the Initiative did not directly support the Gezi protests in the second demonstration in Fatih. However, they still criticized the government harshly for its conducts during the protests and condemned the language of the government and conservative media which used the Kabataş attack as a political tool to delegitimize the Gezi protests all together. The Initiative criticized the government for its uncompromising stance and the disproportionate police violence, and for not taking transparent judicial steps to find and punish the people responsible for this attack. They also chanted slogans that addressed the government such as "We are not vote storage,"[135] and to protestors: "Don't be anyone's soldier, don't attack at the headscarf."[136]

Gezi Protests and Kurdish issue have been the issues that divide the Islamic community in Turkey for the last few years. During the Gezi protests, the Women who Get Together (WGT) platform had significant partitions and disagreements among its participants. Some of them publicly condemned the Gezi protests, while few others in the group attended the protests or

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[134] A pro-government newspaper publicized an interview with the daughter-in-law of an AKP mayor who claimed that dozens of half-naked men walked over her during day-time in Kabataş, Istanbul. The testimony was widely questioned before and after the video recording of the event was published, in which the claimed attack was not visible.

[135] "Oy deposu değiliz!"

[136] "Kimsenin askeri olma, başörtüye saldırma". It refers to the slogan in the Gezi protests "we are the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal"

showed support. After offensive disputes in the WGT e-mail group between the two sides, some years long friendships stopped among the participants (interviews 2015, 2016). Eventually, WGT became silent on political issues and kept a low profile. Its pro and anti-government participants have continued to be active in their own political groups and media. Furthermore, some Mazlumder members resigned after some other members including the general director Ahmet Faruk Ünsal (husband of Fatma Bostan Ünsal) signed a declaration that criticized government's actions and police violence during the Gezi protests (Radikal 2013).

An important example of a defamation campaign occurred in the summer of 2014. An anonymous self-declared Islamist group organized a public campaign against dissenting Islamist intellectuals, most of whom had criticized the government during the Gezi protests and the state violence on the Kurdish region. The boycotting group, without disclosing their identity, targeted women such as Hüda Kaya, Cihan Aktaş, Yıldız Ramazanoğlu, and some men such as Mehmet Bekaroğlu, Mustafa İslamoğlu, İhsan Eliaçık and also Mazlumder as an institution. They called for a boycott for not buying and reading the books of these writers. The alleged reason for the boycott was presented as aforementioned people's and institutions' moderate stance on Syria[137] and supporting Iranian interests in the Middle East (Evet Boykot 2014) rather than their dissenting acts in internal affairs.

Another attack on Mazlumder members took place in 2015 and the dissolution of Mazlumder speeded up in 2016. Mazlumder published a report in 2016 on the destruction of Kurdish cities by the state in its fight against PKK. Some members of Mazlumder (who were also participants of WGT) attended the funerals of those killed in Suruç Massacre in 2015 where ISIL targeted people who gathered to support Kurdish autonomy in Kobanî in Syria. With the allegations that Mazlumder leadership supports PKK after these events, eighty members of Mazlumder resigned. Pro-government members of Mazlumder assumed the leadership after a court process and the new leadership closed 16 branches in several Kurdish cities and Bursa in March 2017.

Convergence of Islam and feminism in Turkey has not developed mainly through academia but with street activism and public appearances in mainstream and social media. Nevertheless, an authoritarian pulse in the government has limited the spaces in the academia in the recent years,

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[137] Some of the boycotted names had published a declaration demanding a 'third way' in Turkey's Syrian policy. However, the boycott included the names and organizations that was not in this declaration.

which accelerated the street activism of especially the left-leaning people, while suspending the street activism of many other groups, including WIMs, against the government. Expulsions and detainments of 'Academics for Peace' – a group of academics who signed a petition for the state to stop its destructive operations in Kurdish cities in the winter of 2016 – presented the peak of the authoritarian attack on academia. Erdoğan, who became president in 2014, labeled the signatories as 'traitors' and former mafia leaders like Sedat Peker made death threats against the signatories.

The coup attempt by the Gülenists in the army against the government in the summer of 2016, has further escalated the government's academic expulsion process. Dissident academics from the left and Islamists have been expelled from their positions for either signing the 'Academics for Peace' declaration or for alleged connections with the Gülenists. The organizers of the prestigious International Political Science Association (IPSA) canceled the 2016 conference in Istanbul due to security concerns as well as to condemn the deterioration of academic freedom in the country. These all point at the vulnerability of academic freedom and dissenting visibility in Turkey.

As such, small dissident acts like signing a petition or *tweeting* has made women a target. Fatma Bostan Ünsal claimed that they did not do much to oppose the government besides tweeting (interview 2016). Ünsal, who was still a consultation member of AKP (*istişare üyesi*) by January 2016, was later expelled from her academic position in Alparslan University in Eastern Turkey with a state decree for signing the 'Academics for Peace' petition. In an environment where most of the people prefer to stay in the mainstream lines of religion and stay silent on government's repressive policies at best, women who cross the boundaries of religion or oppose the repression become visible as a target. While they are praised by the anti-government media, they are frequently attacked by pro-government Islamist media or anonymous trolls.

While the current AKP government attempts to cleanse academia from 'traitors', pro-government KADEM claims to value academic production and promote research on women according to its emphasis on gender justice and balancing women's domestic roles with working life. KADEM has an 'Academic Research and Development Committee' and publishes a national peer-reviewed journal, *Women's Research Journal.* Sare Yılmaz, the head of KADEM, herself has written and published on 'gender justice' in several journals like Turkish Quarterly.

The increased enrollment of women with headscarves in universities and ability to assume public posts since 2008 has been a very important gain for women's politico-religious empowerment. Furthermore, thanks to the strength of feminist mobilization and the open space for religious dissent enabled by AKP's coming to power, there are more and more dissenting and transgressing women's groups among WIMs since 2011 which carry a reformative and transformative capacity in religion and politics. On the other hand, the well-funded women's NGO's propagate conservative gender values in line with the government's agenda, and the government has been giving signals of institutionalizing religion in more aspects of social and political life, which have been serious threats to women's politico-religious empowerment. Furthermore, with the ongoing war at Turkey's Syrian borders since 2011, authoritarian practices in the country are accepted in silence by the majority of the society and political groups. In this context, the trajectories of women's politico-religious empowerment seem dim. Dissenting and transgressing acts of WIMs have been facing with serious internal and external obstacles as the two chapters have shown.

Part III: Women's Islamic Movements and Politico-Religious Empowerment in Egypt (1995-2016)[138]

In Part III, I analyze the capacities of women's Islamic movements in increasing women's politico-religious power in Egypt between 1995 and 2016. The findings bring to light WIMs positioning in mainstream gender and political order in Egypt. I explain the differences of WIMs in Egypt vis-à-vis the ones in Turkey by looking in parallel at repertoires and types of contention; networks and resources; discourses; and political opportunities and constraints around WIMs in Egypt. I draw attention to in-group differences as well as variations in time. I reveal different types and actors of women's politico-religious empowerment in Egypt and focus on two critical junctures, *khul'* reform in 2000 and the revolution in 2011. I trace how these developments have influenced the activism of women's Islamic movements and empowerment.

I diverge in different degrees from the definitions of women's Islamic movements in Egypt described in Badran (2009), Abu-Odeh (2004) and Karam (1998) and I will discuss the reasons in Chapter 6. I divide the movement in Egypt to four groups based on their discourse on women's rights, forms and levels of contention, and priority issues: (1) Islamic feminists led mainly by academics and recently with some local and international NGOs; (2) eclectic women's NGO's which refer to Islamic discourse for certain issues, mainly the Personal Status Law; (3) Islamist or religious women's activities and their NGOs; and (4) women of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muslim Sisters (*al-akhwāt al-muslimāt*). The focus of the chapter is on the activism of the first two groups since they prioritize women's issues as opposed to the latter groups that treat women's issues within a broader political framework. Self-defined Islamic feminist current in Egypt has mostly been an academic and research enterprise since the late 1990's until the revolution in 2011. Eclectic women's activism, on the other hand, concentrates more on advocacy and lobbying.

The chapters 6 and 7 demonstrate that the political authority of the state has direct influence over women's politico-religious power and on the activism of WIMs more than the religious establishment. While the periods of political freedom, most notably the revolution, have enhanced

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138 All quotations in Part III are direct quotations from interviews conducted in English, unless otherwise stated

the *discursive* and *organizational* empowerment of women by opening up the organizational space and giving opportunities to discuss taboo issues, *legal* empowerment does not necessarily have a positive relationship with the political freedoms in Egypt. However, organizational space has shrunk after the political crackdown with the popularly backed military coup since July 2013, with severe limitations on funding of civil society activism and increased state surveillance.

Legal empowerment of women has been very much connected to the authoritarian state in Egypt, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 6. *Khul'* reform in 2000 increased the politico-religious power of women with a tangible legal result. Based on Islamic ijtihad (new reasoning), *khul'* gave women the right to a no-fault divorce. It has been a significant empowerment of women in Egypt despite the resistance from other stakeholders, such as Islamists, divorced men or conservative jurists who have been resisting implementing the law. Notwithstanding the religious and legal credentials of the people behind this reform and support from the women's rights organizations, Suzanne Mubarak's support for the reform was the key to realizing it. After *khul'*, women's right to make ijtihad and further reform in Personal Status Laws (PSL) have become heated topics.

The mainstream Islamic gender order in Egypt is represented by al-Azhar institution and its imams, as well as, popular Islamist movements, notably Muslim Brotherhood. Regardless of important differences between the two, both attain a degree of dominance to men over women (such as taking for granted that men have a right to unilateral divorce, to polygamy and to a higher share of inheritance), and regard women's public presence limited with their responsibilities to their families.

Throughout the two chapters, I will demonstrate that the women's organizations have different empowerment capacities, as consolidating, reformative to transformative, based on their particular actions and stances. Islamic feminists have dissented from the mainstream religion with some degree of accommodation, thereby mostly contributing to the reformative capacity of women. Islamic feminists, more than calling attention to specific problems and solutions, have concentrated on producing theoretical works on equality and equity between men and women in Islam. The primary field that the Islamic feminists have problematized most has been women's equal access to the public space and equality in the family.

Academia has been a central location for Islamic feminism in Egypt, yet at the same time limited it to an elite space. They have not engaged in an overt confrontation with the state and the religious establishment, al-Azhar. Unlike their counterparts in Turkey (religious feminists), most Islamic feminists in Egypt prefer not to be visible in broadcast media and abstain from contention and polemic by limiting their public appearances to confined academic areas and women's NGO's projects. Consequently, Islamic feminists in Egypt have not become as vulnerable as some of the religious feminists in Turkey who have been more visible with overt dissent. Accordingly, the link between the Islamic feminist scholarship and activism has not yet been strong. Cairo University has provided a crucial hub for networking of Islamist, Islamic feminist, and feminist women.

As opposed to that, some feminists have been more confrontational with the state and religious clergy, demonstrated in sections 6.2 and 7.3. The strategic use of Islam by eclectic women's rights activists have been more radical; thus they showed more transformation potential. Some eclectic women's organizations have concentrated on PSL in a more systematic way. The efforts of these groups and women have contributed to women's politico-religious empowerment in a reformative and transformative way, as they dissent and transgress the norms.

The revolution of 25 January 2011 opened up spaces for all kind of political movements in Egypt, including feminism and Islamic feminism, as discussed in Chapter 7. Islamic feminism, in particular, has attained further institutional backing with the emergence of institutional outlets since 2011 – although this has been short-lived. Furthermore, the international networks of Islamic feminism have increased in Egypt since 2010, and this has enabled women to compare experiences around the Muslim countries and learning from each other. Women's right to produce ijtihad have especially been a crucial focus for Islamic feminist NGO's. They have engaged in dialogues with religious scholars and organized training with al-Azhar sheiks as a long-term goal of religious reform. Analysis of the Quranic concept of *qiwamah* (often interpreted as male authority over women) has been the backbone of Islamic feminist research in Egypt.

The younger generation has lead the discussions of the taboo subjects since around 2007 with the emergence of radical feminist organizations. The revolution in 2011 proliferated the feminist platforms and voices. A few Islamic feminists from the young generation have also appeared. These young and 'feeling-young' women open up taboo subjects not only in feminism

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but also in Islam. Some have also stood up against authoritarianism, by risking detention or jail. With their courageous work on sexuality and Islam as well as their fight against political repression, they act in 'transgressive' ways and thereby contribute to the transformative capacity of women.

Islamic feminists draw attention to the need for reform of religion itself. The extent to which they can live up to this goal has been questionable. They negotiate the boundaries of sharia (*ḥudūd*) regarding rights and duties of women in light of today's conditions. Community and family have been important references for women's movements in general in Egypt. It is not clear how far Islamic feminists can prioritize women's interests with a focus on the community and family since they have not produced specific solutions on the balance of womanhood, family, and community. Research on *qiwamah* has not yet turned into new legal proposals, as there are disagreements over the definition of equality in law particularly on the abolition of polygyny, male guardianship, and women's obedience. Most of them do not demand full legal equality, unlike the religious feminists in Turkey who justify the legal equality in Quranic terms.

Scholars point out that there is an Islamization of the women's rights discourse in Egypt (Abu-Odeh 2004; Abu-Lughod 2010, Sharafeldin 2013). The findings from the dissertation reveal that women's movements do not systematically use religious discourse except for the PSL reform. Sporadic reference to Islam is given but it has not been the main legitimacy of women's rights NGOs in Egypt. For example, as shown in section 7.4, there is no Islamization of the discourse against the sexual harassment, which has been a hot topic among youth and women's organizations especially after 2011. In this sense, eclectic and secular women's groups keep their secular discourse in many issues.

As I argue in section 6.3, Islamist women, as well, contribute to women's politico-religious empowerment. Some have been more visible in public and media than Islamic feminists. Even though they do not produce and proclaim a systematic gender equality discourse within Islam as they prioritize the community well-being as a whole, their strong presence and leading role in the Islamic community have been a role model for women. Therefore, such Islamist women are not accommodating, but dissenting from the mainstream gender order in religion (see Table 8 and 9).

The dissertation shows the limitations of advocacy when unaided. A key asset that gives WIMs more power is the trust of the broader community. Being a trusted public figure has not been easy for women. Some Islamist women have accomplished this more than the Islamic feminists. Building trust in local communities by providing services or opening up a safe space for them like some feminist NGOs seem to be effective to legitimate feminist activities in Egypt.

As I discuss in 7.5, the limitations on foreign funding and surveillance of human and women's rights activists have curtailed the overall public space since the political crackdown in 2013. Constraints on institutionalization and mobilization have been widespread since then. A dilemma for women in Egypt is that women's movements have taken part in various systems of authoritarianism. Some feminists and Islamic feminists support the military regime in Egypt that came to power in 2013 against the rise of Muslim Brotherhood or Salafi movements, and they turn a blind eye to human rights violations. On the other hand, some Islamic feminists from the younger generation, as well as feminists and Islamists women, dissent from the military regime. These stances are determining the transformative capacity of women's movements. While the suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood seems to have opened up more space for gender equality discourse in politics and law-making – with the caveat that neither the liberal sectors (*al-mujtamaʿ al-madanī*) nor the military regime wholeheartedly supports gender equality – democratic corrosion is counter-productive in the long-run. The suppression of feminist voices who demand democratization has been an indication of this.

The contextual conditions have been much more challenging for WIMs in Egypt than WIMs in Turkey regarding legal reform: religion adds an extra layer of power that has to be confronted due to the clergy's hold of authority. The main challenges for women's activists who work within the religious frame in Egypt are: (1) a limited sustained organizational network and outreach (despite the increase after 2011); (2) unsustained intellectual production on gender equality in Islam (despite the increase after 2011); 3) not being seen as religious authorities; 4) lack of connection to the local communities; and, 5) broader suppression of the political scene and having to collaborate with authoritarian governments.

The structure of Part III is as follows: In Chapter 6, I map the main actors in the convergence of Islam and feminism in Egypt between 1995 and 2011 by looking at two streams:

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Islamic feminism and efforts of eclectic women's groups in reforming personal status law. Here, I shortly touch upon stances of Islamist women. In Chapter 7, I focus on the developments after the revolution in 2011. In particular, this chapter demonstrates the institutionalization of Islamic feminism, opening up of the space for taboo subjects and limited interest among young generation to Islamic feminism. In this chapter, I look at how the overall repression in the political scene influence WIMs, their visibility, and politico-religious space and power.

Chapter 6: Convergence of Islam and Feminism in Egypt (1995-2016)

6.1 Islamic feminism in Egypt: Accommodation and Dissent Together (1995-2011)

Islamic feminism (*al-nisawīya al-islāmīya*) was predominantly a research-oriented endeavor in Egypt between 1995 and 2011. Self-claimed Islamic feminists consist mostly of female university professors and researchers (personal interviews 2014). Without openly challenging the state or the religious apparatus, Islamic feminists in Egypt engaged in a knowledge building and disseminating effort in small closed academic circles. The priority issues of Islamic feminists have been women's position in Islamic sources and history and reinterpreting Quranic concepts.

There is a conflation of Islamist women, 'Islamic' feminists, 'Islamist' feminists and Muslim feminists in Egypt in the English literature. For Abu-Odeh (2004), the mainstream feminists have a liberal orientation, and they focus on legal reform around the concepts of equality, autonomy, and consent. She defines another group as Islamic feminists who have a more conservative orientation than the liberal groups. For her, while the former consults to the religious discourse for strategic reasons, the latter normatively believes that Islam provides the "proper structure of gender relations" (2004, 174). She argues that Islamist feminists uphold the principle 'husband maintains and wives obey' and they find it problematic when both sexes cross their boundaries (2004, 151-152). Abu-Odeh talks about Islamist women rather than Islamic feminists in Egypt. Furthermore, Islamist women in Egypt do not also uphold the superiority of husbands unconditionally and uncritically. Same is true for Azza Karam's definition of 'Islamist feminists' where she talks about Islamist women in my definition. Karam defines Islamist women as feminists to differentiate them from the male Islamists due to their gender sensitivity (1998, 10). She defines 'Muslim feminists' as women who value Islam and do not have a problem in being defined as feminists (Karam 1998, 11). This definition matches with Islamic feminists in my study.

I demonstrate that Islamic feminists have engaged in accommodation and dissent, sometimes in the same action. For this reason, the typology shows broader trends, rather than fixed positions. Three issues have made Islamic feminist trend (1995-2015) accommodating besides its dissenting goals and actions. First of all, they have abstained from using a radical language and

their style of contention has been contained. Secondly, they have often emphasized the community and society. Thirdly, they have not targeted specific laws, which is a sign that they avoid direct contestation with the authorities. Related to this, most Islamic feminists do not engage in a broader critique of the political system in their public appearances.

Islamic feminists in Egypt define their work as a reformist knowledge-building project. Dr. Omaima Abou-Bakr, professor of English and Comparative Literature at *Cairo University* and a co-founder of *Women and Memory Forum (WMF)*, is the most well-known Islamic feminist in Egypt and one of them known worldwide. For Abou-Bakr 'Islamic feminism' is about:

> …knowledge and reform. Knowledge: producing a new knowledge about gender and Islam, a new perspective, new discourses altogether in the hope that this kind of alternative new knowledge and discourse can have a role in reform… legal reform, social and cultural reform, we hope that it can have a role in actual reform (Abou-Bakr interview 2014).

As Nadje al-Ali argues women's rights activists in Egypt have come to see feminism as a Western product for having been blamed for cooperating with Western imperialism for decades (2000, 47). This image of feminism has a role in the emergence of 'Islamic feminism' as a localized concept. Likewise, Islamic feminist Dr. Amany Saleh, the acting head of *Association for Studying Women in Civilization (ASWIC)* and an associate professor of political science, public opinion and mass communication at *Misr International University* in Cairo, argues that Islamic feminism has more chance to be accepted in society, since it is 'modern' and 'Islamic' at the same time:

> The liberal feminism, modernist feminism including the socialist feminism and so on have always been floating on the surface of society, they never went down to the root.[139] They will be never accepted by ordinary people... They copy ideas from the West and repeat them….Ordinary women practice both Islam and modernization in their

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[139] A similar point was made by Islamist Safinaz Kazem who quoted the philosopher Zaki Naguib Mahmood: "we enlightened people are like the olive oil, we float on top of the society but do not mix with it"(see Rashed, Tahani. 1997. Documentary Film: Four Women of Egypt)

lives. An equation that puts the two together in conciliation is the main
purpose of Islamic feminists (Saleh interview 2014).

As such, Islamic feminism as being a 'local' concept is emphasized frequently among its defenders. Dr. Hoda El-Saadi[140] is an adjunct assistant professor of Islamic history at *American University in Cairo (AUC)* and another co-founder of WMF. El-Saadi also believes in Islamic feminism and building an egalitarian society in which both men and women get equal opportunities (interview 2014). She highlights that their demands are feminist, but their source of legitimacy is coming from Islam. She researches women's public participation in the classic period of Islamic history to bring them as examples for today. For her, Islamic feminism is about establishing a 'new egalitarian epistemology of Islam' against the prevailing narratives of despotic male politics and Orientalist scholarship (El-Saadi 2014 interview). She argues that 'alternative knowledge' helps to resist patriarchy:

> Knowledge is monopolized by men, and on the basis of the knowledge people build their lives, and societies are constructed. By trying to bring people the alternative knowledge one can construct an alternative… If you go back, you find that this simply is one interpretation of the Quran, one interpretation of hadith or one interpretation even of history. Why don't we provide another interpretation that can give people a wider perspective and alternative knowledge that will help them to resist patriarchy, resist a despotic ruler, and resist rigidity? Definitely, it's a kind of a resistance (El-Saadi 2014, interview).

What separates Islamic feminists from other feminists in Egypt who use religious discourse sporadically is that Islamic feminists aim to produce a systematized gender-sensitive knowledge of Islam – which women have lacked as Chapter 3 demonstrated. They seek a 'deeper' approach to produce 'a new feminist religious knowledge' rather than only seeking to change laws (Al-Sharmani interview 2014). Dr. Mulki Al-Sharmani[141], an Academy of Finland research fellow and Docent at Faculty of Theology in the University of Helsinki, is a member of the global Musawah movement. As a woman of Somali background who grew up in Egypt, she has been researching

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[140] not to be confused with Dr. Hoda Elsadda who is also a co-founder at WMF
[141] She was also an assistant professor of anthropology at AUC.

and writing about reform of Egyptian personal status laws, as well as, Islamic feminism and the question of hermeneutics and authority both transnationally and in Egypt. She emphasizes the holistic approach of Islamic feminism to change the overall religious discourse on gender equality:

> It's not just about critiquing a particular interpretation, no. It's also about critiquing the discourse underlying this interpretation. Changing the whole religious discourse, changing the methodology. (Al-Sharmani interview 2014)

Many Islamic feminists in Egypt come from middle-class religious families who were not politicized and simply observed religious duties, in their own words (personal interviews 2014). The conservative discourse of Islam that devalue women, experiences of injustice under the name of religion and socialization in gender issues have influenced the Islamic feminists in building up their identity and academic focus as such. Mulki Al-Sharmani recalls her alienation from the patriarchal interpretations from an early age:

> When I was fourteen, I started to be interested in going to the mosque… praying Fridays and listening to the service. I listened to this famous Egyptian scholar Mohammad Matwally Sharawy[142]… I was mesmerized by his mastery of Arabic language and how he engages the Quran. But then he came to *sūrat al-nisā'* [the verse 'the women'] that was precisely the point where he lost me. He saw things in a very patriarchal way, his idea of women was that they were just mothers, carriers of wombs basically, also as sexual beings. I felt like that went so much against the ethical principles that I associated with Islam and the Quran. And that always created a dilemma for me. He was a good scholar but he was completely blind when it came to the gender issue. For me gender issue was so important not from a rights perspective to start with, it was important from a theological perspective as a believing person….I said that didn't make sense, it was not ethical. Islam is a religion of beauty, of justice. All the time

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[142] former minister of Endowments, prominent Islamic preacher between the 1970's and 1990's

in the Quran, [it mentions] "*al-'adl wa-l-iḥsān*" (justice and doing the good and beautiful). But…what he was interpreting about women did not speak to me at all. I was completely turned off [sic] by this (Al-Sharmani 2014 interview).

On top of the official authority they have, male religious scholars have competency in reciting the Quran and Arabic language, and this further engrain them as religious authorities among society, as the account of Al-Sharmani shows.

Besides the alienation from the mainstream religious discourse on women, being exposed to gender issues in academia has also been a crucial road to Islamic feminism. The importance of informal networks in politics has long been manifested (Singerman 1995). Cairo University has been the key hub for different kinds of political movements in Egypt. From leftists to Islamists, from feminists to anti-military activists, the university has historically brought people together to mobilize under different kinds of ideologies. Cairo University's *Faculty of Economics and Political Science (*known as *FEPS)*, the most prestigious faculty of its kind in the country, and *Faculty of Literature* have been of particular significance for Islamist, feminist, and Islamic feminist women. Omaima Abou-Bakr explains how Cairo University and Women and Memory Forum sensitized her towards gender issues:

> After I came back from the US, I came to work as an academic at Cairo University. After a few years, we began the project of Women and Memory Forum. Getting together with other friends and academics, we found ourselves interested in studying more about women's history and culture. Being gender sensitized, being interested in women's history and heritage, but also I become interested in Islamic studies but with a gender perspective… Being in the Women and Memory Forum, I began to discover feminist theory and studies, the concepts of gender and gender justice and where a gendered perspective was (Abou-Bakr 2014 interview).

In the Egyptian context, academia has been the main hub, and the research has been the main focus of Islamic feminists. This can be explained by the main premise of Islamic feminism which is re-

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reading religious sources and academia is less reachable for societal pressures. Rather than lobbying or human rights activism, intellectuals productions have been the main repertoires of contention of Islamic feminists as will be detailed below.

A Landmark for the Convergence of Islam and Feminism: Mona Abul-Fadl and Association for Studying Women in Civilization (ASWIC)

During the late 1990's, personal efforts of an influential scholar, late Dr. Mona Abul-Fadl, played an important part in the convergence of Islam and feminism in Egypt. Abul-Fadl was a professor of political theory at FEPS at Cairo University. She is the daughter of Dr. Zahira Abdeen, discussed in Chapter 3. Abul-Fadl grew up in London and Cairo due to her parents' occupation and thus experienced cultural encounters between 'East' and 'West' from an early age which influenced her research. Coming from an Islamist background, she produced works with an Islamic perspective. She was a fellow at *International Institute of Islamic Thought* (IIIT) in the USA and directed the Western Thought Project at IIIT and published several books on Islam, West, and encounters between the two civilizations.[143]

Abul-Fadl founded two centers that aimed to flourish 'Muslim women studies' in the USA and Egypt. In April 1998, she founded the *Zahira Abdeen Chair for Women's Studies[144]* at the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences in Cordoba University[145] in Virginia, USA. One year after, Abul-Fadl founded the *Association for Studying Women in Civilization (ASWIC – jamʿīya dirāsāt al-marʾā w-āl ḥaḍāra)* in Cairo as a non-profit organization (Abul-Fadl 2007d). She rented a small apartment in Zamalek, an affluent district in Cairo, as an office, library and meeting place for ASWIC. She hired several colleagues and students from Cairo University as researchers. She was the main financial sponsor for ASWIC, yet it is not clear whether she received funding from IIIT or Cordoba University.

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[143] She was married to late Dr. Taha Jabir al Alwani who was a founding member and former president of the IIIT; a former president of the Fiqh Council of North America, and the Imam Al-Shafi'i Chair in the Islamic Legal Theory at the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences at Cordoba University, USA. In 2002, Abul-Fadl and Al-Alwani's house in Virginia was raided by counter-terrorism of the Treasury Department as part of the government's attempt to find out 'the flow of money to terrorist groups'. (Miller 2002)
[144] The name of the chair was sometimes written as Dirasat al-Nisawiya (Feminist Studies), sometimes as Dirasat al-Mara (Women's Studies), and sometimes written in English as 'Women and Gender Studies' in their website.
[145] An Islamic university in the US

Abul-Fadl aimed to strengthen her project 'Muslim Women Studies' with international networks. She envisioned the chair in the US 'as an openness to the world' and Cairo 'as a source of enlightenment' (Abul-Fadl field notes 1999). Exchanges between English and Arabic were necessary for Abul-Fadl in two ways: first, she wanted the researchers in ASWIC to be able to read English sources and to review them with an academic eye. Secondly, she aimed to translate and publicize Arabic sources for non-Arabic speakers.

The opening statement of ASWIC highlighted the importance of women for the *community* as a whole, representing the traditional discourse on women:

> ASWIC aims at safeguarding and improving women's status and protecting the family and society at large. It seeks justice for women based on the premise that women, in their various and versatile roles, are the source for community development and social reform (Abul-Fadl 2007d).

Being part of the community (*umma*) is indispensable for womanhood that Abul-Fadl envisioned. The focus on women in ASWIC was *not* to elevate the status of women independently from the community and society (*mujtama'*). She addressed a group of friends in Cairo who assisted her in creating the Zahira Abdeen Chair in 1998:

> Speaking as a woman scholar coming from an Islamic civilizational perspective, I take 'engendering community' to be a vital perspective in rethinking women in culture and society. To speak about women is to envisage community, and no amount of thinking about community can be taken seriously without re-centering women as the cornerstones and active agents for generation, preservation, cultivation, and regeneration (Abul-Fadl field notes 1999).

The emphasis on community is pervasive across diverse women's groups in Egypt as opposed to Turkey. For Abul-Fadl, it comes from both strong nationalist thrust in Egypt and Islamic component of her ideology. She did not refer to the community as a tactical mean – as some other women's organizations do. She allocated a considerable amount of space in her academic work on discussions of community and Islamic civilization.

ASWIC produced three newsletters in Arabic named *al-mar'ā w-al-ḥaḍāra* (Women and Civilization) between 2000 and 2002. Besides Abul-Fadl, the team included her colleagues and graduate students from Cairo University, namely Dr. Amany Saleh as the vice-president, Dr Hind Mostafa, Manal Yahya El-Sheemy, Zeinab Aboul Magda and Azza Galal. This team and guest researchers published articles about the position of women in Islam, feminism and Islamic history (ASWIC 2000, 2001, 2002)[146]. The abstracts and the editorials were translated into English and few articles were published in English. This is a reflection of ASWIC's efforts and ability to connect to international networks, unlike their Turkish counterparts.

The ASWIC newsletters set forth Islamic feminist knowledge production in Egypt in a collaborative manner with institutional support, and encouraged and provided a space for researchers who are interested in the issue of women in Islam. The articles tackled Quranic concepts that have mainly relevance for the public lives of women, although concepts like *zawjīya* and qiwamah also have implications for private matters. They did not tackle daily problems in Egypt except few articles.

The first pilot issue of Women and Civilization, named 'Towards an Islamic perspective for the feminist knowledge/epistemology (*naḥwa manẓūr islāmī l-il-maʿarifa al-nisawīya)* was released in spring of 2000 with two guiding concepts: *umm* (motherhood) and *umma* (community)[147]. The Arabic editorial highlights the diversity of thought schools in the newsletter including Islamic, feminist, academic, rationalist and idealist ones. What unites them was described as the will of truth, justice and reform of their religion (*dīn*), community (*umma*) and country (*waṭan*) (Abul-Fadl 2007b). Mona Abul-Fadl explains as to how mothering and community are central to ASWIC's understanding of civilization:

> *Umm* and *umma* are two facets of a common mandate. Both concepts,
> mothering and community, were suffused and transfused with the

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[146] Other publications of ASWIC included a bibliographic survey of the classical sources in the tradition and a survey of the contemporary Arabic sources on women, including works written by women (Abul-Fadl field notes 1999). The book is entitled "Women in modern culture and society: a century of Arabic discourse: an analytical bibliography" in 2002.

[147] Original translation

coming of Islam….Not only was she central to each role, rather, she was the vital link between both, stretching vertically, marking generations of descent (*ṭabaqāt*), and spatially, or horizontally, imprinting an ecology of ascent. The moral order as defined by an ethos and its quality - intent, and extent - is contingent on this link. As women scholars embarked on an affirmative project of rediscovering root identities and reclaiming lost spaces / roles, we confront the task of retracing a collective, gendered sirah [*sīra*][148], and of piecing the fragments, interweaving them into coherent patterns that may serve to texture our lives in the modern world and give meaning and direction to our strivings. We might thereby also contribute to safeguarding our threatened communities against the wiles and guiles of the surreptitious anti-humanist globalizing currents that fill the air (Abul-Fadl, 2007c).

As a political theorist, Abul-Fadl engaged the woman question often at an abstract level, as exemplified here, with an intricate use of Arabic and English language. It is possible to argue that her articles were not accessible to ordinary Egyptians. Moreover, her level of abstraction blurs what she possibly means in the immediate context of Egypt about the right balance between women and community. It is clear that she asks for a larger 'space' and role for women, yet what would be the specific trade-offs for women to 'safeguard the threatened community' is not explained.

One of the well-known Islamic feminists today in Egypt, Amany Saleh, contributed to this volume. In her article, named the same as the title of the volume, Saleh presented the main tenets of Islamic feminism and its metaphysical differences from the liberal and Marxist feminisms (2000). Saleh emphasized that criticism and deconstruction of knowledge in Islamic feminism are geared towards reform, *not* towards destruction (2000, 9). She explains their difference from other feminists:

> We don't believe that the whole heritage of knowledge and social structure should be decomposed. Of course, it has some masculine

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[148] Biographies of important figures in Islamic history, including of prophets

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biases, but it also has very human features. They need to be refixed and criticized, but not destroyed (Saleh interview 2014).

Islamic feminists' stress on 'reform' (*iṣlaḥ*) instead of 'destruction' (*hadm*) accords with their emphasis on community. This emphasis had an impact on their repertoires and styles of contention and the type of capacity they can contribute: reform, not transformation.

The theme of the second newsletter published in 2001 was "Women's Sirah and Muslim History." Sirah (*sīra*) refers to the biographies of prophets and important personal figures in Islamic history. In the English editorial for the second newsletter, Abul-Fadl explains that studies on *sīra* are crucial to reclaim history as Muslim women and these studies could constitute the premise for 'effective reform in contemporary Muslim societies' (Abul-Fadl 2001). Although she points to 'reform' in reality, she does not specify in which field, law or issue that the reform is needed in the immediate context of Egypt or other Muslim countries.

Some of the articles in this newsletter touch upon women's pledge of allegiance in the early years of Islam; women rebels against Umayyad sultans, social and political role of the *faqihāt* (women jurists) in Muslim history and men in women's classical poetry. One of the contributors, Manal Yahya, for example, writes about women's *baī'a*, political allegiance, to the new Islamic community/state during prophet's time. In her article named 'The Spring of the Political Women' (*rabīa' al-mar'ā al-siyāsīya*), she argues that women were constituent members of the pact between the prophet and its followers. Nevertheless, Yahya points out to "the methodological challenges of reading gender into the politics of the early Muslim community" (2001). Like the emphasis in the editorial, Manal Yahya draws a parallel between women's allegiance to the prophet and women's political participation today:

> It's not only about history, but it's also discovering your identity...
> [With] *baī'a al-nisā'*, women were asked to give their opinions 1400
> years ago. So, can now anyone ask 'are women allowed to participate
> in elections or not?' How come? (Yahya interview 2014)

ASWIC issued the third newsletter with the theme "The Woman and the Quran" in 2002. Titles and abstracts of this newsletter signal to a path towards Islamic feminism at its core. As such, contributors of this volume looks at the Quranic concepts and try to reread and interpret the Quran

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from a gendered perspective. I argue that the third newsletter of ASWIC is a forerunner of a collaborated Islamic feminist production in Egypt with its systematic approach and its long-run aim. In its editorial, Abul-Fadl directly criticizes the existing jurisprudence on women and hints towards women's right to ijtihad (legal reasoning). Ijtihad is a key field that can expand women's politico-religious power:

> Women thinking for themselves and seeking to renegotiate their place and role in a changed and changing world, can no longer take ready answers on the authority of others, no matter how hallowed the transmission, or how daunting the credentials. We turn to the Quran to re-establish links with the source of some very basic knowledge about ourselves and our world, and with the fount of our values and convictions. We do so not just in remembrance and reassurance, but to ask critical questions about our role and status in society today, as well as about the issues and orientations in our larger community which will determine the direction of a future generation for whom we feel responsible (Abul-Fadl 2002).

In this volume, Abul-Fadl clearly points out a criticism towards existing Islamic fiqh (jurisprudence). Transmission of fiqh by well-famed male scholars and consolidated unanimity over their interpretations over centuries have provided legitimacy for keeping rulings that put women in a subordinate status. Abul-Fadl, thus, questions the authority of such rulings based on their credentials.

In this newsletter, Amany Saleh explores the gender question in the Quran in an article entitled "Gender in the Quran: Beyond Feminist and "kiwama" (Qiwamah) Theories." Saleh highlights the concept of *zawjīya* (pairing, marriage) in the Quran and positions her understanding of *zawjīya* against both feminist and *fiqhī* theories of gender:

> Zawjīya ("Pairing") is the original and widely used expression in the Quran to describe the male-female relationship. Grounded in a universal cosmogony, *zawjīya* is poised to compass and encompass a dynamic axiology: it asserts the meaning of a deep rooted unity and affinity, human equality, interdependence, functional integrity, a fair and balanced system of reciprocities, a right-duty allocation, and a

basic social equity between both sexes where merit and due recompense are acquired and not ascribed… With this in view, the Quran unequivocally denies the inevitability of a confrontation between the sexes and dislodges traditional male-bounded authoritarian theories on the gender question (Saleh 2002).

If merit and due recompense are acquired and not ascribed as Saleh posits, then how do they see the right and duty allocation? Hind Mostafa, another researcher at ASWIC who has worked at *Arab Women Organization* in Cairo, also touches upon the concept of *zawjīya* in this newsletter. Like Saleh, Mostafa argues that there are critical discrepancies between the Quranic perspective and the juridical reading of *zawjīya* (2002). Saleh and Mostafa's understanding of *zawjīya* diverges from the radical feminist emphasis on the confrontation between sexes. Hind Mostafa explains that while they appreciate the problematization of gender relations in Western feminism, they had a problem with their solutions:

> The feminists have offered very good readings of the real problems. They have opened all the files, approached women as human and individuals in their contexts, and talked overtly about women's sufferings. We, as Muslims, never approach women as human and individuals in their social context and we do not look at how they suffer in the family and workplace such as sexual harassment and violence in the family, and intimate relations between women and men. We say that "we have no problems." But, the Western thought studied these issues well and gave wonderful analyses… However, when it comes to the level of answers and cures, there was a problem (H Mostafa interview 2014).

Instead, they sought solutions within the '*tawḥīdī* (related to the unity of God) epistemology.' Abul-Fadl coined the term which she defended against the secular epistemology. The main divergence point of *tawḥīdī* paradigm from the secular one is that the divine revelation is also regarded a source of knowledge (Abul-Fadl 1994; nd; Abul-Fadl 2001, 161). Amany Saleh, directing head of ASWIC, asserts that they do not believe that the experience of women is the ultimate source of knowledge, this is where they differ from feminism. Secondarily, Abul-Fadl's preference on the concept of *tawḥīdī* epistemology, instead of *Islamic* epistemology, also served

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to highlight the common moral and metaphysical approaches between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. Abul-Fadl did not want to discriminate against the Christian community nor contribute to *madhhabī* (sectarian) and ideological divisions in Egypt (personal interviews 2014).

Overall, their solutions were based on harmony between the sexes and harmony within the community. For this reason, they did not line up problems in the private sphere. Accordingly, other articles in the newsletter underscore the public role of women in the Quran and argue that there is no difference between men and women in being able to attain high qualities including rulership. In her article on Mary, Tayba Sharif aims to go beyond "traditional controversies about Mary's prophetic status to address attributes identified with a divine election and merit that Allah reserves for his righteous devotees". She argues that sex is not a factor to be able to attain a divine call. Similarly, Manal Yahya studies Queen of Sheeba (*Saba*) in the Quran as a model of women's rule. Her conclusion is that "when dealing with authority or political rule, [the Quran] focuses on roles and not persons, it also neutralizes gender, and evaluates regimes relying on aspects of competence and faith (*īmān*)" (2002). Yahya explains that her motivation for writing this article was to present a Quranic example to improve the daily lives of women in Egypt and the Arab world:

> We presented *Saba*, as a model of a woman ruling in the Quran. She could lead her people to Islam with [the prophet] Soliman. On the other hand, *firʿaūn* [pharaoh] was a man and he led his people to *jahannam* [the hell]. So it's not about whether the ruler is a man or women. We say that the Quran gave a model of a woman who governed people with *shūrā* [consultation] and was successful to rescue them from *kufr* [disbelief] and *ḍalāl* [straying from the right path] (Yahya interview 2014).

As such, this newsletter laid forward a classic Islamic feminist approach by studying less-attended concepts in the Quran and bringing to light the strong (*and* praised) female figures in the Quran. In the latter, the authors tried to derive messages for today by focusing on the powerful public roles of these women, as well as, their positive personal attributes such as righteousness and openness to deliberate. However, the *zawjīya* concept would need further elaboration as to how it would address the right and duty allocation between spouses in current conditions in Egypt and elsewhere.

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Besides the three newsletters, contributors of ASWIC met on a weekly basis between 1999 and 2002 to read and discuss biographies and canonical texts on Islamic history and feminist theory, including liberal or Marxist feminism. Sometimes they invited other researchers to these workshops. They focused on epistemology and discourse analysis (personal interviews 2014).

A factor that potentially limited the free space of women in ASWIC is that the husband of Abul-Fadl, Sheik Taha Jabir Al-Alwani was present in most of these meetings, including the first general meeting in August 1999 (personal interviews 2014). Abul-Fald justifies this as "to benefit from his feedback on some of our specific projects in areas of his expertise" and explains that the forum is not exclusive to women (Abul-Fadl field notes 1999). Nevertheless, she highlights the necessity of a leading role for women in their platform:

> Our policy, however, is deliberately to promote and encourage a platform that privileges women at the outset, in order to establish a foothold for women in a debate that has ironically been dominated by men, and to overcome some conventional habits of mind that have often left the front seats for men in contending the controversies that arise (Abul-Fadl 2002, 3).

Despite the intention to privilege women, Al-Alwani's presence in the meetings – as an older man, a respected sheik and the husband of the founder – might have silenced female academics and young researchers who are coming from a social science background. It seemed to have foreclosed the space for free discussions on more private and taboo issues.

ASWIC also organized several public conferences on Aisha bint al Shati's legacy and Qasim Amin's reformist discourse. They also participated in a joint conference on "Women and the Renaissance Thought 'A Civilizational Vision' " (*al-mar'ā wa fikr al-nahḍa: rū'īa ḥaḍārīya)* with Dr. Nadia Mostafa from the Center for Epistemological Studies (*markaz al-dirāsāt al-ma'arifīya*) in September 1999. In her speech, Abul-Fadl emphasizes the agency of women in *al-nahḍa* (Arab Renaissance) by referring to the title of the lecture, 'women *and* renaissance thought,' instead of 'women *in* the renaissance thought.' The latter was the widespread approach until the last two decades as explained in Chapter 3. A diverse group of listeners attended to this conference:

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men and women, veiled and unveiled women, Egyptian and international al-Azhar students from East Asia (Cenciv1997, 2012). Hind Mostafa recalls that they gave particular emphasis on *al-nahḍa* and as they believe that there was a paradigm shift in this era which influenced women's issues (2014 interview). However, the name from the era Mostafa recollects is Qasim Amin, whom they read at the weekly workshops and for whom they organized a conference – instead of women of the *nahḍa* era.

The outreach and visibility of the events and newsletters were limited to educated elite composed of college students, post-graduates, and writers (interviews 2014). Only small circles of other researchers were aware of the group and followed the newsletters. Dr. Omaima Abou-Bakr, not a member of ASWIC, played a catalyst role and introduced the group and the newsletters to her circles through the WMF (H. Mostafa 2014 interview). ASWIC distributed some issues to national libraries and *Al-Ahram*, the biggest publishing house in Egypt, but Mostafa explains that they were not successful in advertising and dealing with commercial issues. Abul-Fadl also explains that although there was media coverage including a personal interview with her after their conference on reformist discourse, she did not prioritize media coverage for advertising the activities and mission of ASWIC (Abul-Fadl field notes 1999).This shows her prioritization of knowledge production rather than responding to the ongoing political debates in Egyptian society.

ASWIC suspended its projects around 2004 after the illness of Abul-Fadl[149], and marriage, job, and emigration choices of other members. Overall, ASWIC created a space and raised a human resource for Islamic feminism. Abul-Fadl did not call herself nor the association 'Islamic feminist'. Yet her colleagues and students, Amany Saleh and Hind Mostafa, highlight her role in channeling their attention to Islamic feminism and her charming influence on them with her perspectives in Islamic studies. Abul-Fadl's charismatic leadership and guidance were central to ASWIC:

> My original interest was not Islamic feminism, but it was modernizing Islam
> in general… I was pushed to Islamic feminism by my professor, sponsor Dr.
> Mona Abul-Fadl. I gradually developed this question: could the promotion of

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[149] Abul-Fadl spent her last years completing a book about her mother, Zahira Abdeen (interviews 2014). Abul-Fadl passed away in 2008.

the status of women in Islam be an impulsive mechanism for changing and developing Islamic thoughts and life in general? (Saleh interview 2014).

Hind Mostafa testifies that they borrowed the term 'Islamic feminism' from Omaima Abou-Bakr. Yet, she also highlights the role of Abul-Fadl in her intellectual orientation towards Islamic feminism. They met when Mostafa was a student in the FEPS at Cairo University:

> We studied the western methodologies and the political thought of western history. I felt something was missing between my academic education, and my life and culture derived from Islam and Islamic references... There was an alienation between the two. In the fourth year, I met Dr Mona Abul-Fadl. She showed how to merge the science and Islamic perspective. [There were] no more alienations. (H Mostafa interview 2014)

Members of ASWIC recall their experiences as a very inspiring and enlightening period. Manal Yahya worked from 2000 to 2004 as a researcher and editor and she highlights that it was a like family more than a job. Yahya, who currently works at the journal *al-muslim al-muāʿṣar* (the modern Muslim) also emphasizes the personal influence of Abul-Fadl:

> I admired her work a lot, she was a model to me. She was unique, when there was not much unique perspective and thought … in the college among those who talked about Islamic thought. She was different and amazing that she would talk without any fear and she could handle all the arguments and defend very well and convincingly… Meeting Dr. Mona was a pleasure, it influenced my life very much (Yahya interview 2014).

Indulgence of learning marks the experiences of women in ASWIC:

> It was a very unique *tajruba*, experience. I think it can't be repeated. All of us were willing to learn. We looked at Dr. Mona as a guide, *murshid.* All of us were seeking knowledge and motivated only by *raḥbat al-taʿallum* (openness for learning), not money. (H Mostafa 2014 interview).

Comparing ASWIC to BKP in Turkey (as they were the closest associations regarding their vision in two countries), BKP has been much more women-centric in its activities and discourses even

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though it also highlights the importance of society and Islamic community. Furthermore, BKP joins human rights declarations, issues press statements and join in demonstrations on specific women and human rights issues in Turkey. However, ASWIC was short-lived, so it may be difficult to compare. Still, the difference may be partially explained by levels of political suppression in two countries and politicization of religious women due to the headscarf bans in Turkey. Moreover, the legacy of women's movements in Turkey for addressing women's rights in individual terms independent of society – connected to a higher intrusion of liberal discourses in the country as opposed to colonized regions – has also been influential.

Islamic feminists in Women and Memory Forum

Women and Memory Forum (*al-mar'ā w-al-dhākira* – WMF) has a very distinct and important place for feminist studies not only in Egypt but the Arabic-speaking countries in general. It was founded in 1995 by several academician women from English Literature Department at Cairo University. WMF documents and highlights the legacies of prominent women from Egyptian history and promotes alternative information to counter patriarchy. Dr Hoda Elsadda, professor of English and Comparative literature at Cairo University, one of the main co-founders of WMF and a well-known women's rights activist in Egypt, explains the goal of the forum as empowerment through disseminating alternative information:

> [A]lternative information that empowers women was very scarce. I'm an academic, university teacher, I noticed how when there is a debate in the classroom on women's rights issues, or something related to gender issues the young men in the classroom have a lot more knowledge available to them that confirms stereotypes about men and women; knowledge that categorizes who does what, division of roles, natural roles of women etc. that we all try to challenge, they have a lot to quote and support their arguments. Whereas, there was less information available to the students who wanted to argue against these stereotypes… The starting point is really about making cultural and historical information available, which empowers women to advocate for their rights. (Elsadda interview 2014)

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There are at least two co-founders at WMF who define themselves as Islamic feminists. One of them, Omaima Abou-Bakr, professor of English and Comparative Literature at *Cairo University*, is the most well-known Islamic feminist in Egypt. Elsadda states that they agree on feminist principles with Abou-Bakr since the conception of WMF (Elsadda interview 2014). Abou-Bakr describes the WMF as her *home*, meaning that she undertakes her feminist and Islamic feminist research mainly there (interview 2014). Abou-Bakr highlights that they stand in between research and activism:

> I always say WMF made me discover the feminist in me... I also wanted to work on…Islamic history and hermeneutics, I became very interested in Quranic hermeneutics. And I also find myself personally not happy with whatever discourses there are in our society and culture about women or women in Islam. I began to see the injustice, the male bias, you became aware of that it can't be Islam…*yani* I have been a Muslim all of my life, is this what Islam is? And do I have to accept women's inferiority and marginalization of women in the name of Islam? No. Something was telling me that's not right. That's how it all started, on the level of research first, and then being part of an NGO. We try to call ourselves research-activists…scholar-activists (Abou-Bakr interview 2014).

Hoda El-Saadi also defines herself as an Islamic feminist. El-Saadi gives lectures and publishes at WMF book series for the average Arab readers. She focuses on the construction of fiqh in the historical context:

> What I believe is the history does not reflect reality…In many cases, history is actually a counter-reaction to reality. For example, Ibn al-Hajj, a Mamluk Maliki *faqīh* [jurisprudent] of the 15th century, gave a *fatwa* that women should not go out of their houses except three times. Many people think "OK, Ibn al-Hajj said this, we should follow him. This is what Islam says" No, when you look deep in court records and non-traditional historical sources, you find that this was not the reality of the Egyptian society in the 15th century. On the contrary, women were very active in the street and in the courts. So, you come to realize that what Ibn al-Hajj said…was simply a

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counter-reaction to the reality. The more women are active; the more religious scholars are in fear that women are a threat. They feel that they lose their grip on society… So they write this simply in an attempt to prove their authority. But did women abide by this? Did anybody abide by this? No (El-Saadi, interview 2014).

Several interviewees refer to a gender gap in the literature, history and social memory in Egypt. Having feminist academic co-founders, researchers, and employees on board, WMF has done unique projects that engage history and culture with a woman's perspective.

Some of the important projects of WMF include the oral history project, documentation of oral accounts of the older generation of women activists from the 20th century and also participants of 2011 revolution. WMF has an Arabic library on women and gender studies. It is unique in the Arab-speaking world for providing the 'gray literature' which is not readily available since the circulation of books in the region is very limited (Elsadda interview 2014). Furthermore, WMF republishes the writings of prominent Egyptian women like Malak Hifni Nasif, Aisha Taymuriyya and Nabawiya Musa from the late 19th century. WMF team has also translated feminist theoretical publications in English into Arabic.

Women's right to produce ijtihad has been a central theme for Islamic feminists. For advanced readers, El-Saadi and Abou-Bakr together wrote 'Women and Religious Life in the Muslim Middle Ages: Between Islam and the West' (*al-mar'ā w-al-ḥayāt dīnīya fī-l-ʿuṣūr al-wusṭā bayn al-islām w-al-gharb)* in 2001. They aimed to "shed light on the neglected history of women as religious scholars in Islamic societies" by historically surveying women who worked in the religious field as theologians and scholars and compared them to the Christian saints of Europe of the same period (WMF 2015a).

Outreach and Visibility

WMF targets broader outreach beyond academic circles compared to ASWIC. An important project that has potential outreach to the broader Egyptian society is the WMF book series called 'In Words and Images' published with pictures and short texts in colloquial Egyptian. The books aim to introduce non-specialized readers with gendered analyses and they are accessible on the

website of WMF. El-Saadi and Abou-Bakr contributed in these book series. El-Saadi wrote about women's active role in pious endowments in 'Pious Endowments in Words and Images' (*al-āwqāf fī suṭūr wa ṣūr)* with Amina Elbendary in 2006. With short texts, illustrations and caricatures, they wrote about women's active role in donation in Islamic history, particularly their financial contributions to the foundation of the Cairo University (Elbendary and El-Saadi 2001, 59). WMF does not have a systematic data as to how many copies are sold or downloaded online.

WMF also has a children book series to sensitize children and young generation on gender equality. For the series, Abou-Bakr wrote an adaptation of the story 'Aladdin's Lantern' (*miṣbāḥ ʿalāʾāddīn*) in 2002 where she gave the message that we should appreciate different colors in life and should not accept rigid boundaries (WMF 2015b). Gender sensitive storytelling workshops have also been organized at the WMF. With theatrical tools and daily language, they have more outreach to the public. The importance of these projects of WMF is that colloquial language is an important access tool to reach the broader Egyptian society. The official standard Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) is an obstacle for literacy of ordinary Egyptians as colloquial language is quite different. Therefore, these publications have a higher chance of outreach to the broader public.

WMF, in general, has expanded women's political space by digging out and shedding light on the histories of women in public life in Egypt. This is a tool to legitimize women's political power today. Islamic feminists in WMF particularly has been working to highlight women's politico-religious power in the history of Egypt. WMF inspires the young generation of Egyptian women who are mostly university students.

Women's NGOs, in general, have struggled with self-sustainability. Elsadda says that even though they have full-time researchers at the Forum, they feel that they are still not sustainable (interview 2014). WMF receives support from private businesses in Egypt and also international orgnaizations for their projects and publications such as Global Fund for Women, NOVIB (Netherlands), Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute (DEDI), Danish Center for Research and Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity (KVINFO). As a strategy and ideology, most women's NGOs in Egypt prefer receiving funding from Northern European countries instead of the US or United Kingdom as a reaction to the Iraq invasion in 2003 and they tried to avoid funding from 'Zionist' entities (interviews 2014). Amany Saleh explains that she joins projects supported by Swedish or Danish agencies as they are 'less biased and interfering' than American and British

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agencies (interview 2014). She expresses her sorrow that they need financial support from the West to produce Islamic feminism and that they are not sustainable alone.

This section portrayed the emergence of Islamic feminist hubs in Egypt between 1995 and 2011. Islamic feminists aimed at a conceptual awareness in Islam via two organizations, ASWIC and WMF. The alternative knowledge is significant for the politico-religious empowerment of women. However, Islamic feminists drew attention to the need for reform of religion and society with a restricted engagement of concrete issues and without directly challenging the state and religious establishment. Accordingly, their works have a reformative capacity, rather than a transformative one as seen in Table 8.

6.2 Women's Efforts and Confrontations to Reform the Personal Status Law (*al-qānūn al-aḥwāl al-shakhṣīya)* (2000-2011)

In the legal sphere, we find eclectic women's groups which lobby and campaign for reform and at times they confront the state and the religious establishment. The strategic use of Islam by these women's rights activists was at times more radical, direct and efficient than that of Islamic feminists. In this section, I base the analysis mostly on the activities of CEWLA and Azza Soliman in reforming the personal status law (*al-qānūn al-aḥwāl al-shakhṣīya*).

Studies on democratization and regime change in the Middle East have not engaged in gendered analyses of states and regime change (see Albrecht 2013; Bahgat and El-Mahdi 2012). Although the state is differentiated and not a coherent body (Pringle and Watson 1992; Kantola 2007), it is nevertheless gendered, and there is a 'gender regime' within the states (Connell 1990). As an illustration, the situation of women and minority rights often remain stable in democratic transitions or regime changes, while other fields such as electoral system undergone drastic changes (Abaza 2013; Saad and El Fegiery 2014).

The continuous separation of the personal status laws from the rest of the legal system is an example of gender regime that does not change when the electoral regimes and constitutions have changed in Egypt. The area that governs marriage, divorce and custody relations in Egypt are known as personal status law (PSL) based on Islamic principles as in many other Muslim

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countries.[150] While the rest of the legal system is secularized (mostly based on Napoleonic code), the PSL is governed by religious principles (Bernard-Maugiron and Dupret 2002).

The PSL epitomizes women's legal empowerment in private space. Yet it is also a public matter, as women's activities to reform the PSL shows women's ability and authority to produce *ijtihad* (new reasoning). For this reason, studying the PSL reform attempts is a way to assess women's politico-religious power in both private and public spheres. Some of the main issues that women in Egypt have problematized in the PSL since the turn of the 20th century are men's unilateral divorce right; women's divorce rights; child custody and division of property after divorce; and polygamy. In the current PSL, marriage is designed as a complementarity relationship between spouses and *not* of equality. It interprets Quranic concept *qiwamah* as a male financial responsibility on women and women's obedience to the husband in return (Sharafeldin 2013). It sanctions men's unilateral divorce right and polygyny, albeit with limitations. Mulki Al-Sharmani states that the mainstream religious perspective gives priority to men over women:

> …[S]till, when you debate these issues in parliament, on TV, the mainstream, the dominant one is that they take for granted that men have [a right to] unilateral divorce, they take for granted that men have right to polygamy and they think that is religious and it is condoned by God. That hasn't been questioned yet except for us who are still few (Al-Sharmani interview 2014)

The PSL has undergone gradual changes since its first codification as decree-law in 1920[151] and 1929 after the revolt against the British rule in 1919.[152] Later, it has been reformed with the 1976 law and 1985 law. Nathalie Bernard Maugiron argues that personal status laws have been adopted by decree-laws to prevent controversies in the parliaments in the Arab countries (2010, 8). The personal status laws have not been codified in a united exhaustive law, thereby understanding and reforming it become additionally difficult (Bernard-Maugiron 2010).

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[150] The Christian population in Egypt have their own Personal Status Law, which is more restrictive than Muslim PSL in some issues, such as divorce rights for men and women.

[151] Decree-Law No 25 of 1920 regarding Maintenance and Some Questions of Personal Status. This was the first personal status law in North Africa (Sadiqi 2016, 3).

[152] Qadri Pasha code in 1883 based on Hanafi doctrine, never went into force but used as manual (Bernard-Maugiron 2010, 6).

The reason for the slow reform is explained by the resistance emanating from the law's connection with religion and culture (personal interviews) and as well as the resistance of religious authorities to give up the mandate. Widespread acceptance in society about the 'primacy of men over women in marital affairs' is an example of the law's cultural and religious resonance (Sharafeldin 2013, 59). On the other hand, Lama Abu-Odeh argues that the main reason that undercuts women's reform attempts in PSL is 'the identity of the Egyptian legal system' (2004a, 147). She maintains that 'secular male elites' who control the legislature and judiciary have striken a compromise between the demands of feminists and religious intelligencia by making limited reforms in the religious-based PSL to protect the rest of the legal system from the encroachment of conservative *'ulamā'* (religious scholars) and religious movements (Abu-Odeh 2004b, 2004a 147).

Along similar lines, some scholars argued that the codification of laws in the modern period led some Islamic practices that benefited women to be gradually left out in the current practices of marriage and divorce in Egypt (Valassopoulos et al. 2010; Tucker 1998, 185; Abu Odeh, 2004). For example, women used to put stipulations in the marriage contract, such as preventing the husband to marry another wife. Some of the work of Islamic feminists like El-Saadi thus have a connection to reform in family law, as she works on marital contracts in Islamic history. El-Saadi argued that if women today learned women of the early Islamic period put conditions on their marriage contracts, then they could go against the social pressure. She lists three conditions that are not well-known today (interview 2014). Firstly, women had the right to unilateral divorce if it was stated in the marital contract, known as *al-ʿiṣma*[153]; women could prevent the husband to marry a second wife[154]; and they had the right to force the husband to divorce the second wife (El-Saadi, interview 2014). In 1993, a group of women, including Hoda Elsadda from WMF, traveled around Egypt and spoke to local organizations to bring back the Islamic tradition of including stipulations to the marriage contracts for women (Valassopoulos et al., 2010).

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[153] Karima Mohammad Farghali had *al-ʿiṣma* in her marriage contract with the reformist thinker Rifai al-Tahtawi (Hatem 2011b, 158). Hatem argues that middle and upper class women in the 19th century enjoyed this right.

[154] Huda Shaarawi, 13, had a marital contract to her cousin-husband that obliged him to release his concubine and bar him from taking another wife (Shaarawi 1986, 55-60). After his concubine got pregnant in the fifteen months to their marriage, Shaarawi left her husband for breaching the contract and lived independently for seven years (Shaarawi 1986, 61-61).

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There have been pro-women reform attempts on the PSL especially since the 1970's. A progressive state decree in personal status law was issued in 1979 after 50 years, known infamously as Jehan's Law, deriving its name from the wife of Anwar Sadat. The decree regarded polygamy as a sufficient reason to grant a divorce to the first wife; gave women the right to travel without husband's permission; and raised the legal age for marriage to eighteen from sixteen (Bernard-Maugiron 2010, 4; Al-Ali 2000, 74). However, the law was declared unconstitutional in 1985 by the Supreme Constitutional Court with the procedural argument that the circumstances were not as urgent for a decree and the president could have waited until the next parliamentary session. The court decision followed the pressures of the Islamist movements. Azza Karam explained that the rejection was a result of the Islamization of the Egyptian polity which constantly emphasized discursive legitimacy and authenticity (1998, 2). The Committee for the Defense of Women and Family Rights, of which Nawal El-Saadawi was an organizer, protested the decision (Pratt 2007, 83). Some of these progressive reforms were reimplemented by the president Hosni Mubarak in response to the demands of the international organizations and local civil society in the early 2000's. Connected to the reforms was the establishment of the National Council of Women (NCW *al-majlis al-qawmī l-il-mar'ā*), as a state machinery to promote women's rights.

Khul' law in 2000 and aftermath

Among those PSL reforms of Mubarak, a landmark one was adopted in 2000, and it gave women a new divorce right safeguarded by Islamic ijtihad. Known as *khul'*, women gained the right to a no-fault divorce by forfeiting their financial rights in the marriage. This, in theory, gave women the right to ask for a divorce without the consent of their husband and without a justified reason.[155] It also aimed to speed up the divorce process initiated by women. Initiators of this process were Suzanne Mubarak, the first lady and the head of the NCW at that time and late Dr. Zeinab Radwan. Behind the reform, there were also influential religious scholars such as Abdelmoty Bayyoumy who supported the ijtihad with his studies.

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[155] Some justified legal grounds for women's divorce are lack of maintenance by the husband, the husband's sexual incompetency, and harm such as domestic violence. Under these conditions, women can go through the normal divorce procedure (*ṭalāq)* and may keep her financial rights from the marriage.

Dr. Radwan was a deputy of the People's Assembly (*majlis al-shʿab*) (the former lower house of the Parliament), member of Shura Council and National Council of Women. She defined herself as an Islamist (Hassan 2005), although she did not wear the headscarf. She often referred to the Quran to argue for women's rights in her speeches and public interviews. In a conference on citizenship in 2007, she claimed that women's testimony was equal to men's which created an uproar and received criticism including the former head of fatwa committee of al-Azhar Gamal Qutb, who later became al-Azhar grand sheik.

The fact that Suzanne Mubarak and NCW supported this reform was the key to the introduction and approval of the bill in the parliament (interviews 2014). Even though Radwan studied Islamic philosophy and she was the Dean of *Dar al-Ulum* of *Cairo University* and a member of Shura Council, she was not taken seriously and attacked even by her students for not wearing the veil and for working with Suzanne Mubarak (Nkrumah 2000). Yet, working with NCW and Suzanne Mubarak protected Radwan; and enabled her to turn her research into the law. Earlier attemps of women to reform the law had failed due to the lack of connection to the political power (interviews 2014, Valassopoulos 2010).

Khul' is an obvious example that reflects the ambiguous position of the authoritarian regime for women's rights in Egypt. Being close to the figures with political power is a key, despite the actor's credentials in Islamic studies or professional achievements. Even though women have demanded to reform the PSL with field activism, without a democratic setup it is not easy to find direct linkages between activism and the most relevant actors behind a successful reform.

Women's rights activists see *khul'* reform as a very significant accomplishment for women's rights in Egypt (personal interviews 2014). CEWLA (*Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance - markaz al-qaḍāyā al-mar'ā al-maṣrīya*) made studies on *khul'* and found it revolutionary (Soliman, interview, 2014). The divorce litigation of women that took ten years before has decreased to two-to-six years with *khul'* (personal interviews 2014).

Activists point out some remaining difficulties for women after *khul'*. Azza Soliman, a feminist lawyer, the co-founder, and head of CEWLA explains that during the litigations men may marry other women and have children, and their lives go on, while women's lives pause (interview, 2014). *Khul'* is often used to fasten the process even when women have acceptable reasons to

divorce based on harm (*ṭalāq al-ḍarar*) and are entitled to keep their financial benefits otherwise (interviews 2014, On Ent 2011a). Soliman claims that some men push their wives to get *khulʿ* to avoid giving alimonies (interview 2014).

Furthermore, activists highlight that more than the law itself, more embedded cultural stereotypes, economic hardships and long judicial process[156] make divorce for Egyptian women more difficult. Azza Soliman argues that *khulʿ* was introduced to support women's rights, yet it turned into a notorious right, as women fear losing their reputation due to the societal perception around it (Nader 2010).

According to several activists, the problems with the PSL is *not* that it is based on sharia, as opposed to the claim that sharia curtails women's rights. They argue that regardless of the source of the law, the content of it can be revised with scientific and religious research (interviews 2014). For, Soliman both fiqh and international conventions are tools to "fight for her case" (interview 2014). Similarly, other lawyers –male or female - who work on women's issues argue that fiqh is not untouchable (A male and female lawyer interviews 2014). Nonetheless, comparison with Turkey shows the impact of religion in the PSL reform. The historical resistance of religious authorities to keep their grip in the only domain they can control has stalled and deligitimized women's reform attempts.

Khulʿ experience in Egypt shows that reform based on *Islamic* ijtihad is not enough for legitimizing reform in the eyes of some clergy, conservative judges, and society. Religious and cultural stereotypes about divorced women make it difficult for them to use their legal rights, even the ones sanctioned by religion. Furthermore, among the women activists, few have the knowledge and authority to talk about religion in a systematic way. While women's rights activists can talk about human rights much more easily, they point out the need to be prepared for religious arguments (interviews 2014) – which brings us to women's right to do *ijtihad*.

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[156] There are also problems originating from the overall judicial system in Egypt. After *khulʿ*, family court system was changed further and mediation between parties was incorporated before divorce procedures in 2004 (Sonneveld 2010). Sonneveld shows that flexibility in contemporary Egyptian courts do sometimes work against the interests of women in her study of family courts that proceeds *khulʿ* (2010, 109). She argues that discretion of the judges in contemporary judicial system where judges do not have a clue about the financial and class background of women work against women's interests.

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Women's Right to Do Ijtihad vis-à-vis Religious Establishment and the State

Reform of PSL is directly connected to women's rights to do *ijtihad* – to make new legal reasoning. The activists who try to produce a sustained Islamic legal discourse and claim their right to *ijtihad* carry the spirit of Nazira Zeineddine (see Chapter 3) to the 21st century. The official religious establishment in Egypt comprises of four institutions: *al-Azhar al-Sharif* – the official Islamic authority in Egypt and widely respected in the Sunni Muslim world; *al-Azhar University; Ministry of Religious Endowments*; and *Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyyah* – the government body responsible for issuing *fatwas* (religious verdicts). The majority of scholars in these institutions are male. Female religious leaders are not common and they are not seen as powerful as male scholars in local communities, unless she is a powerful figure (interviews 2014). Moreover, some female scholars do defend patriarchy (interviews 2014). Omaima Abou-Bakr argues that most female Azhar graduates are 'recycling traditional knowledge' and they are part of the institution.

Women's rights activists and scholars from diverse spectrums agree on the need for reform in al-Azhar and for women to engage in *ijtihad*. Dr. Amina Nusayr, a professor at al-Azhar University, and member of National Council of Women. She is one of the few female al-Azhar scholars who regularly appear on TV and journals to talk about women's rights. She defines herself as a Muslim woman and does not prefer to use 'Western' concepts like feminism and gender (Nusayr interview 2014). However, she collaborates with feminist organizations including CEWLA in projects when her religious knowledge is useful.

Nusayr exclaims that the main problem of women in Egypt is *rijāl al-dīn* (literally: men of religion; the clergy) who are resisting against the women's rights (interview 2014). Like Fatma Bostan Ünsal in Turkey, she calls attention to that both men and women have the responsibility of *istikhlāf* i.e. being successor/representative of Allah on earth citing the verse (6:165)[157]. She stresses that al-Azhar is problematic from a women's point of view and in terms of women's rights and freedom (interview 2014). She points out the influence of traditions (*taqalīd*), customs (*al-ʿādāt*), wrong interpretation of the texts (*al-tafsīr al-khaṭa' l-il-nuṣūṣ*) and opinions of the earlier

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[157] "and it is He who has made you successors upon the earth" (wa huwa al-ladhī jaʿalakum khalā'if al-arḍ) (Saheeh International, 2012)

jurists based on their era on the current understandings on women in religion. (Nusayr interview 2014).

As one of the very few women in al-Azhar, she pushes for women's rights agenda within the religious establishment. Moreover, her collaborations with feminist organizations like CEWLA and her work in NCW help to push for a egalitarian view of Islam in women's rights. She represents a dissenting view that can help to make reform in Egypt. However, the political stance of Nusayr shows an uneasy alliance between women's rights defenders and suppressive regimes in Egypt and has fallen short of a transformative capacity. She publicly supported 'For the Love of Egypt' (*fī ḥub miṣr*) coalition during 2015 parliamentary elections which supported the al-Sisi regime.

Contributing to the public space and especially to *ijtihad* emerges as the most emphasized issue by Islamic feminists. Amany Saleh from ASWIC is also suspicious of the capacity of *ijtihad* in al-Azhar. Like Nusayr, she believes that the religious change will be generated by women – who have been left outside of the historical heritage:

> We are at a turning point this century: from the history of men to the history of men and women together. I believe that God assigned us an important role to be active in education and legislation in every area. The wheel has started to move and we cannot push things back. Coming out of home, getting education, working, and taking an important part in the public sphere are irreversible steps in the historical process, reflecting the will of God. Women and other marginalized groups could be viewed as the human reserve or stock for the long awaited historical renewal in our region. If there will be a new civilization, it will heavily rest on women...Al-Azhar is a captive to its very strong and complicated heritage, so they see themselves as the gate-keepers rather than the developers of this heritage… That's why I'm telling you this is the age of '*alimāt*, *faqihāt* [female scholars and jurists] and female philosophers. Women are more eligible to make *ijtihad*. They are not burdened with the heavy historical loads (Saleh interview 2014).

Saleh's ideas mirror the assertions of Mary Douglas (1996) and Fatmagül Berktay (1996) that the the initiators of resistance emerge from the fringes of the prevailing system, by those who have been marginalized. Islamic feminists in Egypt have been very passionate about women's contribution to civilization, ijtihad and *tajdīd* (renewal in Islamic perspectives). A strong idealist spirit have been very evident in the interviews with Islamic feminists and their writings in Egypt. However, their public visibility is limited, which will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Tahani Al-Jibali is one of the first three women appointed to the position of judge in 2003 and she was the first women to be nominated to the Supreme Constitutional Court in Egypt.[158] She has engaged with religious arguments on TV and press. As a member of the Board of the Lawyers Syndicate, she defended women's rights against the members of Muslim Brotherhood[159] and she argues that "the experience convinced me that women should not be fearful about entering religious discussions" (Badran and Cooke 2004). After being appointed as a judge, Al-Jibali encouraged women's NGO to engage with religious arguments, rather than limiting their work to social and cultural questions (Badran and Cooke 2004, 410). She started receiving more invitations from women's NGOs to discuss prevention of harmful and wrong practices in the name of religion (Badran and Cooke 2004, 410).

Omaima Abou-Bakr from WMF also highlights that al-Azhar needs reform but it is a long-term project that would take years (interview 2014). Azza Soliman from CEWLA states that the scientific quality of al-Azhar has deteriorated and that they reproduce culture instead of uniting religion with science and reasoning, unlike the period of Muslim jurists such as Abu Hanifa or al-Shafi'i in the 8th century (Soliman interview 2014). Abou-Bakr and Soliman, one being Islamic feminist and the other a feminist, both highlight the remnants of culture in the interpretation of religion. For them, there is no absolute power of men over women in Islam, yet al-Azhar *'ulamā'* preach the dogma of authority of men over women.

The state, composed of the president, legislature and judiciary, has been the central actor of reform in Egypt (Abu-Odeh 2004a, 2004b). Women have different assessments of the role of

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[158] There is a recent research interest in the judicial authority of women in Muslim countries (see Sonneveld and Lindbekk 2017)

[159] Al-Jibali has also taken cases on freedom of expression including defending late Nasr Abu Zaid, the Egyptian scholar on religion, who was accused of apostasy and convicted as such. Abu Zaid himself promoted equality between males and females by rejecting polygyny and arguing that veiling is a cultural practice (Zainol et al 2014).

the state in *ijtihad*. While some feminists and Islamic feminists support state's role in mitigating the influence of Islamists, others are more skeptical of the progressive agenda of the state. Women have diverse views regarding the position of the state on women's rights regardless of their feminist positioning.

Female legal or religious experts such as late Zeinab Radwan, Amina Nusayr, Tahani al-Jibali and Azza Soliman have been rare figures in lobbying and advocating with religious arguments publicly. In the next section, I discuss Egyptian women's activism in PSL reform after *khul'* and especially focus at CEWLA's efforts on ijtihad.

Women's Activism and Issues related to PSL

Many women's NGOs who work on PSL do not ask for radical change regardless of their ideological background in Egypt (Sharafeldin 2013). Secular and Islamic feminists have been collaborating to reform the PSL. The Network of Women's Rights Organizations[160] (the Network hereafter) is one of collective women's groups specialized in reforming the PSL in Egypt. It is founded by women's rights activist and poet Marwa Sharafeldin in 2005. The Network mostly used international human rights discourse until 2007 (Sharafeldin 2013, 64). However, they reconsidered their discursive strategies, and decided to follow three main guidance in 2007: (a) lived realities of Egyptian women and families and disconnection between the reality and current law; (b) an enlightened Islamic legal discourse (c) international human rights treaties and conventions (Sharafeldin 2013, 63).

While there were demands on the abolition of polygamy in the 1920's, this was not touched upon during the 1990's, as it seemed too ambitious to challenge (Guenena and Wassef 1999) especially after the Islamic awakening since the 1970's. Up to this day, there has not yet been an agreement among the NGOs of the Network as to the contents of an enlightened Islamic interpretation of polygamy, financial guardianship of men, and wifely obedience (Sharafeldin 2013). There are disagreements in the Network over equal inheritance and the complete prohibition

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[160] CEWLA was part of this network. See Sharafeldin (2013) to read about the efforts of the Network to reform PSL.

of polygamy, since there are clear Quranic verses on these issues (Sharafeldin 2013). Islamic feminist Abou-Bakr argues that women in the short-run should aim to restrict the application of polygamy procedurally and economically, rather than aim to ban it. She hopes that in the long-run equality can be in the definition of marriage like in the Moroccon personal status code known as *mudawana* (*mudawwanat al-aḥwāl al-shakhṣīya*) reform in 2004 (interview 2014).

What adds to the confusion about polygamy and guardianship of men is that there are some advantages of the Islamic jurisprudence for women compared to international CEDAW framework. These include the legal obligation of the husband to pay a dowry before marriage, husband's financial responsibility during the marriage and after its dissolution, and the priority of female kin in child custody (Nashat, interview 2014; Sharafeldin 2013). Some activists are hesitant to push for full equality, as the wifely obedience is connected to husband's maintenance.

The challenge of using religious discourse continues to be a heated debate among activists and scholars. NGO's in the Network also do fear 'augmenting the rising power of religion in Egypt' and indirectly supporting their opponents (Sharafeldin 2013). Scholars, as well, raise concerns about the increased Islamization of women's rights discourse which gives legitimacy to the authority of religion in women's daily lives (Moghissi 1999, al-Nakib 2013). Similar to Baron's analysis of late 19th century women's activism in Egypt (1994), Abu-Odeh argues that Egyptian women have been trapped in a religious discursive field that they have to contribute (2004). The risk of 'augmenting' the authority of religion in women's lives is indeed a serious challenge for WIMs across MENA today.

In a way, avoiding ideological commitment not only gives women the flexibility to work with the regime and religious leaders when necessary, but also a more independent stance. A more eclectic and independent stance may alleviate the fears of strengthening religious authority. Several Egyptian women's rights activists claim that they undertake the struggle to reform, not because they have an 'ideological' commitment to religion or international treaties, but only to respond to urgent daily problems (interviews 2014; Sharafeldin 2013). They use Islamic discourse often in an eclectic way by distancing themselves from the political Islam represented by the Brotherhood, which has long been criminalized by the state. However, they also do not commit to 'secular values' as such to avoid attack from al-Azhar and Islamist movements. They work

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strategically to increase their rights within the existing system, bargaining *both* with the state and religious patriarchy (Kandiyoti 1988).

CEWLA's activism

CEWLA (*Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance – markaz al-qaḍāyā al-mar'ā al-maṣrīya*) was founded by lawyer Azza Soliman in 1995 as an NGO to raise awareness on women's rights and provide legal assistance to women in disenfranchised communities. Since then it has been an active women's rights NGO based in Boulaq al-Dakrour on the outskirts of Cairo, with around 20 employees. CEWLA rejects funding from the US after the Iraq war (interviews 2014). It has received funding from EU-OXFAM Novib (Dutch), DYCHONIA (Dutch), Dutch Embassy, Kvinna till Kvinna (Woman to Woman) Foundation (Swedish), and Global Fund for Women. CEWLA also often cooperates with Jordanian Women's Union (interviews 2014). It has a special consultative status at the Economic and Social Council of the UN. CEWLA has been primarily dependent on personal efforts and networks of Soliman, which raises the question of sustainability.

Azza Soliman, the head of CEWLA, has been one of the fierce defenders of women's rights and proponent of PSL reform in Egypt. As opposed to other secular activists and in a similar move like Al-Jibali, she is in dialogue with religious leaders since 2002. This is when she saw the success of *khul'* process and when she noticed local communities paid more attention to religious leaders. Soliman recalls how she started to study fiqh in depth:

> [W]hen I talked about women's rights in Egypt, I used, of course, international conventions; but, the community and many official organizations didn't know about them. When I started [to engage] more and more with the local community, many of them didn't care about anything except religion... I never thought that Islam disrespected women, or said that women should stay at home and put hijab *(ḥijāb)*…. So when the local community always talked about "this is Islam", I began to read more. (Soliman interview 2014).

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One of the central complaints of women's activists is that ordinary people do not have an easy access to the fiqh research and Islamic history, so religious leaders get away with their interpretations without facing counter-arguments. Besides engaging with al-Azhar, Soliman challenges conservative MB and Salafi interpretations:

> …see behind you [showing me her library], I read a lot of Islamic law. It's also amazing for me. I think it is important for the religious leaders that nobody knows the religion, the information. In 2012, during the MB rule, [the constitution writing committee] refused to add an article about trafficking[161]. I had an interview with a Salafi group, which is a group that thinks girls should marry at the age of nine. And this guy, when he saw me, was very happy. Because he thought that I didn't know anything about the Quran… He said this was against sharia. I asked, "Which article?" And he became crazy and yelled at me. I was very relaxed…This means that they have a stereotype about us. I am a woman and I don't put on hijab, so I don't have knowledge, and he can scare me... I think all these reasons explain why family law is like this (Soliman interview 2014).

Soliman's account vividly highlights the surprise and shock of conservative male religious people when they are faced with challenging questions *within* religion. Soliman argues that religious authorities use the stereotype of women as being fragile and diffident and they look down on women whom they meet (interview 2014). Religious authorities and movements often get away with their interpretations due to this stereotype and the fact that NGOs do not engage with religious arguments.

CEWLA has been working on the compatibility of CEDAW and Shari'a since 2008 (abu-Lughod 2010). It has collaborated with some al-Azhar scholars and mosque imams since 1998, but especially after 2008 (Nashat interview 2014). Nada Nashat, advocacy coordinator at CEWLA, explains that they approach the religious leaders 'based on how open minded they are' and whether

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[161] An article was proposed to outlaw trafficking women for sex. Sheikh Mohamed Saad El-Azhary, a member of the constitution-writing committee opposed to the article on the grounds that it would criminalize local practices of child marriage (McGraft 2012).

they are 'willing to discuss scientifically or they just oppose for the sake of opposition.' (interview 2014). Some al-Azhar scholars that CEWLA worked with are Amina Nusayr, late Dr Mahmoud Azab[162] and Abdelmoty Bayyoumy who was influential in promoting *khul'* before it was presented to the parliament in 2000. With the initiation of CEWLA, Bayyoumy wrote a book on *qiwamah* and *wilayah* to show the compatibility of *khul'* with these Quranic concepts. Since the consent of the husband was not necessary for *khul'*, many people were against it claiming that it was against *qiwamah* (interviews 2014).

As part of their project on CEDAW and sharia, CEWLA prepared a family law draft that aimed to "achieve justice and equality for all family members through Islamic sharia and international convention of human rights, especially CEDAW" (Nashat, interview 2014). In preparation for the draft, they collected data and statistics form their partner legal aid centers in the governorates. They engaged in discussions with especially religious leaders but also with the legal personnel, judges, lawyers and media representatives to have a juristic basis for the changes they sought in 2008 and 2009 (Nashat, interview 2014). There were negative reactions that the draft was against sharia. Nashat claimed that local communities became more receptive to the suggestions in the draft after the revolution in 2011. They did further modifications that increased the custody rights of divorced mothers and visiting hours. At the time of the interview, CEWLA was waiting for the assembly of parliament to present their suggestions (Nashat, interview 2014).

As part of her attempts to reform the PSL, Soliman also established a forum on religious reform in 2010 (Ashoka 2011). Ashoka supports Soliman in her work for a 'new religious discourse' (*khitāb dīnī jadīd*) since 2011 (Ashoka 2011). Ashoka is a non-profit organization based in the U.S. that provides personal stipends to 'social entrepreneurs' worldwide up to three years (Ashoka, nd). Soliman held meetings with religious scholars, social scientists and high-level administrative officers to discuss qiwamah and the revocable divorce (*al-ṭalāq al-rajʿaī)* at which it is men's right to unilaterally divorce and return to their wives within a certain period of time. (interview 2014). International networks has been essential for Soliman to develop and publicize her work further.

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[162] Azab was the adviser to Al-Azhar Grand Sheik Ahmed al-Tayyeb on dialogue between religions. He was a former professor of Semitic languages (Hebrew and Arabic) at the Islamic University of Al Azhar in Cairo, and in National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO) in Paris.

Building trust in 'the community'

As opposed to the academic Islamic feminists, CEWLA works close to local and ordinary people in suburbs of Cairo and via their paralegals in other governorates in Egypt. Gaining trust of the local communities helps to be sustainable. CEWLA targets grassroots in its main activities and provides social and legal services to women and sometimes men, such as helping to obtain ID cards. CEWLA seems to have gained the trust of community of Boulaq al-Dakrour, an impoverished neighborhood at the outskirts of Cairo, where CEWLA is based. Local people visit the center to receive assistance regarding legal and administrative issues (personal observation 2014). However, legal assistance is not the only activism of CEWLA in Boulaq. Nashat argues that they provide a safe space for the people to discuss issues:

> Actually by being here in Boulaq, most of the employees here are habitants of this area, some of them live two streets away or something, so people know them and trust them. And they understand the area and the culture of Boulaq... [W]e do a lot of orientations here, and we let ladies and men in general speak freely, express themselves and discuss whatever they want to discuss even if they are pro or against what we are trying to deliver them. People of Boulaq, they feel that this is a safe area. So this is how we gain the trust. (Nashat interview 2014)

Nashat explains that the people of Boulaq region, Muslims or Christians, are sensitive to religion and want it to be the driving force for the law. However, they would be against the extreme applications of religious law such as cutting the hands of thieves (interview 2014). People want the religion to govern their lives in impoverished areas in Egypt, but in its moderate applications.

CEWLA employs specialized male and female lawyers and has partnered with nine legal aid centers across Egypt. Each center has female and male paralegals who are trained in human rights and act as a mediator in taboo and sensitive issues like honor crimes, incest, tribal marriage (Soliman; a male lawyer at CEWLA interviews 2014). Customary laws are widespread in some

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governorates in Egypt which are often problematic for women regarding inheritance rights, and early and forced marriages. CEWLA invites scholars like Abou-Bakr in training of these paralegals (Soliman interview 2014).

Attacking back the attackers

Besides engaging dialogue with religious leaders and being in contact with local communities, few women activists in Egypt chose to be *visible* in public and media with conflictual argumentation with religious leaders like Azza Soliman. She is one of the few female figures in Egypt who respond back the religious leaders critically. Her legal education and knowledge on Islamic fiqh in family matters helps her credibility, and with her personal courage she has become one of the well-known women's and human rights defender in Egypt.

The publicized paternity lawsuit of Hind al-Hannawi in 2006 was an important case where Soliman supported a scientific intervention, while the Al-Azhar scholars rejected. Al-Hannawi gave birth to a child within an *'urfi* (customary) marriage with an Egyptian actor. According to the fiqh in Egypt, children born without official wed-lock cannot be registered to the paternal lineage. This fiqh, based in a hadith, is widespread in several Muslim countries. Azza Soliman intervened in this lawsuit and supported the use of DNA test – "merging ijtihad with new scientific tools" in her own words (interview 2014). She had meetings with religious leaders and the lawsuit was publicized in media. According to her account many religious leaders refused the DNA test as a fatherhood proof. She argued the rule "child of adultery cannot be attributed to the father" (*ibn al-zīna lā yunsab*) is fiqh and a human interpretation, thus not Quranic. The-father-in-question rejected to go under the DNA test. Finally, Al-Hannawi won the paternity lawsuit after the higher court ruled that evidence of marital relationship was enough to announce paternity in 2006 (Shaham 2010, 177). Since there is no enforcement of DNA test in Egypt, the success of this case to be repeated in similar cases in Egypt is questionable. Still, the option of DNA test supported by women's rights activists like Soliman and the rejection of the test by the-father-in-question might have had an impact on the court's decision.

After this paternity lawsuit, Soliman began to employ another style (*uslūb*) in her activism. Rather than only making dialogue with the religious leaders, she started to *attack* them with religious arguments (Soliman, interview 2014). When the religious leaders condemned her during Al-Hannawi's lawsuit for not wearing hijab, she argued that she silenced them by questioning their own Islamic positions, such as asking: "Why don't you ask Ms. Mubarak why she does not put on hijab?" or "why are you silent on other issues in which Islam requires action such as social justice, torture, or poverty?" (Soliman, interview 2014). When she was criticized for her clothing, Soliman responded with "*ghaḍ al-baṣar!*" (lower your gaze) referring to *sūrat al-nūr* (Verse 24) in the Quran (interview 2014).

Soliman does not refrain from being visible in public about her work in fiqh and her contestations with *rijāl al-dīn*. A *Ted-x* talk in Cairo in 2012 was another of the example of Soliman's public visibility, although limited to a middle-upper class Cairenes who filled the conference hall of American University in Cairo. In colloquial Egyptian, she puts forward her argument that there is need to reform the personal status law and it is not representing Islam as it is argued by *rijāl al-dīn*:

> They fool us and say that the personal status law is Islamic sharia. No, it is not Islamic sharia. Islamic sharia came to fulfill justice (*'adl*), equality (*musāwāh*), and fairness (*insāf*). This is Islamic sharia (TEDx talks 2013).

In the public talk, she argues that jural reasoning and judgements (*ijtihād al-fiqhiyya)* are not sacred, but man-made. She argues that there is a need for a 'jurisprudence of reality' (*fiqh al-wāqaʿ*) based on the lived realities in Egypt (TEDx talks 2013). She also tells to the audience how *rijāl al-dīn* does not take her seriously at first sight because she is not a *muḥajjaba* (veiled woman).

Is it a personality issue to respond to religious authorities on an equal footing and to be visibly dissenting from them? Personality plays a role, yet the international connections and protection has been also important. Azza Soliman is a well-known activist in international human rights circles and her work has been supported by several international and European organizations. Being visible carries more risk in an authoritarian regime and in the presence of conservative religious authorities and segments of society. Power contestation between women

and conservative religious officials and targeting of activists such as Soliman will be discussed in Chapter 7.

6.3 Islamist women: Different priorities

Islamist women's contributions to women's politico-religious empowerment have been with different acts and stances. Some of the academicians like Dr. Nadia Mostafa and Dr. Heba Raouf Ezzat are influential public figures not only in Islamist circles but also in intellectual circles in Egypt and abroad. They have been more visible in public and media than most of the academic Islamic feminists. Even though Islamist women do not prioritize producing a systematic gender equality discourse within Islam, their presence and leading role in the community function as role-models for women. Due to their active role in embodying women's power, I locate Islamist women to the reformative trajectory in the typology, instead of accommodating one. It is also important to note connections between some of the Islamic feminists and Islamist women. Several women from ASWIC were taught by Nadia Mostafa and Mona Abul-Fadl in Cairo University and these women transferred them an interest in Islamic studies (interviews 2014).

Priorities are different between Islamic feminists and Islamists in Egypt. Islamic feminists concentrate their intellectual efforts on the woman question in Islam and ijtihad, while they acknowledge poverty and lack of security as important problems of women in Egypt. However, most Islamists gear their intellectual and field work towards broader societal and political issues such as illiteracy, poverty, political system, democracy, and East-West relations.[163] They see 'ignorance' (*jahl*) as one of the most important problems in society and claim to advocate comprehensive solutions to problems of women, rather than focusing on the agenda of West or 'Westernized locals'.

Nadia Mostafa is one of the well-known Islamist women in Egypt and worldwide. She is a retired professor of international relations of *Cairo University,* and the director of *Civilization Center for Political Studies* (*markaz al-ḥaḍāra l-il-dirāsāt siyāsīya* – Markaz Hadara hereafter). She was the former head of Political Science department at Cairo University and the former

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[163] Poverty, education system, illiteracy and corruption have been reported as the main problems in Egypt by respondents of diverse political leanings.

director of *Center for Civilization Studies and Dialogue of Cultures (markaz al-dirāsāt al-ḥaḍārīya wa ḥiwār al-thaqāfāt)*, one of the research centers at FEPS. Mostafa argues that focusing on problems like illiteracy would help to eliminate 'less important' problems like *khitan* (FGM) that 'liberal women elite' focus. She complains that the UN program finances especially these 'less important' but highly controversial issues that go heart at the tradition and religion and divides society. She argues that problems like FGM will be over if they can overcome illiteracy (N. Mostafa interview 2014).

A former researcher of ASWIC, Manal Yahya also does not believe in immediate change on issues like FGM. While she accepts that these kinds of 'cultural' problems exist and should be tackled, she argues that the most important problems of women in Egypt are related to the economy. She stresses that poverty and state retraction from the public services affect women more than men since women are the main care-taker of the families (interview 2014). It is important to note here that one of the fiercest opponents of FGM in the 1970's was Nawal El-Saadawi and she has been also questioning the poverty and inequality since then. With a more holistic approach, it should be possible to work on different kinds of problems around women.

Making exclusive projects for women is something that Islamists diverge from the feminists and Islamic feminists. Against the liberal feminist efforts to increase women's political participation such as the female MP campaigns of Egyptian Feminist Union, Nadia Mostafa argues that being a judge and head of the state is not a priority for women in Egypt. She also goes against parliamentary quotas for women and instead prioritizes education:

> They put us [women] in the middle of problems and debates that exhaust our capabilities and they are not the priorities. Which one is more important? To educate people and women; or to fight for a woman to be a judge and concentrate all the effort on this? No. Please concentrate all your efforts on educating women, ordinary women…I saw this myself. Women do not want to be nominated... [But] they have to put two percent as a law to have women. What has happened? They were selected by the government and regime. It is not the fruit of social mobilization, of normal participation; it is imposed, decoration and artificial. But if you let the society free to organize and empower

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women by education and change the culture of people, make a good understanding of religion,...then, you will find women by themselves, they want to participate. The free will, first (N Mostafa interview 2014).

The stance against Western and local feminist agenda can be pointed in Mostafa's account. The distance towards the Western rhetoric is more prevalent among Islamist perspective than Islamic feminists. Yahya also problematizes the Western approach on Egypt. While she accepts that the Western agenda has been helpful to problematize issues like FGM, similar to the view of her ex-colleague Hind Mostafa from ASWIC, Yahya argues that they need to formulate their genuine solutions. Contextualizing the international conventions and emphasis on locality is widespread among both Islamists and Islamic feminists (interviews 2014). This position is in stark opposition to the views of several religious feminists in Turkey, as Zeynep Göknil Şanal from BKP argues "we don't need to reinvent the wheel" (interview 2016).

Unlike Islamic feminists, some Islamists do not prefer to use feminist concepts such as patriarchy and gender. Dr. Heba Raouf Ezzat is one of the most famous and influential Islamist woman in Egypt and the world. She has been active in numerous projects on cultural dialogue and education locally and internationally. She is a professor of Political Science at *Cairo University* and she has more than 700.000 followers on her official Facebook page. Ezzat is among those who rejects using feminist concepts:

[The term] patriarchy is ideological, it's loaded with connotations; I can see the injustices, but I don't need to use the same terms…. the same way I don't use, for example, the word gender. It's too post-modernist and fragmented. So I prefer to use my own language and terms rooted in Quranic Arabic… Part of my Islamic understanding and its philosophical underpinnings is that I establish my thought firmly on Quranic concepts. Because if I'm committed to Islam, then the source of concept construction should be Islam. And then I can translate that understanding to others in their own terms. But it would remain a process of interpretation and translation… A paradigmatic

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gap can not be bridged but only recognized and comprehended (Ezzat interview 2014)

As such, Ezzat is very careful and sensitive regarding the language in women's and human's rights circles and in academia. She firmly rejects being interpreted by hegemonic Western discourses in the projects that she is involved with and she highlights in these events the importance of reciprocal *exchanges* between, for example, her as an Egyptian Muslim and them as Europeans (field notes 2014). The importance of *community* among Islamists is also pronounced like among Islamic feminists. Islamists do not seek confrontation with community and emphasize 'changing together' and 'changing the mentality of a generation' (Ezzat interview 2014). They are against the idea that you can empower women by neglecting the societal development. Nadia Mostafa criticizes all-female feminist mobilizations:

> If you ask for complete equality, why do you work in only feminist circles? [Their response is] to provide women's discourse, women's perspective, women's solution and so on. No. Your problem is not separate from the family, community, society, nation, and *umma*. We have to get together (N Mostafa interview 2014).

Ezzat reacted to my question when I tried to understand the roots of her commitment to Islam and she strongly underscored the national and cultural component of her identity:

> …[M]y awareness of myself, I understand that it's very Egyptian, as well. So culture means a lot to me. So it's not that my commitment is floating. I understand that it is rooted in my Egyptianness. I'm an Egyptian... You might wonder "She is an Islamist, but how far she was influenced by the Western education or background when she was doing her Ph.D. or so" But actually, I'm an Egyptian woman. *Yani,* I know that I'm very rooted in my culture and I'm very glad that I'm so. So the culture is an important stream in my thinking. I can't escape it, and I can't deny it and I'm aware of it. I do believe that there is a component, it's not overwhelming and dominating; but, there is a component of culture in understanding Islam. I'm not a Malaysian, South African, American, but I'm an Egyptian Muslim. (Ezzat interview 2014)

Ezzat strongly condemns the 'politicization' of her Islamic identity and she finds it 'reductionist'. (Ezzat, e-mail correspondence 2018). She highlights the cultural component of her identity to refute her commitment to Islam as something 'ideological.' Secondly, the response might also have a criticism of the dynamics of our interview, a Turkish student from a European university interviewing her in English. Nevertheless, this emphasis on culture and nationality has been very common across diverse women's groups in Egypt, which is in stark contrast with today's women's movements in Turkey. Nationalist discourses have not united but divided the women's movements in Turkey due to the suppression of the Kurdish minority.[164] Since the 1980's, the mainstream women's movements have been critical to the dominant nationalist discourse and have often condemned it with the exceptions of Kemalist women and sacramentalist (*mukaddesatçı*) Islamist women.

Overall, intellectuals like Ezzat and Mostafa are role models for young women in Egypt. With their qualifications, respectful positions at university and their public activism, they embody the empowerment of women within an Islamist framework. Interestingly, some of the Islamist or faith-based activist women seem to have received their attentiveness in community development from their mothers. The mothers of Heba Raouf Ezzat[165], Mona Abul-Fadl, and Nagia Abdel Mogney[166] actively took part in community well-being or politics in the 1940's and on. Especially Ezzat has often been praised as a teacher as well as for her social engagements by several young women from diverse ideological backgrounds that I have met in Cairo. I will discuss few of those in Chapter 7.

The positioning of WIMs in relation to gender order in Egypt between 1995 and 2011 (Table 8) is presented below. The reformative capacity can be potentially produced by Islamist women and Islamic feminists. Islamist women contributed to the reformist space with their strong presence in the public space. Islamic feminists aimed reform in the gender order and created projects and publications accordingly. Therefore I put ASWIC, and Islamic feminists from WMF to this reformative space. It is a question whether women of Muslim Brotherhood had an

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[164] We may find similarities as to how nationalism is perceived by Nubian-Egyptians, but this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

[165] Ezzat also sees her father as a very influential person in her life. She says "He taught me to think of myself as a human being, not as a female. It made all the difference in my entire life" (e-mail correspondence 2018)

[166] An active participant in Moral Rearmament group in Egypt which brings together peoples of faith and provide services to local communities.

accommodating stance in gender issues, as they seemed to conserve the existing gender norms in Egyptian society. However, since I did not study their discourse and activism in depth, I do not locate them. Looking at CEWLA's work and stance between 1995 and 2011, I put it and Azza Soliman to transformative space. Soliman showed dissent from religious authorities and the state in this period, most notably by being involved in Hind Al-Hannawi's paternity lawsuit. By attacking the religious leaders and with her efforts on the unification of Christian and Muslim personal status laws, she also transgressed norms with her bold stance. I locate her and CEWLA to transformative space for also speaking out for human rights.

Table 8: Suggestive Table of Some WIMs' Politico-Religious Acts and Empowerment Capacities in Egypt (1995-2011):

WIMs relation to political oppression / WIMs relation to mainstream religious gender order	Challenging	Members with both Inclinations/In between	Silent or Supportive
Trangressive (marginal &challenging)	Transformative power/empowerment capacity • *Eclectic feminists and CEWLA*		
Dissenting (mainstream&challenging)	• *Islamist women*	Reformative power/empowerment capacity • *ASWIC* • *Islamic feminists at WMF*	
Accommodating (mainstream &confirmatory)			Consolidating power/empowerment capacity

Chapter 7: Egypt after 2011: Institutionalization, Taboo Issues, Expanded and Contracted Spaces

Since the revolution of January 25, 2011, the political scene has witnessed fast and bloody transitions of power in Egypt. Despite the recent restrictions on public space, the revolution has expanded women's politico-religious space in Egypt, both for having opened up channels of political participation and enabling discussions of taboo issues. Female activists in Cairo from diverse political spectrums – feminists, leftists, and Muslim sisters – pointed out that the revolution was a turning point for their increased participation in the public sphere and ability to express themselves freely. The younger generation especially affirmed that they started to be politically active after the revolution (interviews 2014). Even with 'the current mess,' referring to the political crackdown on July 3, 2013, Hoda Elsadda thinks there has been more space for women's movements after 2011 (Elsadda, interview 2014). Her account sums up well the situation that many female activists have depicted:

> …[T]here has been a shift after 2011…one of the gains [is] we are finally discussing problems. There are unprecedented debates on issues that were taboo years ago. This opens up space for more action and more work. There are possibilities for establishing programs for gender studies at national universities… I'm not going to suggest that all of a sudden we are very strong as obviously there is a fight going on. But again we have gained more spaces in the public arena…. It's a mess and there are lots of challenges, it's not looking very good but there is room for debate, room for action, more spaces have opened up. (Elsadda interview 2014).

The revolution has, first of all, brought more freedom to move and mobilize. Millions of women took to the streets to demand freedom (*ḥurrīya*), dignity (*karāma*), and to protest against 'the tyrant' (*ṭāghīya*), military rule (*ḥukm al-ʿaskarī*) and sexual harassment (*taḥarrush*) (Lahlali 2014, Abaza 2013). Female activists felt that they were liberated and that things would change for the better (personal interviews 2014). In the streets, women protested against Hosni Mubarak's rule,

violations and attacks of Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) against the demonstrators after the fall of Mubarak, and discourse against women's rights during the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (*ḥizb al-ḥurrīya w-al-ʿadāla*) rule. Women's organizations issued several collaborative statements on the injustices of the regime and SCAF. Political participation has become the focus of many women's organizations more than before.

The demand of women's organizations for a free space was evident in discussions and statements on the illegitimacy of the National Council of Women (NCW), the women's policy machinery during the Mubarak era. Right after the revolution, several renowned women's NGOs (including Women and Memory, Nazra and CEWLA) named Coalition of Women's Organizations (CWO) declared NCW illegitimate due to its ties to the past regime and demanded its dissolution to prevent it from representing Egyptian women in international forums (WLUML 2011; Hatem 2011). CWO demanded a temporary women's council composed of experienced women selected with a consensus among women's organizations and civil society (NWF 2011a, Nazra 2011)[167]. One year later, the ruling military council appointed 30 new members, including former Social Affairs minister Mervat al-Talawy as the head. With the composition of the members, NCW kept its ties to the past regime. CWO condemned the formation of the council with a military decree and reinstated their demand for a civilian administration for women (NWF 2012) despite the challenging context of attacks against women's rights in an MB dominated parliament.

Secondly, as a result of the expansion in the political space, the revolution has enabled the problematization of taboo issues further such as sexual harassment, FGM, and unveiling. These all signal an increase in women's politico-religious empowerment. Feminism has become more widespread among young women since the revolution. Famous Egyptian radical feminist Nawal Al-Saadawi – who have been accused of apostasy for years by Islamist movements – testifies that young Muslim brothers and sisters warmly welcomed her in Tahrir Square (Cooke 2016).

As part of the revival in women's activism after the revolution, Islamic feminist discourse and projects have also flourished. Islamic feminism has been supported and produced at a more

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[167] While the English declaration mentions 'independence' criteria for these representative women, the Arabic declaration does not, (NWF 2011a, 2011b; Nazra 2011, WLUML 2011) which maybe either due to a translation mistake or for a more assertive presentation to the international audience.

sustained organizational level in Egypt, with local and international platforms. Three of them have been the Noon Center, Musawah, and the WMF. The Noon Center was part of a local NGO, and it promoted Islamic feminism for reform – it was closed down by the government in 2016. Musawah is a global movement that has brought a new dynamism and platform to Egyptian women's rights activists since 2010 until recently. The WMF has also increased the number of projects on Islamic feminism. Collaborations between feminists and Islamic feminists have also proliferated with the projects of Musawah and the Noon Center. Islamic feminists have focused on Quranic concepts such as *qiwamah (qawāma)* and *walāya* (often interpreted as men's authority over women in Islam), *musāwā* (equality), and polygyny that have an influence over personal status laws in most of the MENA countries. Islamic feminism has become more active and visible with the institutionalization wave, yet it still mainly perpetuates itself on the academic level with the familiar names such as Omaima Abou-Bakr and Amany Saleh. Among young feminists, a few are interested in Islamic feminism and bring up taboo issues that have not been discussed under Islamic feminism before such as sexuality and marital rape.

7.1. Political Developments

The first free parliamentary elections were held between November 2011 and January 2012 in Egypt.[168] Before the election, SCAF canceled the 64 reserved seats[169] for women which was enacted in 2009 and amounted to 12 % of the People's Assembly[170] (*al-majlis al-sha'b*), while the reserved seats for farmers and laborers were kept intact. Despite a record number of around 900 female candidates, women made up less than 2% of the parliament in 2012 (Diaa 2016). Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) won the maximum number of seats and MB leader Muhammad Mursi became the president in the elections in June 2012.

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[168] Parallel voting was applied in the three stages of the election. Two-thirds of seats were elected by party-list proportional representation. The remaining one-third was elected under a form of bloc voting in two-seat constituencies. On 14 June 2012, two days before the presidential elections, the Supreme Constitutional Court of Egypt ruled that the parliamentary election was unconstitutional, and called for dissolution of the lower house. The court's ruling is interpreted as military aiming to reinstate its power.

[169] The quota was designed to last for two rounds of elections, to be expired after 2020 (Hill 2010). An amendment to the elections law in 1979 had brought 30 reserved seats for women, which was canceled in 1987 elections (Diaa 2016).

[170] Al-Sisi dissolved the People's Assembly in 2014. Since then Egyptian parliament is unicameral represented by the House of Representatives (*majlis al-nowwab*)

During the rules of SCAF and FJP, the political space for participation shrank again. The mass sexual harassment (sometimes by the state thugs, *balṭagīya,* dispatched to the demonstrations) became widespread to intimidate female protesters. In their short time in power, FJP attempted to limit women's rights and terminate already existing rights such as quotas. FJP-dominated UN Commission on the Status of Women of Egypt (CSW) tried to invalidate some of the international conventions that Egypt was part of such as CEDAW. The dilemma for women in authoritarian states in the MENA once again surfaced when women connected to the old regime such as the head of NCW, Mervat El-Talawy, defended the existing rights against Islamist attempts by calling upon international coalitions. This prevented the MB-dominated CSW from invalidating the gains made.

FJP did not meet the expectations of opposition groups for more plurality (Saad and El Fegiery 2014). Except for Islamist women, almost all of the feminist and Islamic feminist interviewees complained about the rule of FJP regarding the suppression of dissident voices and women's rights (interviews 2014). Feminists and Islamic feminists were disappointed with the women affiliated with MB during women's meetings at al-Azhar or the Women and Constitution Forum in 2011 organized by WMF (interviews 2014). Feminists contended that women from the Brotherhood opposed the attempts to discuss polygamy, women's inheritance with the argument that they were untouchable (interviews 2014).

After the first anniversary of MB leader Mohammad Mursi's inauguration as the president, the Egyptian military took the political power under General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on July 3, 2013, responding to the massive protests against Mursi on June 30, 2013. Al-Sisi initiated a series of onslaught on Muslim Brotherhood, peaking at the Raba'a Massacre[171] in August 2013. Since then, the official state discourse has been the consolidation of the new political regime, bringing back the 'unity' of the country and fighting against 'terrorism.'[172] Organizational space has been further curtailed and dissent and confrontatiton has been very risky, as the coming sections will demonstrate. Meanwhile, Al-Sisi endorsed reform in al-Azhar with a slogan of 'religious

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[171] On August 8, 2013 military intervened in the Muslim Brotherhood sit-ins at Raba'a square in Cairo leading to 'at least 817 and likely more than 1000' casualties (HRW 2014)

[172] The Muslim Brotherhood was announced a terrorist organization in December 2013, as the terrorist attacks against the police centers and churches by Islamist groups have increased.

revolution' (*thawra dīnīya),* while he fell short of supporting reformist clerics who were accused by Al-Azhar and jailed such as Islam al-Beheiry (Ibrahim 2015; MadaMasr 2015).

The revolution had given a momentum to the women's movements regarding dissent, transgression, and radicalism. Referring to the current period of military government in Egypt, Nada Nashat from CEWLA points out the painful feeling of being silenced after learning to speak up and difficulty of getting permissions from the state for their projects:

> We are having our worst dreams coming true; it's worst in a sense and better in a sense. We have already gained the right to speak up, to be in the streets and demonstrations, to write statements and not to be afraid of the reaction of the state. Of course, we are trying to be careful with what we are doing, but we are braver now. But with the current state, with the military in charge, it is worse. We are having more security issues with regards to funds and permissions. They spy on us all the time, we don't care anymore about that part, but permissions now are really hard to get. (Nashat, interview 2014).

This account represents the perception of many activists in Egypt who have been active since the revolution. Women feel the gains of the revolution are undone or at best at risk. The crackdown has silenced female activists from all spectrums. On the Women's Day on March 8 2014, there were no mass public demonstrations by women's organizations. The revitalized Egyptian Feminist Union limited its activity on that day to a small lecture in a cultural center attended by around 30 people on women's parliamentary representation. This shows the restrictions on the public space, and women's space in particular.

Table 9 shows WIMs stances towards the gender order and political repression and locates their corresponding politico-religious empowerment capacities between 2011 and 2016. This period covers two regimes; but given the actors in the chapter, the stances were stable regarding the stance towards the political oppression. Actors in WIMs have increased since the revolution in 2011. The Noon Center and Musawah joined Islamic feminists in the reformative space in 2011. I have kept CEWLA and Azza Soliman in the transformative space for their conferences on the

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unification of the Christian and Muslim personal status laws, and for being vocal about the anti-democratic steps conducted by the military regime. Feminists and a few Islamic feminists from the young generation have become more visible after the revolution, particularly Fatma Emam, who works on sexual and bodily rights in Islam at feminist platforms Nazra and Ikhtiyar. They have transformative capacity not only for their actions against the religious patriarchy but also for their stance against political repression. The table is as an exhaustive list of WIMs, but it only locates the studied groups and women who use religious discourse systematically. The women of FJP and MB might have occupied accommodating row with changing stances to political repression throughout 2012 and 2016. However, I cannot pinpoint them due to the lack of data.

Table 9: Suggestive Table of Some WIMs' Politico-Religious Acts and Empowerment Capacities in Egypt (2011-2016):

WIMs relation to political oppression / WIMs relation to mainstream religious gender order	Challenging	Members with both Inclinations/In between	Silent or Supportive
Trangressive (marginal &challenging)	**Transformative** power/empowerment capacity • *Nazra, CEWLA* • *Feminists and young generation of Islamic feminists*	• *Ikhtiyar*	
Dissenting (mainstream&challenging)		**Reformative** power/empowerment capacity • *Islamic feminists at Noon Center, Musawah, WMF* • *Islamist women*	• *Some Islamic feminists*
Accommodating (mainstream &confirmatory)			**Consolidating** power/empowerment capacity

7.2 Islamic Feminist Institutionalization and Collaborations with Feminists

Noon Center (Markaz Nūn): A reformist Islamic feminist organization

Noon Center for Women and Family Issues (markaz nūn li-qaḍāyā al-mar'ā wa-l-usra)[173] has produced a religious discourse on gender equality. It was established in 2011 as part of *MADA Foundation for Media Development (mu'assasa madā l-il-tanmīya al-'alāmīya).* MADA was an NGO founded in 2010 by some of the former staff of the closed website www.islamonline.net[174], which was a global online platform for Islamic politics and lifestyle.

Noon Center received funding from UN Women, UNICEF, Swedish Institute in Alexandria, and National Population Council (interview 2014). The project coordinator from Noon Center testifies that Islamic feminism receives a higher interest from the international funding agencies than 'Western' types of feminism. MADA and its centers, including Noon Center has been closed down in 2016, after the amendment in the article 78 of the Penal Code in 2014 which increased fines for transfer of foreign money and due to the alleged connections of its CEO with Muslim Brotherhood.

Noon Center has openly promoted Islamic feminism. In the words of a coordinator[175], they "support ijtihad and new reasoning in the holy text." The coordinator argues that "for women's emancipation we need to formulate our own genuine approach neither Western nor conservative Islamic" (interview, 2014). She emphasizes the novelty of the Islamic feminist project and the validity of Islamic feminism as a platform as opposed to the past approaches that eliminated religion from women's rights discourse in Egypt.

Noon Center had two main goals: reaching out to the *'ulamā'* – the religious scholars and ordinary people – the grassroots; and networking among feminists and Islamic scholars. They targeted *'ulamā'* and community leaders, whom they called 'the middle chain' and who could reach out to the grassroots (interview 2014). They organized workshops on women's rights in Islam, trained religious leaders on gender equality and produce booklets and video clips on equality

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[173] (Arabic letter for N, referring to first letter of woman/women in Arabic, *nisa/niswat*)

[174] MADA established the website Onislam.net (2010-2015)

[175] She asked anonymity after the closure of MADA and Noon Center in 2016

on women and men in Islam. They also organized projects with the media representatives on correcting media representations of women and children with the support of UNICEF.

Noon Center published three educational booklets in 2014 in Arabic on the 'feminist ijtihad' (*al-ijtihād al-nasawī*) with the support of the United Nations for Women in Egypt and the National Population Council (*al-majlis al-qawmī l-il-sakkān*) – the state agency of social development. Islamic feminists like Omaima Abou-Bakr and Amany Saleh wrote or edited these booklets on gender equality in Islam, after the workshops conducted at the National Population Council on February 5, 2013. In the introduction of the publications, Noon Center ensures that each of the discussion series of this feminist ijtihad is within the Islamic ijtihad in general and that Islamic religious scholars are involved as well as Muslim female researchers (Noon Booklet 1; 7) to legitimize their reformist act.

Unlike WMF's colloquial book series, Noon's booklets are in standard Arabic – yet in a simple language as some participating authors explain. They endorse Noon's publications that it is all local production for the local audience unlike Musawah (discussed in the next section). The booklets are distributed in mosques and schools.

The booklets advance a moderate discourse on women's rights, often for the basic public rights, such as participation in the public sphere. Amany Saleh wrote the first booklet entitled 'Equality: towards the renewal in constructing the relationship tenets between women and men' (*al-musāwā: nahwa al-tajdīd fī binā' usūl al-'alāqa bayn al-mar'ā wa-l-rajul*) (2014). In the introduction, Saleh highlights that the mentality of *mujtahidīn* (people who exercise ijtihad) and clerics have strongly been influenced by the cultural and historical values prevailing in their era (Noon Booklet 1; 11). She argues that the differences between the two sexes cannot be understood as a neutral reality and that positioning people based on their sexes obscures the real Quranic differentiation based on values (Noon Booklet 1; 11). For example, Saleh asserts that we cannot conclude that women's testimony equals to half of men's from the surah al-Baqarah (2:282), which has been used for having either two men witnesses or two women and one man witnesses in financial matters. She argues that here the Quranic principle is the plurality of witnesses, not that women's testimony equals half of men (Noon Booklet 1; 26-27).

The second booklet is about a much-discussed concept in Islamic feminism: 'Qiwamah: Towards an Alternative Ijtihadi Vision' *(al-qiwāma: nahwa ru'īa ijtihādīya badīla)*. It was written by Omaima Abou-Bakr and Amany Saleh together. The third booklet specifically engages with women's right to ijtihad, entitled 'The Women and the Right in Ijtihad and Knowledge Production: Reading the Concept of Inferiority and its Interpretations (*al-nisā' w-al-ḥaq fī-l-ijtihād wa intāj al-maʿrifa: qirā'a fī mafhūm al-naqs wa ta'wīlāthu*). It was written by Fatma Hafez, professor from Cairo University who had also contributed to the newsletters of ASWIC. The coordinator of Noon explained that there was a lack of female researchers on Islam and they wanted to increase number of women who do ijtihad (interview 2014).

Besides the booklets, Noon Center produced educational video clips (cartoon or short movie) on gender equality with a collaboration of National Population Council's (NPC) program on Empowerment of Family (Noon Center 2012). The clips underscore girls' right to education, women's right to political participation and sharing household chores between couples, but also more taboo problems like domestic violence, sexual harassment, and FGM. The videos aim to attract the average Egyptians to decrease gender discrimination under the name of culture and religion.

The videos are very important for women's politico-religious empowerment. However, they have a moderate approach to gender equality, not a radical one. For example, they emphasize women's motherhood role to argue that they can be good political leaders in society. They also have a video on FGM which is still a common practice in Egypt like in several sub-Saharan countries, despite being banned in 2008. In the video, they depict a girl who dies after undergoing FGM, and they question the role of mothers, doctors, the teachers and also *rijāl al-dīn* who say that FGM is a must by religion, despite the fatwas from al-Azhar that it has nothing to do with religion. They also provide the helpline number of the NPC for children (Noon Center 2013). The video and message are significant contributions, and especially that they invalidate it as a religious practice. However, they do not mention FGM's more widespread effects on women such as psychological distress, sexual disorders, and unsatisfaction.[176]

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[176] CEWLA and Nazra co-organized an event for the occasion of 25 days of fighting against violence against women in November 2014. They presented an interactive psychodrama on FGM at the event. In the drama, a young girl

As part of its networking goal, Noon Center worked to bring together three groups: Muslim scholars, feminists, and civil society, since they regarded them as the key players in women's rights field. They called it *shaqā'iq* (peer) network, inspired by a hadith saying 'women are peers of men/women complete men' (*al-nisā' shaqā'iq al-rijāl*). Noon also organized international meetings for networking between Islamic feminists from especially Arabic-speaking countries to share information and local experiences (Coordinator interview 2014).

In one of their highly publicized conference, the participants proclaimed the "Alexandria Declaration on Women's Rights in Islam" in March 2014. The conference was named "Women's Issues: Towards a contemporary Islamic ijtihad on women's rights in Islam" (*qaḍāyā al-mar'ā: nahwa ijtihād islāmī mu'āsar*) and was hosted by *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* (Library of Alexandria). Alexandria, as the second largest city in Egypt located on the Mediterranean coast, has historically been a cosmopolitan city with Greek, Jewish, Coptic and Muslim communities until the nationalization policies of Nasser in 1950's. Since its re-inauguration in 2002, Bibliotheca Alexandrina launches and supports projects on renewal and reform in Islamic thought, collaborating with Noon Center and WMF. The council of patrons of the library includes the French President, the Queen of Spain, Director-General of the UNESCO and other international supporters who are "chosen by invitation of the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt" (Bibalex 2015). Al-Azhar scholars, Islamic feminists, and other women's rights activists inside and outside Egypt were invited to the conference, including Omaima Abou-Bakr, Amany Saleh, and Marwa Sharafeldin.

After the conference, the participants declared the Alexandria Declaration in March 2014 in the Library of Alexandria. The draft of the declaration was being prepared since 2012 when Mada Foundation tried to initiate a process of writing a document on women's rights from an Islamic perspective with al-Azhar (Coordinator interview 2014). Grand Imam of al-Azhar attended the meetings of women activists from civil society, Muslim and also Christian scholars. The coordinator explains that al-Azhar was slow in revising and declaring the document, so they

died during the operation and the audience was given the option to go back in time. There were religious leaders in the audience invited by CEWLA – visible with their distinctive gowns and headgears. A religious leader suggested operating the FGM in the hospital as a solution. The event exemplified the endorsement of FGM by mainstream representatives of religion. A representative of Nazra, who was present at the event, accepts the importance of having discussions with the religious leaders to 'mainstream' gender if mainstreaming is the aim (A Nazra member, interview 2014).

decided to work on it and declared it independent of al-Azhar. The declaration was publicized in media. She argued that if al-Azhar would declare it at some point, it would give it a significant support (interview 2014).

The declaration emphasizes equality between men and women in spirit, dignity, and responsibility. It asserts women's participation in the public space and suggests: "prohibiting viewing women in light of her bodily functions only" (Alexandria Declaration 2014). This statement is a response to misogynistic approaches in conservative and Islamist movements which have been promoting women's return to home and women's role as mothers.

However, the declaration has a careful language and it is not confrontational. It states that legislation on women should be in harmony with society, rather than conflictual. It underscores the importance of the family and suggests the interests of children be the "top priority in the development of such legislations" (Alexandria Declaration 2014). This is a common theme in women's rights field in Egypt as opposed to in Turkey. The emphasis on family and putting children's rights to top priority makes the declaration very ambiguous as to what extent it does not see women with their bodily functions as it claimed. The declaration was a very modest reform attempt and it is doubtful that it could lead to a transformation in women's rights legislation in Egypt.

Reaching out to the 'ulamā' and Imams: 'Making a Hole in the Wall'

Building on the trend of women's engagement with religion spearheaded by CEWLA and the Network in the 2000's, Noon Center had a gender equality project of capacity-building for religious leaders, *'ulamā'* and mosque imams who gave Friday *hutbes* or lessons in mosques. The coordinator explains that it is imperative to reach out the imams for social change. Imams have an easier outreach to society with their preaching. They are trusted figures for people especially in poor neighborhoods who often consult them on private matters.

The Noon Center trainings were both informative and psychological. They provided the religious leaders with factual information on women's education and participation to workforce in the 21st century to challenge the stereotypes on women (coordinator interview 2014). They also used psychodrama techniques to 'touch them from inside' and 'change how they feel' (interview

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2014). The form and approach of the trainings approves that the Center aimed gradual change in the mindset of *'ulamā'* instead of a radical confrontation with them. This has also been to BKP's institutional approach to Diyanet in Turkey.

Some Islamic feminists have led these trainings as guest trainers. Abou-Bakr told about the difficulties she experienced during the trainings she gave to two groups of twenty people. As an academic from 'ivory tower' it was hard for her to communicate at times to the imams:

> …They invited me and two and three others… to give lectures, but in Arabic! It was very difficult [that] I gave a lecture to the *'ulamā'*… As an academic researcher, let's face it, academic researchers live in an ivory tower, right? We don't get in touch with real people, since I'm not a grassroot activist. So this is an opportunity for me, to talk to the traditional *'ulamā'*. And it is an opportunity for *'ulamā'* to see people like us. (Abou-Bakr interview 2014).

Abou-Bakr explained that *'ulamā'* often did not like the trainings, even though they were kind:

> *Tab'an* [of course], they are very nice and respectable *'ulamā'* , they are not going to throw eggs at you or something or say nasty. [They are] very polite and they are academics in al-Azhar or imams... We were laughing …[But they] would not be convinced of the idea of gender equality… [T]hey are very paternalistic. Of course, Islam urged us to treat women kindly and nicely. They tell you, "oh no we don't advocate abuse of women, of course not, don't abuse women, treat them nicely, kindly". That part is good. But when you tell them, this verse in the Quran this verse 34, chapter 4, *qiwamah*. They are convinced that *qiwamah* is male leadership. When you tell them, "no not necessarily, [that] God wanted to make sure, it [means] providing… because you get more inheritance".... You find yourself in this discussion, they tell you "women's nature is emotional, a little bit immature, they need guidance from us, from men, they need leadership. Marriage is a ship, you cannot have two leaders"... And I try to tell them, "OK, if you are a conservative in terms of gender, belong to a conservative culture, fine, a rural culture in England can be very conservative, fine. If you believe men should be leaders, and you

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want to lead your life style that way, fine. But please do not say that this is a Quranic *farḍ* [obligation] or Islamic rule". (Abou-Bakr interview 2014).

Like Amina Nusayr and Azza Soliman, Abou-Bakr argues that al-Azhar promotes traditional *cultural* values rather than a genuine engagement with *Islam*. She makes a difference between conservative ideology that exists across regions and religions (which confines women to domestic roles with biological arguments) and Islamic ideology which does not promote these.

On the other hand, the coordinator at Noon had a more positive perspective about altering the mindsets of the imams. Noon Center recorded a positive change among the imams evaluated with post-questionaries and organized a graduation ceremony. The coordinator explains that some imams came to ask for more trainings (interview 2014). She highlighted that they had good relations with them, some of whom were high profile al-Azhar sheiks and Dar al-Ifta members. Noon Center wanted to develop it into a *trainer of trainees* (ToT) to be applied in governorates besides Cairo.

The debate continues between the Islamic feminists and other feminists who think that religious reform is beyond women's movements capacity. Abou-Bakr points out the power of such trainings despite the difficulties. She states that religious leaders act as if they own the religious knowledge, and they are 'shocked' when they see Abou-Bakr and others talking to them about religion, as Azza Soliman also mentions. Abou-Bakr states that changing the religious traditionalism and 'making a hole in the wall' are long-term goals but they are possible:

> …we have to somehow make a hole in that wall, and get into the traditional and religious establishment, do an outreach, make dialogues with them, reach out women Azharites, reach *'ulamā'*, let them know we exist and [make] dialogue with them. I have believed in it for a very long time and I still struggle to believe in it. Others will tell you, "this is too difficult, you want to make a hole in the wall by banging your head? And it's a ten centuries old institution, you cannot compete with it." I'll stay in the margin if you don't try to get inside, we'll be doomed to stay in the margin. They have the authority and power, they never give it to you. You need to keep working in the sidelines, maybe in the future, you'll make an impact (Abou-Bakr interview 2014).

Abou-Bakr is willing to speak to the representatives of the mainstream religion, mainly al-Azhar imams – not to stay on the margins. Several Islamic feminists mention that they want to communicate and convince the religious leaders instead of only talking to people who think alike (interviews 2014). As important and good-willed as it is, this choice necessitates adaptation to the mainstream language as visible from the Alexandria Declaration. They dissent from the mainstream religion without transgressing, in terms of content, form of action and style – the latter will be discussed further. As such, they mostly contribute to the reformative capacity of women, rather than transformative one.

To sum up: Noon Center represented an institutionalization of Islamic feminism in Egypt supported by local and UN sponsors. It has provided an institutional hub for Islamic feminists – who long have written essays in confined areas of academia – to amplify their voices, make them reach out to the *'ulamā'* and public as a whole. While Noon Center openly aimed a feminist ijtihad, it was cautious not to delegitimize itself in the eyes of clergy. Islamic feminists around the center have contributed to gender equality from Islamic perspective and women's politico-religious empowerment with mixed tactics of accommodation and dissent but not in a radical way.

Musawah: An International network of Islamic feminism

Islamic feminism has become a more global trend with regional and global institutionalizations in the late 1990's and 2000's, as mentioned in the introduction. *Musawah* (equality) movement is one of the most visible and established organizations of this kind. It was launched in 2009 with the initiation of *Sisters in Islam* (SIS) in Malaysia. It is a global movement encompassing Muslim women activists and scholars all around the world. Its motto is 'For equality in the Muslim family'. Zeinah Anwar, a co-founder of SIS, has been the executive director of Musawah. Musawah aims to merge the international CEDAW with an enlightened reading of Islam to reform discriminatory articles and practices in countries with Islamic legislation (Musawah 2015). They have an eclectic approach with the four sources they build on: Islamic sources and jurisprudence; international human rights standards; national laws and constitutional guarantees of equality; and lived realities of women and men (Musawah 2016). Musawah has three pillars of strategies which are knowledge building, capacity building, and international advocacy.

Omaima Abou-Bakr is a member of international advisory group of Musawah, the decision-making body, which includes women from different parts of the world who meet once a year. Musawah secretariat, the implementation body, is supposed to rotate among countries in every three years. Marwa Sharafeldin is a member of steering committee. Members, friends and allies of Musawah are called 'Musawah Advocates' such as feminist Mona Eltahawy. Although Musawah is a global movement, lobbying and fundraising are encouraged to take place at the local level (Musawah 2013). In 2011, the rotating secretariat of Musawah was planned to be given to CEWLA in Egypt between 2013 and 2016 and Marwa Sharafeldin would have been the executive director after Zeinah Anwar (Abou-Bakr and Soliman interviews 2014). Azza Soliman, a co-founder of Musawah, explained that Egypt was selected due to its hosting position of the oldest and leading Islamic institution worldwide, al-Azhar. After the revolution, they met the mufti of al-Azhar with Marwa Sharafeldin and he welcomed the Musawah movement (Soliman interviews 2014). However, this did not realize, as they canceled to move the rotating secretariat to Egypt in 2014 due to the increased complications for NGOs. Since Musawah receives foreign funding, it makes its operation difficult under the new NGO law in Egypt. This issue will be dealt with in more detail in the last section.

Musawah had brought hope to many feminists and Islamic feminists in Egypt that it brought an organizational tool to have a sustained discourse of Islamic feminism to fight against Salafi interpretations of Islam and 'politicized' Islam of Muslim Brotherhood (Abou-Bakr, interview 2014). Activists reported that even though it was a coincidence that Musawah came after the revolution, it was the right time to start talking about sharia when the Brotherhood began to intimidate the opposition with it (interviews 2014).

The heterogeneous body of Musawah interestingly deters both religious and secular women. As mentioned earlier, some religious feminists in Turkey have kept a distance to Musawah as they had concerns whether there was enough shared experience between them and women who have been living in the West or have internalized a Western lifestyle. Likewise, Amany Saleh from Egypt thinks that Musawah may be closer to feminism than Islamism. Although Saleh finds its activism legitimate as a different point of view, she does not collaborate with it to remain 'independent' and not to be part of an ideological group (interview 2014). On the opposite side, some well-known secular women activists from Egypt and Morocco also declined joining

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Musawah, but due to its religious orientation (Soliman interview 2014). Mulki Al-Sharmani, a member of Musawah knowledge building group, acknowledges the heterogeneity of Musawah and this is not a problem for her:

> Some of us like me and Omaima [Abou-Bakr], we are very concerned with the religious question from the perspective of faith, we believe in this religion. We have a stake in it. We don't want to [leave] this religion to other people who are patriarchal, and who are telling us that God says so…. The others are more concerned with human rights…So we are different…but we have common goals (Al-Sharmani 2014 interview).

Abou-Bakr, who joined Musawah in 2010, feels excited about it unlike some other Islamic feminists (interview 2014). As part of Musawah's knowledge building pillar, she has been actively participating in the planning and production of its research projects and publications as a resource person along with Islamic feminists Amina Wadud and Ziba Mir Husseini. Knowledge building pillar of Musawah is better funded and more systematic than local Islamic feminist efforts.

However, outreach is still limited to educated elites; and translation of knowledge into legal reform is necessary. That is why Musawah has also capacity building and advocacy pillars for local NGOs. It provides guidance for NGOs in the Muslim-majority countries for preparing shadow reports for CEDAW Committee and advocating removal of reservations on CEDAW, such as Article 16 concerning equality in marriage. Abou-Bakr has lectured in capacity-building trainings in Cairo and Malaysia for women's rights activists around the world.

Like other Islamic feminist organizations, Musawah organizes meetings with local and international religious scholars. Connecting Moroccon researchers and activists is important for Islamic feminists, as the reform in Moroccon family law (*mudawana)* in 2004 brought 'equality' in marriage with Islamic framework. Musawah organized a meeting in November 2014 with Asma Lamrabet, the head of women's studies center of the Al-Muhammadiya League for *'ulamā'* (*rābiṭa al-muḥammadīya l-il-'ulamā'*) in Morocco, a religious institution established under the support of the King of Morocco. In the meeting, Moroccan and Egyptian Musawah advocates and religious scholars exchanged experiences and discussed Quranic concepts like *qiwamah*.

Abou-Bakr's work on *qiwamah* has been a significant part of Islamic feminist production. She wrote the chapter "The Interpretive Legacy of Qiwamah as an Exegetical Construct" in the book "Men in Charge?" (2015) co-edited by Mulki Al-Sharmani, Ziba Mir-Husseini and Jana Rumminger as part of the knowledge building pillar of Musawah. The chapters in the book are dedicated to understanding the concepts of *qiwamah, wilayah*, and *khilafat* from the perspective of Muslim women. In her chapter, Omaima Abou-Bakr exposes the historical and cultural construction of qiwamah. She specifically studies the period of 'science of exegesis' (*'ilm al-tafsīr*) covering the past ten centuries until today. Abou-Bakr argues that theological schools (*madhāhab*) differ little in their interpretations on gender issues. Qiwamah is often interpreted as men's authority over women in the verse *al-nisā'* (4:34)[177]. The first part of the verse has often been interpreted as the following translation in English:

> Men are *in charge of* women by [right of] what Allah has given one over
> the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth.
> (Saheeh International 2012, my emphasis on the translation of
> '*qawwamūna*')

Abou-Bakr put forward four claims on the hermeneutics of *qawwamūna* (2015, 48): First, she argued that the word began to carry a normative meaning over centuries, while it was originally understood as a descriptive fact – that men were indeed providers. Second, she asserted that it came to mean authority of men after earlier being understood as responsibility of men. Third, it came to denote a broader status for men from a restricted meaning of providing financial support. Fourth, Abou-Bakr also showed how essentialist natural differences between men and women came to dominate the interpretations of the verse (4:34) with the exegesis of al-Qurtubi in the 13th century (2015, 51).

Al-Sharmani emphasizes the importance of Abou-Bakr's work on qiwamah since the concept is used as a ground to disapprove *khul'* reform in Egypt:

> The patriarchal understanding of the concept of qiwamah is powerful.
> It's always a way to stop the conversation. They say *khul'* is
> unreligious because it's against qiwamah. Don't abolish polygamy

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[177] al-rijāl qawwamūna 'ala-l-nisā' bimā faḍḍala allāh ba'ḍahum 'ala ba'ḍin wa bimā ānfaqū min 'amwālihim

because it's against qiwamah. Don't abolish unilateral repudiation because it's against qiwamah. But nobody unpacks qiwamah. (Al-Sharmani interview 2014)

Indeed, the resistance to *khul'* has continued after the revolution especially from the Islamists, groups of conservatives and divorced fathers who has asked the annulment of 'Suzanne Mubarak laws', and even sometimes from the liberals (interviews 2014). Some judges refuse to grant *khul'* with the argument that it is *haram* (interviews 2014). After a decade of the reform, the judge Abdullah al-Baga, the head of the Family Court of Appeal, contended on TV that khoula' is legally invalid without the consent of husband (Youssif 2011).

Azza Soliman from CEWLA met with the judge al-Baga and Sameh Makhlouf, the founder of 'Coalition for the Egyptian Family Protection' (*i'tilāf ḥimāyat al-usra al-maṣrīya*) in a TV show few months after the revolution in 2011. In the show, Makhlouf complained about the increased divorce rates in society and attacked 'the Suzanne Mubarak laws' and *khul'* (On Ent 2011a). In this show, Al-Baga concentrated[178] on the effects of the divorce on children, whether with *khul'* or not, and blamed women's organizations and NCW by calling it 'national destruction council for women' (*al-majlis al-fasād al-qawmī lil-mar'ā*) (On Ent 2011a).

Soliman criticized both speakers for having blamed women for the destruction of society. She argued that the increase in divorce rates were due to the fact that *khul'* had a shorter process and women asked it even when they could ask a harm-based divorce. As a response to Islamic arguments, Soliman listed the names of the prophet's male and female companions who divorced multiple times. She said that although she respected *fuqahā'* (jurisprudents) in Dar al-Ifta and al-Azhar, "they are lazy (*kasūl*)" for not producing new fiqh based on women's actual suffering (On Ent 2011a). Throughout the show, Soliman presented her usual assertive and forceful style.

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[178] Two years after, during FJP and Mursi rule in 2013, Al-Baga argued against criminalizing rape between spouses saying that 'the angels curse women who refuse their husbands', and asked for capital punishment or life-long detention for adulterous men and women in a conference on women's rights (Ikhwanonline 2013).

WMF Projects on Islamic Feminism

Women and Memory Forum also increased projects on Islamic feminism after 2011. Most important of these projects was the international conference entitled "Feminism and Islamic Perspectives: New Horizons of Knowledge and Reform" held on March 2012 in Cairo with the support of KVINFO and DEDI. Omaima Abou-Bakr coordinated the conference and Amany Saleh was the keynote speaker who talked about the epistemological foundations of Islamic feminism. Marwa Sharafeldin and Mulki Al-Sharmani from Musawah and Hind Mostafa from ASWIC were among the presenters, as well as two Nazra members (discussed in the next section). The conference aimed "to stir debate on the subject, bring it to the Egyptian and Arab scene, encourage knowledge production in Arabic language" and "to exchange experiences regarding current Muslim women's issues in both the Arab region and the European context." (Women and Memory 2012).

The insisting strategy of Islamic feminists on making dialogue with al-Azhar led to an unwanted result in the conference. WMF invited Sheik Gamal Qutb from al-Azhar, who was known for his moderate views, and a woman activist from the MB-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party for the final roundtable session on the last day of the conference. Abou-Bakr explained that the rationale was 'following two days of promoting the cause of Islamic feminism—we could now [have] a dialogue with society's traditional patriarchy, represented by the official religious establishment, and conservative gender ideology, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood.' (Abou-Bakr, online comment 2013). However, Sheik Qutb's speech at the last panel and the respect that the WMF hosts showed him misled the audience as if he had the 'last word':

> I politely acted as the 'host' of the event and showed respect to his age and appreciation of his effort to make it to the meeting, as something completely separate from the right to challenge him and the theological patriarchy he represented. Yet, his presence in this last session of the conference— although he wasn't the only speaker at the roundtable panel—was interpreted by some as symbolizing that he has the "last word" about all this (Abou-Bakr, online comment 2013).

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As Islamic feminists try dialogue with the traditional patriarchy, the style embedded in dialogues –politeness, cooperation and respect to *'ulamā'* – prevents them from giving their message clearly and if necessary, provocatively. The challenges of cooptation and compromise is evident in the process of 'making a hole' in the religious establishment, similar to the feminist concerns regarding working with the state.

Connected to this inherent style of respect and dialogue, women's religious expertise is constantly questioned by 'ulamā' and also by ordinary people. During the panels, a young man commented that it would have been better if they had "real experts from the specialized *'ulamā'*" (Abou-Bakr, online comment 2013; Emam interview 2014). Abou-Bakr put aside her politeness this time, and "snapped at him" and responded that all presenters were learned academics and if *'ulamā'* came to such conferences, they do not exercise "legitimate creative ijtihad" but "repeat platitudes we all knew" (Abou-Bakr, online comment 2013) As such, Islamic feminists often need to legitimate themselves by introducing their credentials and education. I believe that it is important for women to claim their right to talk about religion, sometimes aggressively to be 'heard' as Abou-Bakr seemed to do.

Some of the articles presented at the conference were compiled in a book named 'Feminist and Islamic Perspectives – New Horizons of Knowledge and Reform' published by WMF and edited by Omaima Abou-Bakr in 2013. The Arabic version of the book *al-nisawīya w-al-manẓūr al-islāmī* was launched on May 2014 at Misr General Library in Cairo. A discussion seminar was organized with Omaima Abou-Bakr; and several contributors of the book, academicians and a religious scholar/sheik were invited (Abou-Bakr correspondence 2014). However, the invited sheik refused to come in objection to a couple of sentences in one of the articles in the book (Abou-Bakr correspondence 2018). The book is one of the most recent outcome of knowledge production on the convergence of Islam and feminism in Egypt.

WMF has also increased its outreach to the younger generation with gender education courses (*dawrāt ta'līmīya fī dirāsāt al-nawa'*) in national universities around Egypt for the last four and five years. As part of these workshops, along with other professors, Omaima Abou-Bakr and Hoda El-Saadi teaches gender and Islamic history in Arabic to university students including in Upper Egypt.

Whom to represent is an important question for a women's platform like WMF that brings back legacies from the past. WMF produced posters of prominent women from Egyptian history after the revolution, and they were sent out to universities and other public places. Posters show influential women from different political spectrums in Egypt including militant suffragette and writer Doria Shafiq, leftist painter Inji Aflatoon and Islamist Zainab Al-Ghazali. One of the WMF project coordinators, Maissan Hassan, shares that some feminists were surprised that Zainab Al-Ghazali was included in the posters as Al-Ghazali has rarely been mentioned in feminist circles (interview 2014). Hassan explains that the idea was 'to show various feminisms' and 'women in the public sphere' in Egypt (interview 2014).

7.3. Transgressions: Discussing Sexuality and Islam

An anonymous Islamic feminist in her 30's lists gender-based violence, harassment, and rape, including marital rape and abuse inside the family as her priorities in women's issues. As shown, middle-age Islamic feminists and their organizations have not prioritized these taboo issues, although some have started to address them with moderate discourse. This is one reason why they occupy the dissenting row in Table 9.

After the revolution, issues of sexuality, body and sexual harassment have been publicly and regularly problematized, often by younger generation of feminists and Islamic feminists and their new platforms. The anonymous woman is disturbed that "you are always bounded by duties rather than by your will or by your desires, ambitions, dreams…" (interview 2014) like Zeynep Göknil Şanal says in Turkey. There seems to be a difference in the priorities of younger Islamic feminists and Islamic feminist organizations in Egypt.

While there have been projects on harassment by well-established NGOs such as Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) since 2005, women have collectively stood against harassment rampant in Cairo after the revolution (Abaza 2013). On their walk for the International Women's Day on March 8, 2011 women were beaten up and sexually harassed (Amar 2011). The 'blue bra' incident became a symbol for the women's marches commemorating a female protestor who was dragged on the street by the security officers and whose *abaya* (long cloak) was stripped off in December 2011 (Abaza 2013, Langohr 2013). The Women's Day march in 2012 was well attended and received high media coverage locally and internationally. Around ten thousand

women joined the marches shouting 'the women of Egypt are the red line' (Abaza 2013, Langohr 2013).

Between 2003 and 2006, the security state intensified 'the practice of targeting publicly and politically active women' and tarnishing their 'respectability' (Amar 2011, 314). A notorious sexual assault towards female demonstrators occurred during a protest in front of the Journalists Syndicate in 2005 (Al-Ahram 2013). Known as 'Black Wednesday,' the assault was one of the striking incident of sexual violence by security forces or thugs as a deterrence of activism. As a response, certain civil society and government campaigns targeted the working-class male youth as sexual aggressers, and some feminist groups demanded further securization of the street, rather than highlighting the role of the security state in intensifying sexual violence (Amar 2011, 314). I agree with Nadje Al-Ali that both accounts, political repression or sexual aggression, are simplistic and we need to look at the broader 'normalization of violence' at the hands of the authorities against males and females, and wider gender-based violence to understand the mass sexual harassments in the streets (Al-Ali 2014). Today there are myriad of initiatives of different size and capacity that work against sexual harassment in Cairo.[179]

One of the most prominent of such organizations is Nazra for Feminist Studies (*naẓra l-il-dirāsāt al-nisawīya*) founded in 2007. It was set up by younger generation and works on issues of sexuality and body. Although based in Cairo, Nazra has collaborated with 'women's rights defenders' around the governorates across Egypt. A more recent platform is *Ikhtyar* (Choice - *ikhtiyār*), founded in 2013. It defines itself as an open space (*misāḥa maftūḥa*) to discuss gender issues and document and develop knowledge production on gender in Arabic language (Ikhtyar 2017). The effect of religious movements and fundamentalism on self-ownership is one of the foci of Ikhtiyar. Ikhtyar team translates feminist articles into Arabic, organize academic seminars and reading groups. Their selection includes writings of minority and radical feminists such as Kimberly Crenshaw, Gloria Anzaldua, Judith Butler and Nawal El-Saadawi. With collaboration with ARROW[180], they organized an event on 'bodily integrity in the Egyptian family' (*al-karāma*

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[179] Some of the most active organizations and initiatives on harassment are Nazra, Ikhtyar, ḍid taḥarrush (Against Harassment), shuft taḥarrush (I saw harassment), HarassMap, and baṣma (Imprint). Besides these initiatives, there have also been ad-hoc civil bodyguard teams – male and female mixed –formed during the big public demonstrations, such as Tahrir Bodyguard and OpAntiSh (Operation Anti Sexual Harassment).
[180] ARROW (Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women) is a regional non-profit organization based in Malaysia. It focuses on women's sexual and reproductive rights.

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al-jasadīya fī-l-usrat al-maṣrīya) in October 2016. Despite its radical feminist stance, Ikhtiyar addresses the family as an important and legitimate unit.

There are few Islamic feminists in the young generation who engage with issues of sexuality in Egypt. Compared to the young generation of religious feminists in Turkey (eg. the Initiative, Reçel Blog editors), younger Islamic feminists who deal with sexuality in Egypt are fewer and their visibility is limited. Fatma Emam is one of the rare representatives the young vein of Islamic feminism in Egypt – among the very few young women who openly calls herself as an 'Islamic feminist'. She is a co-founder and former member of Nazra (between 2006 and 2013) and currently works with Ikhtyar. She has been an international council member in WLUML. She is an Egyptian of Nubian origin; which in all likelihood have an influence on her sensitivity to marginalization and interest in Islamic feminism.

Omaima Abou-Bakr's Islamic feminism was influential on Emam (interview 2014). She first met her in a human rights course organized by Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies (CIHRS). Emam is also a FEPS graduate, and she wrote her thesis on "Women's rights in Egypt between sharia and law." Religion has been influential at a personal level for Emam. After taking off her veil after the revolution – like many young women in Egypt, she faced resistance from her family. Emam states that people were concerned that she would start to do *haram* (forbidden things in religion) after taking off the veil, because for some people "it's like a guarantee that you obey the system" (interview 2014).

Emam was politically active during and after the revolution on human rights violations. She worked as a translator for the 'Front for Defending of Egypt's Protestors' that was established to document unlawful practices of security forces against protesters. She translated the details about the health status of injured and killed people during the clashes between protesters and the armed forces. Due to this psychological burden, she quitted her research position at Nazra in 2013. She served as the assistant of the Nubian representative of constitution writing committee in 2013, and she was nominated twice to the press constitution committee by Baheya Masr, a young women's organization.

Emam is one of the young Nubians who raise awareness on issues of ethnicity and race in Egypt. She has experienced harassment due to her sex and racial background. She publishes Arabic

and English articles and short texts on sexuality, race, Islam and human rights in her personal blog named 'At Brownies' since 2007, and sometimes in printed and online journals like *Al-Shorouk* and *Mada Masr.*

> Every day I hear very bad comments about being black. And people are OK with it. Yes, like sexual harassment, people are really OK with it! The problem is that sometimes they get into my nerves and I start to reply back. And you find nobody supporting you…. Usually, when you reply back the harassers, people say you are impolite, and you should be silent to stop it. (Emam interview 2014).

Emam maintains that radical feminism of Nazra did not contradict her Islamic approach; because she also calls herself a radical as she studies sexuality and women's rights in Islam. Like other Islamic feminists, Emam advocates for women's right to do ijtihad. Reading the African-American Islamic feminist Amina Wadud's work has especially widened Emam's approach to Islam. As someone who embrace her Nubian identity in Egypt, Wadud's African background may have made Emam further sympathize with Wadud's position. Wadud's problematization and historicizing the patriarchal verses in the Quran has been encouraging for Emam:

> I think I'm in a very liberating phase with every new thing I read. I see Amina Wadud as a model of creating a new epistemology for women… In her article 'Aisha's Legacy' (2002) she says that we should be engaged in the creation of the fiqh, not only interpreting it (Emam interview 2014).

Emam and Yara Sallam, as members of Nazra, presented at the WMF conference in 2012 a proposal for research about sexual rights in Islam entitled 'Women's Sexual Rights in Islamic Thought' (*al-huqūq al-jinsīya l-il-mar'ā fī-l-fikr al-islāmī*). Yara Sallam, who defined herself as an Arab African feminist (interview 2017), did her masters in Notr Dame University in the US about the legal status of marital rape in Egypt and its compatibility with Islam. She was the manager of Women Human Rights Defenders Program at Nazra. Emam and Sallam presented the approaches of various Islamic schools of thought about the duties of married couples in sexual

relationship. Marital rape is not criminalized in many Arab countries including Egypt.[181] It is reported that since marital rape is not a legal crime in Egypt, the remaining option for victim women is to divorce with *khul'* – by forfeiting their financial rights, instead of a harm-based divorce (Khalil 2015). In the conference, Emam and Sallam argued that marital rape should be acknowledged as a violation against women, considering the general Islamic principles of affection, compassion, and non-violence (Emam and Sallam, 2012). Emam problematizes the common perception in Islam that women must satisfy the sexual needs of their husbands unconditionally as long as the latter support them financially:

> The idea of sexuality is coming to be an important and interesting in Islamic feminism, my idea is [to show] how new Salafi websites…are tackling with sexuality by taking rights away from women and giving absolute rights to men. Usually, it's connected to *nafaqa* (maintenance), how to provide for the women. They allow to use force, if the women don't obey them. So it's obedience versus *nafaqa*…If you read verses of the Quran you'd find that sex is not offered all the time and men have to be kind and nice to their wives in order to have the rights. It's not an absolute right (Emam interview 2014).

The power struggle over the religious knowledge and authority is evident in the activism of young generation about religion and women's rights. Emam and Sallam received criticism in the WMF conference where space was expected to be safer and more homogenous. Emam approved Abou-Bakr's testimony that a young man criticized the event with the argument that they were all unfamiliar with Islam. Emam contends that "tackling Islamic fiqh is a taboo. Add to this, I am young, woman, with civil education and unveiled" (personal correspondence 2017).

'Visibility' concerns Emam utterly. Before taking off her veil, she researched women's presence in public spaces and encountered the concept of *'awra* (interview 2014). Literally meaning defectiveness and imperfection, *'awra* denotes to the parts of the body (male and female) that are considered sexual, and therefore should be covered for modesty. It has especially been used to prescribe women to be unseen and unheard in varying degrees in societies across the

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[181] NCW rejected the bill proposed by women's NGO's to make marital rape a recognized violence against women (Nabil 2017, Emam interview 2014)

Middle East. For example, the voice of women is regarded as *'awra* in some religious sects, which is the reason of the ban on female solo singing performances in Iran. Like some other Islamic feminists, Emam points out to the influence of Wahhabism across Muslim countries and how it has impacted traditional and more convenient ways of clothing.

After having read the writings of Gamal El Benna, Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud on *'awra* and hijab, Emam took off her veil, however only after the revolution in 2011. The connection between the political and personal transformation is very much evident in Emam's life: "My turning point was the revolution, I felt that if we could fight for a country, and could not fight for ourselves, then we were not free" (Emam 2011). Her testimony, which summarizes many other women's experience in Egypt after the revolution, demonstrates vividly the interconnectedness of broader political freedom to 'personal' freedom.

Emam is at ease with being visible when she writes or talks about women's rights and sexuality backed by feminist research and Islamic fiqh. In her personal blog, she introduces herself with her name and picture. She finds support and courage in feminist circles like WMF and Ikhtiyar (interview 2014, 2017). As opposed to the majority of middle-age Islamic feminists who often draw a divided picture between themselves and secular women, Fatma Emam and Yara Sallam underscores the commonalities and collaborations between secular and Islamic women's movement in Egypt:

> The idea for me, it's like a rainbow. Having different colors on the same thing we all believe in it. Without the secular feminists in Egypt, we wouldn't be at this phase. They helped. The idea of polarization is not good. In the end, you have one enemy. "The patriarchal society"… In the very beginning of the revolution, the first thing was the virginity tests…So in the end, I don't think it matters whether you are Islamic or secular, it is a violation of women's rights. And by being feminist, we all believe in solidarity and sisterhood of women. So any violation of women, we should be against it. (Emam, interview 2014)

Emam's co-presenter Yara Sallam has a similar approach, she appreciates Islamic feminism for challenging mainstream religious discourse, but she also values secular feminists efforts to "shift

the discourse into a non-religious one" (Sallam 2013). Sallam was arrested with six other women for having called for the repeal of the Protest and Public Assembly Law introduced by al-Sisi in front of the presidential palace in June 2014[182]. She was released in August 2015 after staying more than a year in jail.

The activism of young generation such as Emam and Sallam with the collaborations of platforms like WMF, Nazra and Ikhtyar signals to a transformative space vis-à-vis gender in Egypt. They do it not only by problematizing taboo issues like marital rape and harassment but also with their risky political activism on the broader issues of democracy and human rights. They have at times come across with the danger of getting imprisoned or at best psychologically being worn out. They have visibly transgressed the borders of *both* religious and political authority.

Besides the more systematic approach to Islam like Emam's, there are also a few feminists who talk and write openly about sexuality, at times from the perspective of Islam, to a broader audience in national and international media. Mona Eltahawy, an American-Egyptian columnist and a 'Musawah advocate,' is one of the boldest of such feminists. She defines herself as a Muslim woman and feminist (Eltahawy 2010). She lives in Cairo since 2013 where Egyptian national security follows her moves (public conversation 2015), it is unclear whether to protect her safety or to limit her activism. She is targeted and mocked in some Egyptian TV shows along with El-Saadawi, as her writings and public speeches concentrate on women's sexuality and freedom in a provocative and transgressive way.

Eltahawy often writes in English, but frequently appears on Arabic TV channels and elaborates her views on the necessity of a sexual revolution (*thawra jinsīya*) in Arab and Muslim countries. In her public talks, Eltahawy uses a mixture of feminist, ancient Egyptian, and Islamic sources to justify her demand for the empowerment and freedom of women. She received widespread popularity and at the same time outrage for her article at Foreign Policy entitled 'Why do they hate us?' (2012), and her book 'Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution' (2015) where she argues that women's suppression in Arab countries originates from a hatred of women and fear of women's free sexuality. Not only men but also female scholars, such as Leila Ahmed and Saba Mahmood, have criticized Eltahawy in common

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[182] Sallam was in jail during my field work in Egypt so I could not meet her personally.

TV shows for her alleged disregard of the broader inequalities and oppression, as well as differences in the region.

Eltahawy's discourse are often provocative, such as her point that people should blaspheme and offend if they are told that women's genitalia should be mutilated in the name of modesty (Eltahawy 2012). Another time, in a TEDx talk in Europe publicized online, she refers to the religious right in her two countries, Egypt and the US, and she proclaims:

> I connect the men of right wing from both sides of my background by
> saying they are obsessed with our vaginas. And my message to them is stay
> out of my vagina unless I want you in there. (Eltahawy 2013).

Besides using taboo words, Eltahawy also transgresses by couragously speaking about her own sexuality. She often proclaims that she is interested in younger men and she defends openly LGBTİ rights from a personal tone in her English talks. In another Tedx talk in the United Kingdom, she says "it is a revolutionary act to say that it is my right as a woman to have sex with whoever I want, whenever I want…inside or outside of marriage, with a woman, with a man, with many women, with many men in whatever form I choose" (Eltahawy 2015). Homosexuality is one of the most untouched taboos in Egypt, unlike sexual harassment. Same is true for talking openly about sexual desires.

The poem "You are Great my Man" of the Initiave member Nebiye Arı from Turkey, discussed in Chapter 5, has some parallels with Eltahawy's bold public visibility, despite the fact that the two activists have different intentions and stances to feminism and starkly different backgrounds regarding economic power, age, profession and social class. Eltahawy receives fees for her public talks across the world (Eltahawy 2017), while Arı is a young student with no financial means. Arı employed vulgar slang words for sex in her poem, *not* to disclose her private life – although some commentators accused her of doing so – but to criticize a particular type of 'Islamist man' in Turkey. On the other hand, Eltahawy is provocative not only for criticizing patriarchy, but for also openly *talking* about her *sexual desires* as a Muslim woman. Female writers

have written about women's sexual desires in the region especially in literary forms, such as Alifa Rifaat's short stories[183]. However, *speaking* about it is more provocative.

Besides her activism on women's rights and free sexuality, Eltahawy has also been critical of Mubarak and SCAF, and Al-Sisi regimes(although she has not called the overthrow of Mursi as a coup). She attended TV shows in Egypt where she talked about the violence and sexual harassment that she was subjected by the police in December 2011 (ON Ent 2011b). As a cost of speaking openly about sexuality, she carries her Egyptian and US passports each time she goes out in Egypt (Eltahawy, public conversation 2015). Yet, she is hopeful about feminism in Egypt and gives the example that young students welcomed her feminist ideas in a Tedx event at Zagazig University – which is located in a city dominated by MB supporters (Eltahawy, public conversation 2015).

Eltahawy presents one of the most transgressive feminist perspectives not only in Egypt but in the Middle East. As a global well-funded public speaker and a Musawah advocate, she targets a broader audience, unlike other Egyptian and Turkish feminists or religious woman. Her radical feminism may be compared to the radicalism of Nawal El-Saadawi; however, her American citizenship and the fact that she has been living abroad half of the year suggest that she has less public support in Egypt. Nevertheless, she represents a model and idea for young women in the Middle East, although extreme, about the capacities and limits of women's politico-religious power.

Another Sensitive Issue: Uniting PSL for Muslims and Christians

Another controversial issue in Egypt is the idea of unification of personal status laws of Muslims and Christians. Azza Soliman from CEWLA has been dealing with this issue. Soliman believes that the time has come for Egypt to talk about the *civil* marriage (Soliman, interview 2014). After

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[183] She used Alifa as a pseudonym in her early works which remained as her pen-name. My World of the Unknown (*'alamī al-majhūl*) (1974) and Distant view of a Minaret (b'aīdā 'an al-m'idhana) are her important works of this genre.

becoming an Ashoka fellow in 2011, she has increased her work on uniting Christian and Muslim family laws (Soliman interview 2014, Ashoka 2011).

After the revolution in 2011, interpretation outside the church has also been on the agenda for ordinary Christians. The political freedom has fueled the idea of freedom from the strict surveillance of the Coptic Church in private matters (interviews 2014). The Egyptian state has long refrained from intervening in the personal status issues due to the power-sharing arrangement between the authoritarian state and the official religious institutions, the Coptic Church and al-Azhar (Adar 2013, Sedra 2012). The Church and al-Azhar once more showed their support to the military state by posing next to Al-Sisi at the announcement of the intervention on July 3, 2013 on the Egyptain state television (Adar 2013). Due to the power-sharing arrangement and allocation of particular authorities to the church and al-Azhar, the sectarian issues have been very sensitive in Egypt. CEWLA was at times accused of inciting sectarian clash due to their projects on Christian family law (Soliman; Nashat interviews 2014).

There are important problems for Christian Egyptians in terms of personal status laws. First of all, divorcing is more difficult due to the Coptic Orthodox Church's declarations. Conversion (to another religion or Christian denomination) and adultery are currently the only accepted reasons of divorce which is difficult to prove and risky to announce (Rugh 2016, 137). Still the difficulty of divorce lead some Christians to come up with fabricated claims on those (Shams El-Din 2017). Even in cases of accepted divorce, the Church may not allow remarriage. Custody rights of Christian women who are married to Muslim men are also more limited than Muslim women.

CEWLA has organized projects for the Christian PSL. It drafted suggestions for Christian PSL in 2005 based on the liberal Christian PSL of 1938 (interviews 2014). This 1938 law had allowed divorce in case of nine reasons including irreconcilable differences, domestic abuse, and long-term imprisonment (Rugh 2016, 137; Mostafa 2016). CEWLA's project in 2005 faced a lot of resistance (interviews 2014). Soliman explains their motivation has been to give Muslim and Christian mothers the same custody rights, with the argument that motherhood is important regardless of religion of the mother. She says that due to their efforts, many people think that she is a Christian (Soliman interview 2014).

Soliman has been visible in media with their demands of a united PSL. She gave an interview to website 'Copts United' about CEWLA's proposals on a unified law for personal status for all Egyptians, Muslims and Coptic Christians in 2010 (Nader 2010). CEWLA also organized

a discussion to discuss a possible unified civil PSL in December 2014 in Cairo, where they invited Muslim and Coptic civil society leaders, lawyers and journalists. The event poster merged the Islamic crescent with Christian cross to signal possibilities of a united civil law (see Picture 2). During the event, Soliman was verbally attacked by a participant who claimed that she initiated these projects to be famous and popular. This incident was a minor example of the vulnerability of Egyptian women's rights activists when they became visible in going against widely accepted cultural and political practices.

Picture 2 (December 2014, Cairo)

Islamic feminists have been more cautious about the unification as opposed to Soliman. Abou-Bakr thinks that the PSL would stay religious-based for the long-run so the main effort should be to work on the separate PSLs (Abou-Bakr, interview 2014). She agrees that a unified PSL could benefit both Muslim and Christians; however, due to sectarian issues, it does not seem viable to

her. Abou-Bakr tried to reach out to Coptic religious women for a collaboration of religious reform; however, as Coptic Church is a closed institution, she argues that it is too sensitive to do now – possibly referring to the recent political situation (Abou-Bakr, interview 2014).

7.4 Outreach of Islamic feminism

Islamic feminism reaches mostly to the 'usual suspects,' academics, researchers, and activists – a group of educated elite – although Noon Center has tried to popularize its principles among grassroots. It is not popular among the youth in Egypt unlike feminism. Despite the increase in interest in religious reform and Islamic feminism after 2011 and its institutionalization with various outlets, the number of people who dedicate their work to this cause has been very limited. As a rare young representative of Islamic feminism in Egypt, Fatma Emam points out to the age gap in Islamic feminist circles and that they do not have a common meeting platform (interview 2014). Islamic feminism still sustains itself with personal connections.

The young women who use an Islamic discourse in women's rights in Egypt get together in diverse feminist platforms – unlike the Initiative in Turkey that brought young religious women together in one platform. Still, young university students are the group that Islamic feminists reach most due to their activities and academic backgrounds. Abou-Bakr regards young generation very important, and she plans to develop a program for youth in future about Islamic feminism:

> …always these 20-25-year-old girls up to 30, come up to me…and they say, "This is great", that kind of talk that how you can be a Muslim but also can be a feminist and you can be equal and you can work for equality…This is a new talk. When they hear just pure lectures, it teaches them inferiority, to take a certain place, it's not an equality discourse. When they hear radical progressive, equality discourse, it's un-Islamic sometimes anti-Islamic, they are young Muslim girls, so they don't like it. But when they hear discourse combining both, they are ecstatic, "this is what we…" so they come there [WMF], they buy our books (Abou-Bakr interview 2014).

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Mulki Al-Sharmani is aware of the fact that the Islamic feminist trend has a limited outreach due to its form of contention, namely conferences and publications. She compares it to the broader outreach of Islamist Heba Raouf Ezzat when she used to give lectures in the Sultan Hassan Mosque in Old Cairo (discussed in next section). Furthermore, many conferences on Islam and feminism are conducted in English. Hoda El-Saadi confesses that she has not participated at a conference on Islamic feminism in Arabic, besides the gender courses in Arabic she taught at the national universities with WMF. Fatma Emam also approves the elitist construction of Islamic feminism and regards herself and others in the activism field as intermediaries that connect it to the public (interview 2014).

Why has not the young generation been interested in Islamic feminism, despite the need and open channels since 2011? Two explanations stand up. First of all, the criminalization of Muslim Brotherhood since 2013 have pigeonholed all kinds of Islamic discourse, therefore using religious discourse has been limited in general. Closing down of the Noon Center is the most vivid example to this. Secondly, dissident voices can flourish in open political contexts (Naguib 2009, Bayat 2005). This is also valid within-movement dissident voices. As Sameh Naguib argues due to the closed political context, 'a plethora of different and conflicting interests' within Muslim Brotherhood are concealed by the apparent unity of the movement (2009, 106). In Turkey, the political power has been in the hands of ex-Islamists and Islamist circles since 2002, and dissident voices within Islamists could develop especially after this. Islamist youth, women, and leftists in Turkey began to criticize AKP starting from its first term in power, but more so when AKP consolidated its power after 2008 as described in Part II.

In Egypt, Brotherhood's political party FJP did not use its chance in power for plurality and faced a crackdown. This has, once again, silenced the potential dissenting sectors among Islamists – the youth, women, and leftists – not to tarnish the reputation of the Islamists and Islam, in general. A very similar disposition was true for the Coptic Christians who had questioned the authority of the Coptic Church after the revolution, but who became silenced after the increased terrorist attacks against their parishes since the crackdown in 2013. Political freedom enables within-critique and the political conditions in Egypt have not allowed the Islamic feminist critique to grow a stronger root.

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Is there an Islamization of Women's Rights Discourse in Egypt?

Scholars point out that there is an Islamization of women's rights discourse in Egypt (Abu-Odeh 2004; Abu-Lughod 2010, Sharafeldin 2013). Lama Abu-Odeh, for example, argues that the differentiation in the legal sphere in Egypt led women's activists to use more Islamic discourse in the 1990's – but a liberal one – to overcome the compromise between religious authority and the state (2004). Is it true that the secular discourse of women's movements has been turning into a religious discourse? Based on the literature and developments in Egypt with the rise of Muslim Brotherhood into power, I expected women's organizations to respond to social issues except the PSL also with an Islamic language. However, this hypothesis was not corroborated, partially connected to the crackdown on Brotherhood. There is no Islamization of the women's discourse in Egypt beside the activism for the PSL. Most of the platforms which work on issues like political participation, violence against women and sexual harassment use discourse of human rights, economic development, bodily integrity, and sometimes nationalist slogans.

Well-known women's rights NGOs in Egypt do not want to be associated with the Brotherhood or Salafi ideology and they do not want to engage in a discourse that they will be defeated and their demands may be delegitimized. Many state that in case of sexual harassment, "harassers use religious discourse," so they do not see a space for religious discourse and do not think that it would be useful (members of CEWLA, ECWR; Harassmap interviews 2014). Secondly, they highlight that the Islamic discourse in Egypt has been associated with Muslim Brotherhood for the last forty years, which remained illegal with exceptional periods. These are two most common reasons why women's rights activists shy away from using a religious discourse. Most women's organizations are not in a strong position to talk about harassment from a religious perspective. A member from Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) explains their contention:

> The problem is that the dominant religious discourse in Egypt is usually, I will not call it extreme or radical, but a little bit of hardline… you can find some religious experts condemning music bands for instance. For other times… the dominating reaction from women's organizations is "no," all of them are completely against the religious discourse, especially when the

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dominant religious discourse of the time was limiting women's rights during the MB. This is the only religious discourse you get or …most of the time… Usually, I think what women's organizations are trying to do at the moment is *not to conflict with the religious discourse.* Because at the end of the day, whatever they say about the religious discourse, they are going to be accused of not being experts in it (interview 2014 my emphasis)

A member from ASWIC approves these observations that not many women are interested in Islamic perspective in Egypt unlike them. She claims that in meetings on women, Islam is brought up by conservative segments like al-Azhar or Dar-al-Ulm, while secular circles refer to Islam in a negative way in terms of women's right.

During a year long MB rule, many women's NGOs had problems with the religious discourse of the MB (similar to the Islamist women's reactions in Turkey since 2008). In the current situation, using religious discourse is either associated with the MB or it is still a losing ground for women.

7.5 Public Space and Women's Politico-Religious Power in Egypt after 2013

The previous sections analyzed the activities and discourses of WIMs in increasing women's politico-religious power during the last two decades in Egypt. This section is an analysis of their capacities and choices vis-à-vis the narrowing public sphere. Authoritarianism impacts both men and women activists in Egypt and limits their political participation and decisions to be visible. The attempts of WIMs to increase women's politico-religious empowerment have been severely curtailed since the crackdown on public space in 2013. The current condition of restrictions – imprisonments, detention, freeze of assets and limitations on foreign funding – silence dissenting and transgressing voices on women's politico-religious empowerment.

Public space has long been constrained in Egypt due to legal, financial and political restrictions (Abdelrahman 2004). Authoritarianization and regime change are experienced differently by women – as 'gender order' may be either freer or more repressive to women than the regime as a whole. Furthermore, the state is not a coherent body, but it is composed of "differentiated set of institutions, agencies, and discourses" a by-product of political struggles (Pringle and Watson 1992; Kantola 2007). In Egypt, for example, some state bodies such as

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Ministry of Justice and National Population Council have been more receptive to reformist ideas in women's rights. Also among al-Azhar, there are few reformist female and male Islamic scholars that collaborate with WIMs and feminist organizations, as discussed earlier (personal interviews 2014).

Ambiguous position of the Egyptian state regarding women's rights has been unremitting from Nasser to Al-Sisi. Women's rights are often expanded under authoritarian regimes to increase female labor with the ideology of Arab modernization and to gain the sympathy of liberals and Western countries as a façade (Abu-Lughod 1998, 7; Kandiyoti 1991). The new constitution, approved by a referendum in January 2014, promises equality between men and women for the first time and promises to undertake effort for the representation of women in high-level state bodies including the judiciary. The recent law on sexual harassment that increased fines for harassment including jail in 2014 is also another example of expanding women's rights under authoritarian regimes in Egypt[184]. Yet, at the same time, the space for civil society has been seriously curtailed with security measures and funding limitations. The number of political detainees is reported to be at the highest of Egypt's history (interviews 2014). Many women's rights activists do not find the regimes' efforts on women's rights genuine and argue for a need of democracy for better women's rights.

Funding Problems and Surveillance of Civil Society

'The mess' after the political crackdown in 2013 comes with financial complications. First of all, the Ministry of Social Solidarity issued an immediate notice in July 2014 to 'entities' that were not registered to legalize their status in four months. NGO's have to wait extensive periods of time – up until a year – to get approval for their projects from the Ministry of Social Solidarity (ICNL 2016, interviews 2014). Secondly, an amendment to the Article 78 of the Penal Code in 2014 introduced life sentence and increased fines for transfer of foreign money 'with the aim of pursuing acts harmful to national interests or destabilizing to general peace or the country's independence and its unity' (MadaMasr 2014).

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[184] Some activists argue that security forces produce fake cases of harassment to increase police control in critical locations. A leftist female member of the student union in Cairo University argues that a publicized harassment case of a female student inside the campus in spring 2014 was a fake incident to bring police inside the campus to control political activism. (Anonymous SU member, interview 2014).

These laws have threatened the sustainability and institutionalization of WIMs as well, by curtailing their financial and organizational backing. Several organizations including WMF, CEWLA, Noon Center, and Musawah have been affected, as human and women's rights organizations in Egypt are mostly financed by international organizations and private businesses.[185] International donors have been hesitant to support NGO's in Egypt due to increased regulations and political instability. They have been especially unwilling to give long-term funding for rental and staff costs and they prefer to allocate project-based funds (interviews 2014). Soliman explained that it was becoming hard to sustain her Egyptian organization CEWLA, let alone the global Musawah (Soliman, interview 2014). Musawah canceled its secretariat plan in Egypt in 2014 and has only kept CEWLA as an 'affinity group' for the Arab region. The conditions have worsened in the last 3 years for the women's and human's rights NGO's.

Furthermore, outspoken female human rights defenders such as Azza Soliman, Mozn Hassan (Nazra), and Aida Seif al-Dawla (Al-Nadeem) have especially been targeted. Soliman spoke as a witness of the murder of a female activist Shaima al-Sabbagh by the security forces in central Cairo during the anniversary of the January 25 revolution in 2015. She was accused by the state after declaring herself as a witness (Girard 2015). In March 2016, the founders and directors of women's and human rights organizations were interrogated, including Nazra for Feminist Studies, El-Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), and Arabic Network for Human Rights Information. In December 2016, the court put reservation to the real estate, movable property and liquidities of Azza Soliman from CEWLA, and Mozn Hassan – the founder and executive director of Nazra (Nazra 2016). The state imposed travel bans on Soliman, Hassan and Aida Seif al-Dawla, the cofounder of the El-Nadeem, and froze their assets (Mada Masr 2017). Currently, Soliman is in trial for imprisonment and charged with several accusations, one of them is "receiving foreign funding to harm the state's interest" (AWID 2016). There has been also a media campaign against her, including assault and threat, so she has been followed by security forces (Amnesty International 2017).

The case of Mada and Noon Center has been another interesting example of the recent crackdown on civil society and ambiguous position of the Egyptian state regarding women's

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[185] Donations from UN Women are not problematic as it has a regional office in Egypt.

rights. The project coordinator testified that they had problems due to the financial restrictions on NGO's, but *not* due to their Islamic feminist identity in the interview in 2014. However, the offices of the Mada Institute which Noon Center was part of was raided in October 2015 and their CEO Hisham Gaafar was detained with alleged connections with Muslim Brotherhood and accusation of international bribery under the aforementioned article 78 of the Penal Code. Mada was the first NGO that was effected by the amendment (MadaMasr 2016a). While their CEO was in detention, Mada's Noon Center was awarded for the Best Media Production on Arab Women Award in November 2015 by the intergovernmental Arab Women Organization located in Cairo and headed by Mervat al-Talawy (Mada Masr 2016a). The short films and other projects of Noon had been done in collaboration with the National Population Council. Meanwhile, Hisham Gaafar who was a consultant with National Population Council with Mada's other projects, was still in jail as of August 2017, as his bribery case was still pending investigation (Hamzawy 2017, ANHRI 2016). Noon Center's activities were suspended in 2016 after the raid and detention of their CEO, despite the acknowledgment and potential of their work.

Confrontation with Power: Dissent and Transgression

Wedad Zene-Ziegler wrote in her 1988 memoir that women in Egypt were less motivated for militant action compared to the times of Huda Sharaawi and Doria Shafiq in the first half of the 20th century and contended that there were no organized militant feminist groups in universities or elsewhere. (Zene-Ziegler 1988, 113). The observation was valid for the most of the 1990's and the first decade of 2000's where women's activism mainly operated through NGO's with project-feminism and lobbying (Jad 2007, Abu-Lughod 2010).

Islamic feminists

Islamic feminists, in particular, hesitate to engage in an open confrontation with power, be it the state, al-Azhar or religious segments of society. Instead, they emphasize dialogue with the mainstream religion, represented by al-Azhar, rather than overt contestation. They have not mobilized directly for policy change and do not use a radical discourse, unlike some other women's rights groups. Most of the Islamic feminists reject being called 'activist' even after the revolution in 2011 which had legitimized and exalted activism. Some Islamic feminists like Abou-Bakr call

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their work 'intellectual activism' as they produce theoretical work that potentially guides activism of other women in Egypt. One of them adds that neither she nor her work is political, and another explains that she only attends 'scientific' conferences (interviews 2014). Instead, they define themselves as intermediaries who provides alternative knowledge for activists to resist against patriarchy.

On a further level, an Islamic feminist articulates her dislike in giving public speeches and taking part in activism. Responding to my question whether she gives public speeches (in which I did not mention being an 'activist'), she explains:

> My activities as an activist? Actually, I'm not an activist. I am a researcher. I'm not looking forward to being an activist. There are different works in Islamic feminism. One of them is to produce theoretical works, then there must be a middle level that transfers this to a simple level and makes advocacy. I work on this theoretical level…Sometimes I'm invited to public speeches, but I go there hatefully. I don't like it. I would take any chance to stay in my confined area and work on my research instead and stop going to public events (interview 2014)

She does not prefer to be visible on TV either. She calls TV discussions as shallow and "controversial interactions" as the audience is unpredictable. The risk of visibility seems to deter her from attending to debates on TV despite her academic credentials:

> I don't attend those things. In my view that over-interactions I don't want to be part of. It's always shallow. It should be a very deep and thoughtful one, this is my personal preference…There are many problems in these talk shows on TV. You don't know the audience, they are coming from different backgrounds. We are not targeting an audience where you know their mindset. It's not fruitful (interview 2014).

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Islamic feminists have so far focused on producing alternative interpretations and history of women in Islam. Omaima Abou-Bakr is a rare figure among Islamic feminists who accept TV, journal and online interviews which provide a broader visibility. However, she also highlights that she is not an activist (interview 2014). While Islamic feminists had earlier taken part in seminars, the link between the scholarship and activism has become a bit stronger since the new institutionalization. Their activism has included public awareness campaigns, training or lobbying – not militant action like demonstrations or provocative visibility on the media. However, the recent regulations on funding and limitations on the freedom of speech have limited Islamic feminists' connection with advocacy and activism. The pressures on CEWLA, in particular to Azza Soliman, the suspension of the Noon Center's activities, and Musawah's decision to remove its secretariat in Egypt have been the main set-backs to institutionalization and outreach of Islamic feminism.

Being an Islamic feminist, in its current form in Egypt, has much less weight and danger than being Islamist or feminist. Islamic feminists may have been under scrutiny by feminists who see them not feminist enough and Islamists who regard them as tools of Western ideology, as surfaced in my interviews with some feminists and Islamists. However, on the activism and the risk-taking level, Islamic feminists in Egypt do not use radical language nor challenge the power of authorities in a confrontational style. They do not confront the state and the religious establishment unlike some of the feminists. They dissent from the mainstream to varying degrees – while not leaving the mainstream.

Islamist women

The Islamist women have particularly been affected by the political crackdown against Muslim Brotherhood, as people connect their activism and ideologies with the MB. They either stopped their public activities, or the government directly restrained them. A recent example of the direct restraint was the ban on Islamist thinker Heba Raouf Ezzat's lessons in Sultan Hassan Mosque located in old Cairo. Ezzat used to teach young women and men political theory from an Islamic perspective, studying early scholars like Ibn Khaldun since June 2013. The courses were stopped in February 2014 by Ministry of Endowments and security forces without a reason. During another project on children, Ezzat and some of her students were taken to police custody for some hours in November 2014. The policemen associated the pictures of children's hands in the project with

the *Rabaa* sign of the Muslim Brotherhood. According to Ezzat, the space for religious discourse is very limited because of the corroding public sphere. Ezzat believes that positive change can come from the Islamic movements that are facing "a deep internal crisis and blunt criminalization under the vague slogans of war on terrorism" (interview 2014, e-mail correspondence 2018).

Despite her myriad activisms, Heba Raouf Ezzat does not want to be defined as an 'activist.' She is very critical of the hegemonic definitions in the Western literature, and she prefers to define her acts with her Islamic, as well as, citizenship duties:

> [My] conscious decision to play the role of a public intellectual and then academic is equally important to me as going to the street. Because public awareness is important. Most of the voices you hear are feminist voices, talking about women's emancipation; and many of them are secular, and some are quite radically anti-Islamic. This is the role I have assumed [for] myself right after graduation and starting my academic journey. I am an engaged citizen and active academician. The word 'activist' sometimes undermines the way people look at your academic production and endeavor… I see myself as an instructor who is engaged in activities within the educational realm – I target lay people, I don't only teach in the classes at the university, I address the public at large. So, many things I do I consider to be an obligation as an engaged citizen in my society… (Ezzat interview 2014).

Ezzat's evasion from being defined as an activist is also connected to local concerns besides her theoretical positioning. Activism and being part of civil society still raise suspicions in public in Egypt despite the openness during the revolution (interviews 2014). Likewise, Ezzat may not want to 'shadow' her contribution to society nor position herself separate from the society by being defined as an activist. Nevertheless, Ezzat's preference to target lay people and students outside the classroom, often in a teaching format, seemed to be productive and situated her as a role model for the young generations in Egypt, as I discussed earlier.

Other Islamist women have also tried to keep a low profile since the military crackdown. Their organizations have slowed down their public activities and lectures since then. Similarly, the women's organization *sitt maṣrīya* (Egyptian woman) which became the women's branch of *maṣr qawīya* (Strong Egypt) political party led by former MB member Abdel Muneim Abul Futuh, limited its activism after 2013. A former representative of the group explains that they do not engage with the regime, and they continue with smaller public lectures for internal training as "there is not much else to do "(A former member of *sitt maṣrīya*, interview 2014).

Muslim Sisterhood has probably been the largest group of female victims of political suppression in Egypt since 2013. Sisterhood continues their activism for internal community support and sporadic public protests against the regime. They visit prisoners' and deceased members' families and support them materially and psychologically[186] (anonymous Muslim sisters, interviews, 2014).

On the other hand, some feminist organizations have been more visible with their political demands and punished as shown. WMF, CEWLA, Nazra, and Al-Nadeem under the Coalition of Women's Organizations (CWO) have delivered multiple press statements against the SCAF and current Al-Sisi rule on the deterioration of women's and human rights and civil society. CEWLA and Azza Soliman have been vocal yet cautious. CEWLA had been shut down in 2010 for several months (until the revolution) by Mubarak regime due to their campaign on political participation. The young generation of feminists also engages in more open confrontation. Examples of Fatma Emam and Yara Sallam, as demonstrated before, show the transformative capacity of the young generation who has risked being detained or jailed.

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[186] Some liberal revolutionary movements like Sawt al-Hurriyya (Voice of freedom) and 6th of April movement have supported some of the MB anti-coup demonstrations. Also, secular women's centers like Al-Nadeem provided psychological and legal support to detainees of all political spectrums. However, secular activists argue that MB is not collaborative. A Nazra member claimed that they were present after the Rabaa massacre to help, but some Muslim Brotherhood members did not want [seculars] to be involved (A Nazra member, interview 2014). Similarly a women activist from the Student Union in Cairo University explains that they held joint protests with MB students in the university; however, MB students broke their promises of not holding Rabaa signs during the demonstrations. According to her, this jeopardizes further cooperation (anonymous SU member, interview, 2014).

Polarization

Islamic and secular feminists are not divided on the issue of democratization and authoritarianism along their secular and Islamic lines. It is not possible to ascribe one group to supporting democratization and another to supporting authoritarianism. There are silent and vocal supporters of the 'old regime' – and current military regime of al-Sisi – among Islamic feminists and secular feminists. At the same time, there are active and passive resisters to the 'old regime' among both.

Islamic feminism shows very differential characteristics across countries, although being a global movement. In the Egyptian context, most self-defined Islamic feminists position themselves both against 'extreme fundamentalist secularism' and political Islam. They are against a strict secular vision that removes religion from the rights discourse, while they are also against the political Islam in Egypt, represented by Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi currents.

For example, one Islamic feminist positions herself against the Brotherhood, and she supports the current political authority for appointing women like Mervat El-Talawy, Tahany al-Jibali, and Fayza abul-Naga to higher positions who would boost women agenda and 'defy American interference' (interview 2014).

> Since the revolution, the mobilization of women in the street has been very strong, and it played the greatest role in overthrowing Mursi and his Brotherhood. I believe we have very strong women now, they are able to play a great role in the current system specially, because Sisi believes in the prevalence of women (interview 2014).

However, for another Islamic feminist, the suppression in the political scene since 2013 is also a human and women's rights problem. In this regard, she is closer to the ideas of Islamists and secular anti-coup activists than some of her Islamic feminist counterparts:

> …I have a different stance, I'm anti-coup!...Women suffer massive political oppression. I may not agree with the thoughts of Islamists. But they have their own rights. They may be extremists, but they are still human. They suffer massive oppression (interview 2014).

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The polarization between Islamists and secular segments of the society combined with the violent repression of MB and its secluded circles deter women's activists (secular or Islamic feminist) to join hands with the Muslim Sisterhood.

Some Islamic feminists' support of the current regime in Egypt seem both ideological and tactical to stop the political Islamization wave. By dissenting from conservative religious interpretations, and working towards it with collaborations with state institutions, Islamic feminists contribute to *reform* in the society and laws. On the other hand, women who go against both the religious establishment and suppressive policies of the state are transgressing the red lines – more than dissenting from the conservative religious interpretations. In this sense, organizations like CEWLA and Nazra, and activists like Azza Soliman, Fatma Emam, and Yara Sallam are transgressing, and they carry a transformative power for women.

Conclusion

This dissertation has analyzed and located the capacities of selected women's Islamic movements in Turkey and Egypt in increasing and embodying women's politico-religious power in discursive, legal and organizational spheres in the last two decades. Following the calls in the social movement literature, I have studied WIMs from a meso-organizational perspective as opposed to the focus on discourse or ideologies of WIMs in the literature. Furthermore, instead of an emphasis on 'everyday politics and religion' dominating the research on WIMs with a focus on religious service movements, I have examined a broader public presence of women who used Islamic discourse for women's rights in the forms of demonstrations, press statements, blogs, writings as well as interviews and speeches in various media.

The dissertation makes several contributions to the literature on women's studies in the MENA and social movements. First of all, as a case-oriented comparative study, it has traced the contextual factors that influenced women's politico-religious empowerment and movement spaces for WIMs in two important MENA countries. Secondly, the dissertation has showed that organizational patterns of WIMs – forms and styles of contention, networks, discourse, and political context – have a significant effect on their capacity of empowerment, confirming the social movement literature on the necessity of meso-organizational studies. In contrast with the focus on hermeneutics or ideologies of WIMs and in particular of Islamic feminism in the literature, I shed light on the organizational elements of Islamic feminism and WIMs, and the political context which massively influences their empowerment capacities.

Most prominently, the dissertation has introduced the role of 'visibility of dissent' as a reconsideration of social movement theories in the authoritarian and conservative contexts. The findings show that women's politico-religious empowerment is tightly connected to 'visibility of dissent' in the broader public sphere. The concepts of 'political participation,' 'collective action' and 'power of presence' (Bayat 2007) do not fully explain the advocacy movements of WIMs in Turkey and Egypt. When women give an interview to a newspaper, post a tweet, present a paper at a conference or issue a press statement, they become visible to a broader public with their names and faces. Their 'movement' is sometimes simply being 'visible' with dissent or transgression in media. Therefore, visibility should be studied as an indicator of social movements in restrictive

settings. Women's dissenting visibility especially on broadcast media on matters of religion and governance is a step towards empowerment.

Finally, the dissertation offers two typologies to define the acts and empowerment capacities of WIMs, by incorporating their movement dynamics and overall political stances, besides their discourses. WIMs have different types of politico-religious acts and power/empowerment capacities. WIMs' acts towards the *gender order of mainstream religion* vary from accommodating, dissenting and transgressing (see Chapter 1, Table 1). The comparative approach enabled to see that the acts are situational. For example, a 'dissenting' act in a liberal context may correspond to a 'transgressing' act in a patriarchal or repressive context, due to the different reactions to the same discourse, issue, and forms of contention. Juxtaposing these acts with their stances towards *political oppression* gives clues about the powers and/or empowerment capacities of WIMs, ideally ranging from consolidating, reformative to transformative (see Chapter 1, Table 2). The typologies can be useful for future studies, and the permeability between the types should be analyzed further with case-studies that focus on specific groups among WIMs.

In the rest of the conclusion, I first summarize the main empirical findings of the study by situating them with regards to the literature and highlight the conceptual contributions. Then I evaluate the comparative dimensions of the study. Here, I do not repeat some of the context-specific findings from each case study – they are presented in the introductions of Part II and III. Secondly, as an overview, I discuss the sustainability of dissent and transgression, and transformative politico-religious empowerment in the MENA based on the trajectories in Egypt and Turkey. Thirdly, I lay out the limitations of the dissertation due to practical difficulties and theoretical choices, and I suggest some potential routes for future studies.

Empirical Findings and Discussion
Visibility of Dissent

The dissertation has demonstrated that dissenting visibility is a significant characteristic of advocacy movements of women in the MENA. Women have long been in the public space in the MENA to advocate overtly for politico-religious rights and equal citizenship as Chapter 3 demonstrated. Getting out of their closed and local small communities and entering into the open and national public space have not been easy, and it is still not, especially regarding politico-

religious issues. There is a tension of change around dissenting and transgressing women when they step out of the 'closed,' 'within-group' or 'everyday' to go to the 'open,' 'out-group' and 'public.'

Accordingly, few women's groups and women have visibly dissented from the mainstream Islamic gender order among WIMs and even few have transgressed the 'boundaries' (*had/ḥudūd*), in Turkey and Egypt. Among those, few have also challenged political oppression. The risk of visibility is an ex-ante condition that influences patterns of mobilization of women. The small numbers of dissenting religious women and the 'sensitivity' of the issues they raise due to the highly polarized context give them a high – and often dangerous – public visibility when they dissent from religious conservatism and authoritarianism in Turkey and Egypt. Unlike protesters in western contexts (for which social movement theories were developed), dissenting women in Turkey and Egypt are anything but anonymous. Women are often aware of their visibility and potential hazards before they post something on Twitter or make a statement in a newspaper interview. Risks include community ostracization, losing jobs, state persecution, and fear of assassination. Awareness of amplified visibility has limited women's dissident activities in both Turkey and Egypt in different degrees due to the risks and also socialization in conservative environments.

Women who are dissenting and transgressing in advocacy 'unveil' their faces and names, and become vulnerable by demanding equality and rights with a language which has been reserved for religious authorities and masculinist Islamist movements. Such women have especially been criticized and punished for crossing their 'boundaries' as the murders of historian Bahriye Üçok and Islamic feminist Gonca Kuriş in Turkey demonstrate. As Hrant Dink, the Turkish-Armenian journalist described his psychological state before his assassination, women who walk nearby the boundaries also seem to carry the 'skittishness of a dove' (*güvercin tedirginliği*).

Shirin Rai states that we need to contextualize the act of risk-taking and look at whose agency is left alone in potentially risky acts and activisms (personal conversation 2017). This also brings the question of sustainability. It is problematic that dissenting and transgressing women among WIMs are not organized and mobilized in mass numbers in the MENA, but often represented by few women and women's NGO's and platforms.

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Factors for Visibility of Dissent

Who has visibly dissented from the mainstream religion, who has challenged political oppression? The dissertation has found out several factors that explain the dissenting and transgressing visibility of women, as well as challenging political oppression. In the theoretical framework, I highlighted the importance of informal networks. The dissertation confirms that the networks and organizations influence forms of action (Kriesi 1996, 157-9). The networks, especially, seem to be the most important factor for the dissenting visibility of women. First of all, women who are closer to feminist circles or have exposure to feminist literature are more likely to dissent from the mainstream Islamic gender order and challenge political oppression. Same applies to those women who have been part of human rights and leftist circles and those who worked for marginalized people. Many dissenting and transgressing women confirmed the significance of intra-group solidarity for them among these women's/feminist and human rights networks. Thirdly, having international feminist and human rights connections may help with dissenting visibility. This has been the case for the selected WIMs in Egypt. However, in Turkey, there is no direct connection between dissent and having international connections among WIMs. Fourthly, dissenting and dissident WIMs, in the Turkish case, are especially the ones who have distanced themselves from the nationalist-sacramentalist ideology which values the Ottoman/Turkish state heritage with conservative religious traditions.

On the other hand, the dissertation has shown that some factors which are highlighted in the literature as being important for women's movements and Islamic feminism are *not* necessary for dissenting visibility of WIMs. First of all, access to *funding* does not correlate with dissenting visibility. There have been groups and women who have shouted dissent with no and limited funding. Some examples of this were the Initiative and Reçel Blog in Turkey, and individual women such as slain Gonca Kuriş, and young female student activists (some members of the Initiative and contributors of Reçel Blog in Turkey and participants in Nazra and Ikhtyar in Egypt). At the same time, there are groups and women who are dissenting and who have access to moderate or considerable international funding. Some examples are BKP, CEWLA, and WMF – although they have difficulties at times in reaching out funding – and activists like Azza Soliman and Mona Eltahawy who have had access to international funding and fees. Therefore, the level of visible dissent and transgression is not correlated with access to funding.

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Secondly, academic credentials are hinted in the Islamic feminism literature as the most important path towards Islamic feminism, since most of the literature focuses on the academic productions, Quranic studies and exegeses of female theologians or social science professors. The dissertation documented that academic credentials and religious education do not lead women to dissent visibly, as there are significant differences of dissenting visibility among female academics and theologians who have equivalent academic positions and backgrounds in both countries. Indeed, sometimes we find non-academic researchers and activists with more courage to shout dissent – such as the slain Gonca Kuriş in Turkey or Mona Eltahawy in Egypt (these two women are not comparable in other aspects). A training or familiarity with the issue are necessary, but not an academic competency.

Classifying the Acts of Politico-Religious Empowerment

Utilizing Linda Woodhead's (2007) diagram on religion's positioning in relation to gender, and using Flavia Monceri's (2012) differentiation between dissent and transgression, I came up with three main different available acts for WIMs (see Table 1, Chapter 1). WIMs act and become visible in accommodating, dissenting or transgressing ways vis-à-vis the mainstream religious gender order. What makes an act accommodating, dissenting or transgressing in politico-religious terms? Throughout the dissertation, I demonstrated that three variables determine the type of an act:

a) The content of the act (priority issues): from conventional to taboo issue
b) Forms and repertoires of contention: from contained to disruptive
c) Discourse and attitude style (*üslup/uslūb*): from submissive, polite to assertive and aggressive

First of all, priority issues of an organization or person give clues about their stance vis-à-vis mainstream gender order. In Egypt, women's political and economic rights are mainstream subjects, often highlighted by al-Azhar and popular preachers, as long as these rights do not block women's 'responsibilities' to their husbands and children. There are also certain reservations for political rights; women's right to become heads of state is frowned upon by the mainstream religious officials. ASWIC and Noon Center have prioritized these conventional issues or political and economic participation, which potentially put them to an accommodating or dissenting

position vis-à-vis mainstream Islamic gender order. However, discussing taboo issues such as marital rape like the former Nazra members did at the WMF conference, or working to unite Muslim and Christian family laws like CEWLA gives the actors a transgressing potential. In Turkey, after the normalization of the headscarf, there has been an increase in the variety of issues tackled by WIMs, what I called the molecularization process among WIMs. This includes discussing sexuality and interpretation of gender roles in the Quran, which have been taboo topics, and which give the act a transgressing potential. (I did not apply the concept of molecularization to WIMs in Egypt, as we could not speak about a unified and molar movement from the outset unlike in Turkey. Nevertheless, the increased focus on sexuality and taboo issues after the revolution among women's movements, in general, could also be visually depicted as molecularization).

Secondly, forms of contention are also definitive for the type of an act. For example, the above examples of marital rape and unification of the family laws have often been discussed in conferences – a contained repertoire of contention. Similarly, sexuality has often been discussed in writing, such as at Reçel Blog in Turkey. These repertoires, conferences and writing, often *moderate* the transgressive character of an act. Samira Ibrahim's press declaration about the virginity tests applied on her and fellow protestors, or protesting 'the protest laws' and risking being jailed like Yara Sallam were more disruptive and thus transgressive, compared to writing (however taboo the subject is) in quasi-academic journals and books (ASWIC and WMF publications) or organizing conferences (most NGO's).

Thirdly, the discourse and style of argumentation are also determinants for the type of an act. For example, Noon Center in Egypt has published educational video-clips against FGM, but they focused on the possibilities of death during the operation, rather than its adverse effects on women's sexual lives, psychologies or bodily integrity. This discourse makes the act dissenting rather than transgressing. The style also matters. Women differ in their discursive style towards the religious authorities or statesmen. For example, feminists like Azza Soliman's assertive and unapologetic style versus the politeness and dialogue emphasis of most Islamic feminists in Egypt makes the discussion of the same subject transgressive and dissenting, respectively. WIMs in Turkey also differ in discursive style towards the men of religion (*din adamları*) and against the repressive state policies. While the activism of the Initiative, some posts in Reçel Blog and some

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members of BKP have been more critical and offensive against the mainstream religious discourses and gender-based discrimination and violence of the state, some other women among WIMs dissent from them with a less loaded language and humble style.

Comparing WIMs and Politico-Religious Empowerment in Turkey and Egypt

In this section, I synthesize the findings based on the comparative dimensions of the study. The dissertation has inevitably carried the challenges of a multi-disciplinary research. Throughout the dissertation, I have tried to balance the presentation of the theory-driven variables, coming from my comparative political science training, with a more inductive approach and story-telling presentation akin to gender studies. A potential criticism from the inductive approach could be that whether I have overemphasized the importance of some of the historical variables over more immediate contextual dynamics. While this may be an open question for some of the variables such as the influence of colonization on the access to Islamic feminist literature and its global organizations, I have attempted to fine-tune the analysis with the fresh data from the field. Furthermore, some theory-driven variables come from the immediate context, such as the factor of 'Islamist party in power' and 'secularization patterns' in the form of the normalization of headscarf in Turkey.

The variables below explain some of the differences of mobilization of WIMs and their empowerment capacities in Egypt and Turkey. They affect configurations of four main movement characteristics – (networks, forms of contention, discourses and opportunities). Some of the variables, themselves, were political opportunities for WIMs at one point in time (such as Islamist party coming to power in Turkey). Based on the literature and field work, I have looked at the influence of differentiation, secularization, colonial history, Islamist parties in power, overall political repression, and prevalence of radical Islamist (*takfīrī*) movements. Table 11 in the Appendix summarize the findings from this section.

The final position of the mobilization of WIMs and their empowerment capacities depends on how WIMs use the four main powers under these existing contextual variables surrounding them. These choices that are related to movement formation (eg. disruptive vs conventional form

of contention; taboo vs conventional issue; assertive vs submissive discourse; network-making) define how much WIMs accommodate, dissent from or transgress mainstream religion and how much they challenge political oppression.

Differentiation

A higher degree of differentiation in Turkey has been more conducive for the politico-religious empowerment of women as religion is out of the legal system in the first place. There have been serious legal advancements for gender equality in Turkey with the reforms to civil code (2001), penal code (2004), and constitution (2004, 2010). The secular system has enabled the women's movements to organize independently of the authority of religious establishment. Women have not needed to engage in dialogues with religious leaders, and they could directly work with the secular state. The suppression of the Islamists movements in the late 1990's may have also limited a counter-mobilization from the side of conservative Islamists. It has been *discursively* easier for women to mobilize and lobby the reform. Women's successful mobilization during the reform processes, and the ability to overturn Erdoğan's attempt to criminalize adultery (*zina*) in 2004 shows the freer discursive space for women's movements in Turkey coupled with the leverage of EU accession process. The incorporation of the women's rights agenda into the state via women's machinery, KSGM, and its collaboration with the women's movements had an also major role.

A limited differentiation in Egypt, with the religiously based personal status laws (PSL), has influenced women's politico-religious power negatively, as religion has become an additional constitutive site of legal contestation for women (Berktay 1996, Woodhead 2007). However, the religious basis of the law has led to a broader base of women's Islamic movements compared to WIMs in Turkey. Women from both secular and Islamic backgrounds have used religious discourse to reform the PSL in Egypt and I included those in the definition of WIMs. There have been successful reforms based on Islamic ijtihad like *khul'* in 2000, and the constitution of 2014 enshrines equality between women and men. However, it has been much harder for women's reform attempts to emerge and be sustained, as the style of realization of *khul'* and continuing resistance to it have shown. The permanence of religious reference in the constitution and the PSL still makes women's attempts arduous. On the other hand, while women try to change the discriminatory articles and applications like polygyny and divorce practices, some do not want to

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lose rights such as the maintenance duty of men under the religion-based law. Only a few feminists and groups in Egypt *openly* aim to change the religious basis of the personal status law.

The dissertation has confirmed the literature that religion and secularism are not in a binary relationship (Kandiyoti 2012, Zubaida 2011). I have shown that there is a path dependency in strategy and discourse building of WIMs in the two countries rather than a dominating influence of ideology. WIMs in Turkey have been comfortable operating in a secular legal system regarding the Civil Code, while several secular groups in Egypt have been using religious discourse to reform the existing conditions. Islamic feminism, in the Egyptian context, has become a significant ideology and strategy for some women and NGOs. In both countries, women's Islamic movements of women's rights advocacy use eclectic strategies – mixing secular and religious or international and cultural – rather than defending radical ideological changes in their societies.

Regardless of the religion's influence in law, the application of legal empowerment has been problematic in both Turkey and Egypt, mostly due to the resistance of judicial and police authorities to apply the law. Examining the application of legal reforms is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Secularization

The comparison shows that neither strict secularism as in Turkey nor the enforced religious family law as in Egypt has been beneficial for women's politico-religious empowerment. A strict application of secularism in the form of headscarf bans, was, first of all, a severe obstacle for the actual empowerment of a vast number of women in Turkey by limiting their access to the public sphere. Secondly, the bans delayed and interrupted the potential of internal critique within religion in Turkey. This is due to the fact that the bans absorbed the energies of WIMs and made women dependent on the Islamist communities, but also due to the secularist-Islamist polarization that the bans reinforced. They led to a separate women's Islamic movement apart from the secular women's and feminist movements. As an unexpected effect of the bans, some WIMs started to use radical repertoires of action with demonstrations and marches and developed a sensitivity to broader women's and social problems. They have become accustomed to organizing street activism and challenging authorities.

A less strict secularization in Egypt enabled a wider variety of religious expressions among women. Women with and without headscarves often work in the same women's organizations, which has been an exceptional scene in Turkey until recently. In Egypt, there are more fraternized organizations composed of feminist and Islamic feminists unlike in Turkey. Furthermore, the public space has been more accessible to *ḥijābī* women in Egypt, as there was no official headscarf bans[187]. However, overall social and legal limitations based on religious references to hold certain public posts, like presidency and judge, restrict all women in Egypt. Furthermore, overall conservatism and prevalence of accusatory religious language in politics have been limiting women's politico-religious empowerment in Egypt.

WIMs in Turkey have had to perform a double courage vis-à-vis WIMs in Egypt. Dissenting WIMs in Turkey have not only risked receiving threats and losing benefits from the government or their jobs but also being ostracized from their Islamic 'community' and 'neighborhood' which have been solidarity hubs for them due to the headscarf bans.[188] They have had to leave their protective shelter, as they have dissented 'from within'. WIMs in Egypt, with a broader base, have different relations to the 'Islamic community.' For Islamist women in Egypt, not Islamic feminists, we can talk about a similar connection to the Islamic community but not at the same level as in Turkey. Most of the time Islamist women highlight their belonging to the community, rather than separation as women or dissident. Again, if FJP in Egypt would have stayed in power like AKP, this relation might have changed. Furthermore, the feminists who use religious discourse and the Islamic feminists do not have close ties with an immediate 'Islamic community' around them. Instead, they put forward their arguments to the broader Muslim community of Egypt. Still, having similar concerns of being visible with dissent in a context where overall conservatism is higher and liberal Islamic thinkers have been accused of apostasy, many WIMs in Egypt have often preferred dialogue and inclusion of men as a strategy. Most of them have abstained from visibly dissenting from the mainstream religion and power.

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[187] There are testimonies regarding the obstacles for women with hijab to be promoted to higher-level positions in Egyptian firms which have international connections.
[188] They also had to perform a double-courage compared to dissenting feminists, seculars, and leftists in Turkey.

Colonization

The experience of colonization has led women's movements to use more nationalist discourse and be more wary of Western discourse and agendas on women's rights in Egypt. Nationalistic arguments are prevalent in Egypt among feminists, Islamic feminists, and Islamists. Women have legitimized their activities with local references in order not to be associated with the West and not to be labeled negatively as 'feminist.' The emphasis on creating a 'genuine' and 'local' approach by 'Islamic feminism' and avoidance of receiving funds from the US and UK are signs of this. The presence of a religious minority, the Coptic Christians, has also strengthened the use of nationalist discourse, as being Egyptian is a uniting identity for the two faith communities.

In Turkey, feminist movements have early on relinquished the focus on nationalism since its problematization by Kurdish political and women's movements. WIMs, on the other hand, were mostly nationalists during the 1970's and 1980's. However, since the 1990's nationalism has been regarded as a divisive discourse also among some WIMs due to the Kurdish question, even among ex-nationalist Islamist women. I have also demonstrated a rejection of the nationalist-Islamist discourse in the dissenting young generation of WIMs in Turkey. Secondly, WIMs in Turkey, especially the younger generation, define the West less as a malicious 'other.' This is also valid for the younger generation of WIMs and feminists in Egypt.

NGO activists in Egypt are much more likely to speak and read English than their counterparts in Turkey. This difference can be explained by the influence of colonization on the education system and the prevalence of missionary schools for middle and upper-class girls in Egypt. Middle and upper-class Egyptian women have better access to the literature and discussions of Islamic feminism and historical methodologies in English. They also have wider international connections (this is also due to an easier contact with other Arabic-speaking countries), including Islamic feminist organizations. Furthermore, a more cautious stance to feminism due to authentication needs has also increased the purchase of Islamic feminism in Egypt. However, class differences between female NGO activists in Turkey and Egypt should be studied further to avoid over-emphasizing the impact of colonization on language skills.

Islamist party in power

The Islamist-rooted AKP has enabled a freer space for women who wear headscarves but only after 2008. Until then, WIMs mostly remained silent in the expectation of lifting of the bans and not damaging the party *within*. After the process of normalization of the headscarf and AKP's stronger hold on power since around 2008, the dissidents from the Islamist circles could more easily emerge – most notably women, leftists, and youth. Since AKP has established its authority further, the internal critique has been enabled unlike in the 1990's.

Egyptian Islamists could have undergone a similar path if the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party had stayed in power. When the Brotherhood became freer and more visible after the revolution and FJP ascended to power, the number of Islamic feminist organizations increased in Egypt. Women had regarded this increase as strategically useful against the conservative religious discourse of the MB and FJP. The political crackdown on the MB in 2013 once again relegated the Islamists (especially women and youth) to a position where they were unable to engage in internal critique. As Sameh Naguib argues, diverse interests within the Brotherhood remain concealed in a suppressive political environment (2009, 106).

Jenny White refers to a move from Islamism to Muslimhood in Turkey in her analysis of the discourse and actions of AKP and its immediate circles (White 2013, 189-90). According to White, Islamists have distanced themselves from the political project and instead promoted a mixture of personal piety, charity, and entrepreneurship. Several scholars of Islamism have similarly suggested that the Middle East has entered a post-Islamist phase since the 1990's where Islamists have been promoting values of individuality, human rights, and pluralism more than before (Roy 2004; Kepel 2009; Bayat 2013). Pluralism as a social framework and a political reality was observed in Islamist movements in the region from the 1990's throughout the early 2000's with the examples of pluralist Islamic voices in Iran, the moderate changes within the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the emergence of a neo-liberal and moderate ex-Islamist AKP in Turkey.

Regarding AKP, the argument that Islamists have stopped to openly declare to be Islamists is true, but the promise of the plurality has not been realized. Due to AKP's increased repressive discourse and practices especially since 2011, I observe an interesting move away from Islamism

(*İslamcılık*) among dissenting WIMs in Turkey, as Islamism has been associated with the governing hegemony. Instead, dissenting women highlight their 'religiosity' (*dindarlık*) as their identity. Table 10 below summarizes the identity shifts among the WIMs (those of which had a stronger identity in connection to Islam) in Egypt and Turkey. As discussed in Chapter 4, Islamist women, represented by WGT group (which mostly positioned itself against the seculars until 2008) was divided into dissenting/transgressing religious women (often pro-feminist and anti-authoritarian) and accommodating religious/Islamist women (often anti-feminist and silent on authoritarianism) especially after 2011, the beginning of AKP's third term in the government.

In Egypt, there has been less change regarding the positioning of Islamists and Islamic feminists towards Islamism during the time frame of the study. As discussed in Chapter 6, Islamist women and Islamic feminists can be classified as two different groups since the beginning of the time frame due to their divergent approaches to feminism and political Islam. Most Islamic feminists have been silent on authoritarianism, while Islamists engaged more with the question of political authority. As I discussed, internal change within Islamists has not been facilitated since they have been suppressed for a long time. The number of Islamic feminist organizations has increased since the revolution in 2011, including few young Islamic feminists who also dissent from political repression.

Table 10: Changes in Self-definitions in identity-based WIMs

	Self-definitions in identity-based WIMs (excluding feminists who use religious discourse)	
Turkey	**2002-2011**	**2011-2016**
	'Islamist' women	'religious' women (those who dissent from/transgress)
		'religious' or 'Islamist' women (those who accommodate)
Egypt	**2000-2011**	**2011-2016**
	'Islamist' women	'Islamist' women
	'Islamic feminists'	More 'Islamic feminists'

Political Repression

The trajectories of democratization in Turkey and regime change in Egypt reversed direction during the preparation of this study. The levels of political openness and repression have a direct influence on women's politico-religious empowerment as the two case studies have showed. Discursive and organizational space substantially increased after the revolution in Egypt with the discussion of taboo issues and proliferation of peaceful street activism and civil society. However, the organizational space has gravely shrunk since the military takeover in 2013 with the increased surveillance on civil society and street mobilization. The legal limitation on foreign funding has cut a major financial resource for women's and human rights organizations in the country. These sanctions have further demonized and criminalized dissenting women and organizations who have received foreign funding. The legal changes have negatively influenced Musawah, CEWLA, Nazra and Noon Center – the latter additionally affected with an accusation of connections to the MB. The repression has curtailed the overall space for social movements via protest laws, enforcement of security forces and self-censorship which limit the available discourses as well. Standing against the repressive measures has led to the freezing of asset, travel bans, demonization and imprisonment, as cases of Nazra, CEWLA, Azza Soliman and Yara Sallam have showed.

In Turkey, WIMs' stances towards AKP's increased repressive measures and conservative gender agenda since around 2011 have correlated. Some WIMs either have opposed both, while others have agreed with both of them or have been silent at best as Table 5 shows in Chapter 4. Some WIMs in Turkey have been challenging three types of oppression: Kemalist suppression, authoritarian and conservative AKP practices, and misogynistic discourses of Islamist intellectuals. In Egypt, the stances of WIMs towards authoritarianism and conservative gender discourse do not necessarily co-vary. The relationship is more complicated as there are a considerable number of feminists and Islamic feminists who either support the military regime or they are silent about the political repression.

Secondly, authoritarian governments in the MENA fuel polarization in society, especially between seculars and Islamists. The authoritarian governments make compromises with certain groups in society at the expense of others. While the losers and winners of the system change over

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time, women's rights have often been compromised first and foremost, as experience in Turkey and Egypt have shown. Secular repressive regimes, like the one in Turkey until the early 2000's, created distrust for religious masses and limited women's access to public life. On the other hand, exclusivist discourses and acts of Islamist movements in Turkey and Egypt have threatened and sown fears in secular and liberal masses. The Egyptian state at times compromised women's rights to silence the Islamists and for the favor of the religious authority, while at times increased women's rights to attract international support.

Turkey has been divided into religious and secular camps which is fuelled further by repressive policies. The mutual distrust between secular and Islamist factions in society has made WIMs in Turkey especially walk a tightrope. Women who criticize the Islamists and AKP for their gender discourses, policies or authoritarian tendencies are labeled in their community as agents of 'the other' (which either refers to the local secular people or the West). On the other hand, secular media also use the dissidence of WIMs for their own purposes to attack the Islamists and AKP. Overall, the societal polarization limits the discursive and organizational space for dissent and transgression in Islamic circles – and the possibility of hybridity.

The rise of takfīrī movements

The rise of *takfīrī* movements like ISIL and Salafism promotes conservative and misogynistic gender ideology, and they pose one of the most serious threats to women's politico-religious empowerment in the MENA. Few women risk being visible by dissent and expressing transgressive views on religious conservatism or misogyny. There were some declarations against misogynistic and violent practises of ISIL from WIMs in Turkey. As reported by several activists, the fear of these movements exists among WIMs. Accordingly, many prefer to work in silence, mostly in the shadows of academic enterprises. While in Chapter 5, I discussed the effects of *takfīrī* movements on the current WIMs in Turkey with the influence of Gonca Kuriş's murder and the upsurge of ISIL, throughout the dissertation I mostly reviewed the dissent of WIMs vis-à-vis mainstream religious establishment/movements and the state. The effects of *takfīrī* discourse and terror attacks in the region on women's Islamic movements should be studied further.

Sustainability of Dissent and Transgression, and Transformative Politico-Religious Empowerment in the MENA

A 'masculinist restoration' has been observable in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa where the states have at times been colluding with the perpetrators of gender-based discrimination and violence to restore back the patriarchy (Kandiyoti 2013). Indeed, 'notions of female subordination are no longer securely hegemonic' in the region with the empowerment of women in various fields – economic, social, political and legal (Kandiyoti 2013).

Reflecting this tension between women's empowerment and backlashes against it, there have recently been contradictory developments in the region. Several important pro-women legislation was passed in several Arab countries, especially about violence against women, in the summer of 2017.   The so-called 'marry your rapist' laws, which permitted assailants to get away with punishment if they married their victims, were rebuked in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia after years-long and creative public campaigns and lobbying by the feminist groups. Most notably in Tunisia, all kinds of violence against women were criminalized, including domestic violence and marital rape, the age of consent was raised to 16, and the ban on Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men was lifted. Egypt appointed its first female governor in its history in 2017. Presentations by activists and scholars at the "Feminism is in Crisis? Gender and the Arab Public Sphere" conference organized at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon in January 2018 were a vivid demonstration that aspirations of women in the region are higher than ever.

Feminism is not in crisis in the MENA, it has been flourishing and harvesting the seeds sown under difficult conditions. In some of the countries, Islamist movements and official religious institutions backed by governments continue to promote the patriarchal interpretation of Islam, and the official institutions try to invalidate dissident social movements against themselves and governments. The state's participation in masculinist restoration is observed in Turkey with an increasingly conservative discourse inflated with religious references. As I finalize this dissertation, the parliament has passed a law that gives *müftü's* (religious consultancy bodies in local districts) the authority to perform official marriage ceremonies, as an alternative to the ones

conducted by mayors.[189] Although the content of the civil code has not been amended with this change, this step signals potential future attempts by the government to form parallel religious legislation in Turkey, next to the secular one. A curious question at the end of this dissertation is that whether secular feminists in Turkey will begin to use a religious discourse, broadening the base of WIMs like their counterparts in Egypt, when facing an increased Islamization of political discourse and potential legal arrangements that may give religious authorities administrative power. As the case study from Egypt has shown, it is, unfortunately, arduous to work within a religious legal paradigm for women.

The future for women's religious and political empowerment in Turkey and Egypt seems challenging. The dissenting and transgressing acts of women are more and more imperative in the current context than a decade ago. Rather than being the self-expressions of empowerment of few individuals who show the courage to demonstrate their 'side,' these acts should also be effective for the broader politico-religious empowerment of women. The acts need to turn into wider mobilizations for reform and transformation, as well as to safeguard the already accomplished reforms. This would happen with extensive collaborations across women's movements, sustaining the women's and feminist spaces, making strategic collaborations with men and the state institutions, sometimes getting the support of local communities, while challenging their patriarchal practices, as the two case studies suggest. Reform and transformation in women's politico-religious empowerment will depend on the long-term collaborations of diverse social movements both against the political repression and increased discourse of religious conservatism.

Islamic feminism and Empowerment

In contrast with the optimistic literature on Islamic feminism (or in other words, convergence of Islam and feminism or gender-sensitive reading of Islamic sources) and its prospects (Seedat 2013, Badran 2009, Cooke 2001), the findings of the dissertation show that Islamic feminism cannot lead to transformative empowerment as long as it remains in the academic enterprise and if its supporters are silent about political oppression as the case of Egypt demonstrates in Chapter 6 and 7.

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[189] The bill had also proposed a 'public morality' criteria for people who would gain Turkish citizenship via marriage; but it was removed due to the pressures from the opposition parties.

Islamic feminism needs to move out of academic boundaries and be supplemented by advocacy and collaboration between women's movements. Its principles have to be on streets and in slogans to have a broader outreach. It can contribute to reformative power at best if Islamic feminists lobby during the reform processes or if the other activists use Islamic feminist resources. Experience in Egypt shows that this variation has taken place at least on the advocacy level since 2011 with the emergence of foundations like Mada's Noon Center and with increased collaborations between Islamic feminists and women's rights NGO's such as CEWLA and global Musawah movement.

Secondly, the choice of challenging political oppression or not defines empowerment capacity of Islamic feminism. Acting against all possible kinds of oppression makes the transformation possible. Other than in revolutionary moments, only a few women become visible with their stances against both kinds of oppression. The fact that most Islamic feminists, as in Egypt, shy away from challenging broader political oppression takes away transformation potential of Islamic feminism. Islamic feminists need to be more vocal about overall political repression in their contexts to make their empowering claims within religion more credible and transformative.

The ones who can fill the transformative politico-religious space in Egypt are a few young Islamic feminists like Fatma Emam and eclectic feminists who use a mixture of Islamic and feminist discourse and who boldly touch on sensitive issues like Azza Soliman. These women touch upon taboo issues, some have a provocative style, and they have a stance against authoritarianism. The style of the younger generation may not always be provocative; however, the 'radical' content of their work and their stance against authoritarianism make them transgressive and carry a transformative potential.

In Turkey, the connection between religious feminism and activism has been stronger. I explained this by the accumulated experience of headscarf demonstrations and by the role of BKP as an advocacy NGO founded by several female theologians and religious feminists. The young generation of religious women has also been an outstanding example of a positive radicalization of women's Islamic movements. The Initiative members have been on the streets and in advocacy as much as they continue in small conscious-raising reading groups. They show women's own

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interpretation of Islam sometimes in a confrontational style with the religious establishment, government and religious movements.

The inclusion of men: restricting or empowering?

Women's organizations and activists – secular, Islamist, Islamic feminist – include and employ men in their activities and organizations in Egypt, unlike the ones in Turkey. Organizations like CEWLA, WMF or ECWR all employ male employees, and ASWIC, Noon Center and Musawah have collaborated with male religious scholars, activists, and officials. Islamic feminists promote the idea that women should lead Islamic feminism but that men should not be excluded and their support is crucial (interviews 2014). Amany Saleh from ASWIC also argues that it is not the conflict that rules their relation with men but it is controversy and cooperation at the same time (interview 2014). Islamist thinkers like Nadia Mostafa and Heba Raouf Ezzat also support 'changing together' for women's empowerment. In stark contrast, male presence is unusual in women's organizations in Turkey and collaborations with men have been limited. The well-established feminist tradition in Turkey has aimed to create a free space for women by excluding non-trans men from the feminist marches and conscious-raising groups.

While women's movements approach in Turkey has been empowering as it has given women a freer space to build a strong feminist identity to dissent from and transgress patriarchal practices and discourses, there are cases when male presence is indispensable. Strategic collaborations with men have been empowering as the case of Egypt has particularly shown. Enabling religious reform and protection from direct threat are the two examples. Since society trusts women less on matters of religion regardless of women's religious education, female scholars or activists who work on religion are subjected to correction, insults, and threats in both countries. For this reason, the support of liberal male religious scholars has played an instrumental role. Such scholars have used their authoritative positions as male *and* informed scholars and backed women's rights in legal reform in Egypt as discussed in Chapter 6 and in public debates in Turkey. Furthermore, the deployment of young men for the protection against gender-based violence in ad-hoc or sustained forms during street festivities and protests in Egypt has supported

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the feminist cause rather than blocking it, as several scholars and commentators note (Langohr 2016, Kandiyoti 2014).

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Studies

It is important to mention the limitations of the study to suggest a roadmap for future studies on women's politico-religious empowerment and WIMs. First of all, the dissertation had the benefits of a case-oriented comparative study. However, it has an asymmetrical structure, as the sections on Egypt are at times less detailed compared to the analyses of WIMs in Turkey. As mentioned in the methodology, I had more access to Turkish case with a longer fieldwork and immersion to Turkish political scene and language. As such, the dissertation did not focus on some political factors in Egypt, such as the effect of being a single-party state until 2011. However, I have captured the influence of the regime by looking at overall authoritarianism and showing networks of WIMs in reaching out the state and the president.

Secondly, thanks to the multi-sited fieldwork and research, the amount of material has been vast and the dissertation has presented a broad mapping of WIMs in each country. However, as part of the challenges of multi-sited fieldwork, the application of the social movement framework to some groups among WIMs has been limited. Some groups have been studied in detail regarding the four elements of social movement characteristics – forms and repertoires of contention, framing, networks and organizations and political opportunity structures. I have particularly focused on two social movement elements in the most of the other groups, namely discourses, and forms and repertoires of contention that have been determinants for the type of visibility. I have also looked at networks in detail for groups and women with dissenting visibility.

For example, internal dynamics and hierarchies within some groups are less examined due to the wider mapping of WIMs in both countries. With the meso-organizational focus, I have mostly captured WIM's emergence, activation, issue diversification, funding, mobilizing structures and forms and repertoires of action within the political context – rather than the internal organizational dynamics of each and every group. Nevertheless, I have shown the patterns of personal influence, internal divisions and rotating presidency (if exists) and editorship (in the case

of groups which run media platforms) in groups such as WGT, BKP, the Initiative, Reçel Blog in Turkey and CEWLA and ASWIC in Egypt.

Therefore, it is important to widen the social movement research to focus on the *internal* organizational dynamics of the platforms and groups. This can be possible by narrowing down the scope of the study. It would help to assess the sustainability of WIMs in the long run. Furthermore, since this dissertation has focused on dissenting and transgressing women and groups, the organizational networks, including rent and funding ties of *accommodationist* groups among WIMs should be studied in future studies. To explain women's movements role in consolidating the existing patriarchal gender orders, the internal dynamics and networks of women's organizations which accommodate to the existing power structures should be carefully analyzed.

Thirdly, tabular presentations have been useful to simplify the acts and empowerment capacities of WIMs in different periods in Egypt and Turkey. However, they are suggestive tables and should be read side by side with the narrative, as they do not carry all the intricacies of changing positions and acts of women and groups. That is why, sometimes I located particular gatherings or protests in the tables, as well as, the groups. The flexibility of the groups in terms of their acts and empowerment capacities beyond the three time periods can be seen in the narrative. Likewise, I selected the critical junctures in each country based on political opportunities, threats and legal empowerment that changed the political field for the women's politico-religious empowerment. Therefore, the junctures do not necessarily show changes in the mainstream religious gender order. I have mentioned the changes in the mainstream or more pronunciation of it in the narrative, for example, by demonstrating the increased criticisms from the officials and religious scholars in the recent years in Turkey on women's attitude and clothes in public.

Fourthly, the dissertation has discussed the acts of transgression, not only in theory but also in practice. The boundaries and porousness between transgression, heresy, and blasphemy are very interesting and pressing fields of research. These boundaries are at the heart of women's politico-religious empowerment in contexts where religion is increasingly or insistently in the political discourse as in the cases of Turkey and Egypt. The question of the boundary at which an

interpretive framework stops being properly religious and starts being heretic or blasphemous raises questions on the limits of feminist theology, in general. This study has pointed out the limits of Islamic feminism in practice. As I have argued and showed throughout the dissertation, the strength of feminist theology is not only in its theoretical elaboration and boundary-crossing but especially in its practical reflections: whether its actors join in the political debates in their own contexts on gender issues and broader political injustices.

Therefore, it is imperative to conduct specific research on the subversive and transgressive acts within (and outside of) religion, particularly on those related to sexuality and opposition to oppressive regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. Issues of sexuality and queerness are openly discussed among WIMs all over the region more than ever, as well as Muslims around the world. Sexual politics in the MENA is being analyzed in an ever-increasing degree in personal memoirs, monographs, and academic studies. People in the region are seeking an all-embracing image of God which appreciates all potentials of womanhood and queerness and which empowers the oppressed. The sexual revolution is indeed part of the political revolution (Accad 1990, Eltahawy 2015), and the politics of sexuality within religion should be further tackled since religion is still at the heart of politics and personal lives in the MENA.

Appendices
Table 11: Comparing WIMs and Politico-Religious Empowerment in Turkey and Egypt

Factors	TURKEY		EGYPT	
	WIMs	Politico-religious Empowerment	WIMs	Politico-religious Empowerment
Differentiation	WIMs have been clearly separate from the secular women's movements.	There is no religious reference in the law. Women are freer from dealing with an additional site of power.	There is a broader base of WIMs, as using religious language becomes a need.	Women are bounded by the religion in law, so the empowerment is limited. However, since the base of women involved is broader, there are more actors to engage with the religion.
Secularism patterns	Headscarf bans and Polarization → WIMs coalesced separately from other WMs	1. It has limited the empowerment of women with headscarves. 2. Bans cut back potential contributions to pol-rel empowerment.	Women's organization have members with and without headscarf: more fraternized & more visible religiosity	1. Bigger than the space in Turkey for women in hijab, as there was no bans for women with headscarves to get education or work. 2. However, overall conservatism in religious circles attenuates this. Association of secularism with atheism is problematic.
Colonization history	Two issues: 1. No colonization, but instead Kemalism → WIMs are cautious with Western and feminist discourse but less than Egypt 2. WIMs have less access to feminist and Islamic feminist literature in English.	Past colonization threats are used to promote the discourse of foreign and Western agents against women	Opposite effects: 1. WIMs are cautious with Western and feminist discourse: Cultural authenticity and nationalism 2. WIMs have more access to feminist and Islamic feminist literature in English.	1. Past colonization is used to promote the discourse of foreign and Western agents against women. 2. Influenced the PSL to stay religious-based thus limited the empowerment.
Islamist party in power	1. WIMs stayed silent until 2008 2. Diversity of issues increased for WIMs after 2008	1. The lifting of headscarf bans in universities in 2008 has been empowering. 2. Overall empowerment is under threat as AKP started to promote a conservative religious discourse after 2011 and attempted to give religious authority legal power.	During the short time of FJP power, WIMs diversified and institutionalized both coincidentally but also strategically to respond to increased conservative religious discourse	In short time in power, FJP threatened the existing rights of women

Political Repression	The stance to repression became one of the dividing lines among WIMs	Overall public space has been curtailed after 2011	Funding limitations negatively influence WIMs	Overall public space has been curtailed after 2013
Prevalence of Takfīrī movements	Limits the visibility of WIMs due to the fear and threat they inflict upon	Conservative and misogynistic discourse is being promoted	Limits the visibility of WIMs due to the fear and threat they inflict upon	Conservative and misogynistic discourse is being promoted

Table 12: Summary of the Blogs of "Women Who Get Together"

Name of the Blog	Main Issue	Main Theme/Discourse	Responsible/Addressee
Reaction to Vakit newspaper (2008)[190]	**Demand of expulsion of Hüseyin Üzmez from the Islamist Vakit newspaper due to his alleged sexual exploitation of an under-age girl**	**Muslim-like stance (*Müslümanca duruş*), Conscience (*vicdan*) , personal dignity (*haysiyet*), motherhood**	**Islamist Vakit newspaper**
Women who Get Together for Gaza (2008)	Gaza War in 2008, and Segregation of Gaza region under war	Human rights; Shame	Government of Egypt
Women who Get Together for Ceylan (2009)	**Kurdish Problem**	**Justice (as an essential emotion in every human being)**	**Government and Prime Minister**
Women who Get Together in the Sivas Mourning (2010)	Alevi Minority Issue	Atrocity; Responsibility	Self-Criticism
Women who Get Together for Uludere (2011)	**Kurdish Problem**	**Justice; Transparent judiciary; Inclusion**	**State: Government and Judiciary**
Women who Get Together for	Detainment of a peace activist (the son of Huda	Injustice of the courts, women's conscience	Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

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[190] Signed as "religious women" (*dindar kadınlar) instead of WGT (Haber 7, 2008)*

Freedom to Muhammed Cihad (2011)	Kaya, a member of WGT)		
Women who Get Together for Hilal Kaplan (2012)	**Discriminatory Broadcasting with Hate Speech to Religious/Ethnic minorities**	**Inclusion of Ethnic and Religious Minorities and Respect for Differences**	**Online News Site "Habervaktim" and others who praise this language**
Women who Get Together for Media Monitoring (2012)	Discriminatory (Sexist) Broadcasting	Moral Failure in Media; Patriarchy and Sexism in Media	Online News Site "Haberturk"; Ministry Responsible from the Family and Social Policies; Professional Associations of Media; Media Ethics Council
Women who Get Together for Pinar Selek (2013)	**Kurdish Problem; Intimidation of Intellectuals**	**Anti-Militarism; Academic Ethics**	**Judiciary**
Women who Get Together against the Police Law (PSVK) (2014)	Disproportionate violence against protestors by the police (since Gezi protests)	Right to live; right to protest, freedom of speech; just and human centered policing, social cohesion,	Politicians and Judiciary

Table 13: Summary of the Activities of "Initiative of Muslims against the Violence against Women" in 2013

Name of Action	Main Issue	Main Theme and Framing	Forms & Repertoires	Method	Responsible authority/Addressee
Friday Hutbe preparation (ongoing since May 2013)	Violence against Women	Woman as an individual in the Quran; divorce as *halal*; example of Muhammed; legal status in criminal code(?)	Mild language – not conventional but not disruptive either	Hutbe to be read in the mosques to raise awareness among men; strategy in choosing the Quran translators	Directorate of Religious Affairs; Ordinary men who goes to Friday prayers
Say Stop to the Harassment (Tacize Dur De) (June 7, 2013)	**Violence against women; harassment of women with headscarves during the Gezi protests**	**Anti-Sexism-Racism-Militarism and freedom of religious expression** **Strong condemnation of harassments against women; Support to the Gezi protests**	**Disruptive; Harsh language**	**Public demonstration and march; press statement**	**Gezi protestors; All public; Media**
Resist, the Headscarved (Diren Başörtülü) (June 15, 2013)	Violence against women with headscarves during the Gezi protests	Islamophobia; Hate towards women with headscarves; Justice; Ethics; not every Gezi protestor is an attacker	Disruptive; Harsh language; balanced language in terms of political positions and context	Public demonstration and sending out press statement to journalists and famous people.	Government party; state officials; conservative columnists; Gezi protestors; All public, Media
Stickers and Stencils (ongoing since March 2013)	**Violence and sexual harassment against women**	**Religious discourse; violence and sexual harassment against**	**Disruptive; entertaining (colors and language)**	**Posting stickers on visible public spaces such as walls, traffic lights and public buses**	**Ordinary men**

		women as un-Islamic and against *sunnah*			
"Man in Islam" Forum (İslam'da Erkek) (May 19, 2013)	The role, rights and responsibilities of men according to Islam	?	Conventional : Conference	Seminar where scholars and journalists gave lectures	Ordinary people, Men
Women's Shelters Project (2013)	**Increasing the number of women's shelters in Turkey**	**Women need shelters for protection (Family is not enough, and sometimes dangerous for women)**	**Disruptive (Islamic communites are not in favor of women's shelters)**	**Options discussed: Lobbying; Signature Campaign; Demonstration**	**Municipalities; Family and Social Policies Ministry**
Reading group (2013)	Marriage, Divorce, Roles in Family	Clarifying women's rights in family in Islam	Conventional	Consulting to Islamic resources and group- discussion; conscious-raising/Collaboration with leftist Islamic *Emek ve Adalet*	Ordinary Muslim women and men

Interview general question guide (Not exhaustive)

➢ Can you please tell me how you started to be active in religion and women's issues?

➢ What kind of activities have you organized as a group/have you joined?

➢ What kind of activism do you value more?

➢ What are the obstacles for your activism?

➢ Where are the things that supported your activism?

➢ With which organizations or people you work with?

➢ Do you receive funding, from where?

➢ How many of you are in this organization/initiative?

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- ➢ What have been the tension points within the group?

- ➢ What have been the tension points with local feminists?

- ➢ What have been the tension points with the state?

- ➢ What are the most important problems of women in this country?

- ➢ What do you think about feminism?

- ➢ What do you think about Islamic feminism? How do you describe yourself? (feminist, women's rights activist, Islamic feminist etc)

- ➢ What do you think about West?

- ➢ What has changed with the revolution? And after July 2013? (Egypt)

- ➢ What has changed for WIMs with an Islamist party in power? (Turkey)

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