

# Islamic Identities as Positioned Power Relations: The Case of Turkey and Iran

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To my parents for  
their unwavering love and support

## Abstract

Islamism and fundamentalism have been falsely taken to be the same, distorting our perception of Muslim identities. However, the new forms of being Muslim are highly adapted to the prerequisites of the modern life. Islamism takes different shapes and is highly embedded in the sociopolitical context and power relations within societies. This research's main question is 'what is it to be politically Muslim?' Although it seeks to present a typology of Muslim identities ranging from Islamists to non-believer seculars, it finds the literature of identity politics reductionist in order to give a comprehensive picture of diverse narratives of being Muslim. The logic of identity politics asks us to disregard the multi-dimensional character of religious and political identities and instead assume that Muslims are only differentiated based on their belief in the broad and vague concept of the Islamic state. This research is a comparative study of political Muslims in Turkey and Iran, comprising fourteen in-depth interviews whose findings depict the impossibility of categorizing Muslims in existing identity groups. The ethnographical approach of this research, followed by a thematic analysis of the narratives, results in an interpretative understanding of the actual beliefs, values, and performances in the Muslim world. In line with Talal Asad's conception of religion, the research claims that the construction of different Muslim identities dynamically occurs through the cultural hegemonies, dominating discourses, and power struggles within the society, rather than by theological discourses representing different interpretations of Islam. Therefore, Muslim identities are the points of reference for positioned power relations, which get heterogeneous shapes based on different social and political contexts.

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# Chapter 1- Introduction

## 1.1 *Resisting Secularism*

Although the incidents of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath are generally known to be the turning point in which political Islam got its current salience, there have been a lot of other events and cases that have shaped the academic and political interest in the questions regarding political Islam. The Arab Spring, political conflicts in Turkey and Iran, integration of Muslims in Europe, the threats of radical Muslims in the Western Africa, and several terrorist attacks in the name of Islam are only a few anecdotes of why political Islam is one of the main centers of attention for researchers today. The picture of a politicized and anti-Western doctrine of Islam has brought about a sense of fear for the Western mind that immediately connects Islamism with backwardness and violence. Islamism and fundamentalism have been falsely understood to be the same, which has been presented not only to the public, but also to the scholars by means of media and public culture.

By a secular perspective, originated and developed only in the Christian tradition of social and political theory, it has been argued that the Western concern over the question of Islam “is not Islamic identity but Islamist identity.”<sup>1</sup> Scholars have tried to differentiate between a version of Islam that is limited to the private sphere of life on one hand, and a politicized type that dictates how a believer should act in the sociopolitical domain on the other one. In this sense, the word Islamism is equal to political Islam and the term Islamic is used for both non-political and political aspects of Islam that a Muslim might believe in. The secular hegemonic discourse of the West has long been demanding the Muslims to limit the Islamist character of their beliefs to their private life. For instance, on the question of Turkey’s membership in EU, Samuel Huntington stated that Turkey, in effect, could do a

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<sup>1</sup> Schwedler, Jillian. "Islamic identity: myth, menace, or mobilizer?." *SAIS Review* 21, no. 2 (2001): 5.

South Africa: “abandoning secularism as alien to its being as South Africa abandoned apartheid and thereby changing itself from a pariah state in its civilization to the leading state of that civilization.”<sup>2</sup>

Inspection on the possibility of a secular Islam has vastly appeared in the works of scholars mostly aiming to answer whether a reconciliation of democracy and Islam is possible. Steven Fish in his extensive studies on countries around the world concludes “the assumption that religion is consistently more important to Muslims than it is to adherents of other faiths and that this difference is clearly reflected in social and political life is open to doubt.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it has been widely argued that the Western secular perspective cannot be applied on Islam in the same way that it has been employed on Christianity. Michael Connolly argues that the problem is that this framework uses “neutral terms of analysis, several concepts and themes that became authoritative only through the hegemony of Western secularism.”<sup>4</sup> On the same lines, Talal Asad claims, “From the point of view of secularism, religion has the option either of confining itself to private belief and worship or of engaging in public talk that makes no demands on life.”<sup>5</sup>

This particular type of separation between Islam and politics presupposes the same characteristics in Islam and Christianity and dismisses the differences in the history and content of these religions. However, it does not follow that Islam and politics are firmly entangled, rendering any form of Islamic politics without Islamism impossible: “The attempt to understand Muslim traditions by insisting that in them religion and politics (two essences modern society tries to keep conceptually and practically apart) are coupled must, in my

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<sup>2</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. “The erosion of American national interests.” *Foreign Affairs* (1997): 178–179).

<sup>3</sup> Fish, M. Steven. “Islam and authoritarianism.” *World Politics* 55, no. 01 (2002): 22.

<sup>4</sup> Connolly, William E. *Why I am not a secularist*. U of Minnesota Press, 1999: 22.

<sup>5</sup> Asad, Talal. “Religion, nation-state, secularism.” *Nation and religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (1999): 191.

view, lead to failure.”<sup>6</sup> Scholars such as Mohammad Ayoob, by a detailed reference to the history of Islam in different regions, insist that “There is, therefore, nothing unique in the history of Islam that sets it apart from other religious traditions in terms of the relationship between religion and politics.”<sup>7</sup> He accounts for a historical understanding of Islam that proposes the possibility of a separation between Islam and the state. With the same argument, Elizabeth Hurd contends, the claim that the distinction between religious and political authorities is unthinkable due to the fixed characteristics of the Islamic religion is false.<sup>8</sup>

However, there are versions of Islamism, most importantly in Shiite Iran, that introduces the separation of Islam and politics as a Western conspiracy: “Religious and political power may be joined in, say, Iran and Taliban-era Afghanistan. But these polities are atypical.”<sup>9</sup> The Islamic revolution in Iran was a rupture in the history of the Islamic world. Islamic jurists got the chance to sit on the head of the government and to rule by what they claimed to be the Islamic law. Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Revolution, announced in Najaf, “In just the same way that there are laws setting forth the duties of worship for man, so too there are laws, practices, and norms for the affairs of society and government which amounts to a complete system of laws.”<sup>10</sup> Since the God’s laws are not just restricted to the time of the prophet, it is necessary to enact these laws today by an Islamic government.

However, as Ervand Abrahamian argues, Khomeini became well aware that basic religious texts are not capable of constructing a religious institution. Abrahamian states, “It is

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<sup>6</sup> Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of religion: Discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam*. JHU Press, 2009: 28-29.

<sup>7</sup> Ayoob, Mohammed. *The many faces of political Islam: religion and politics in the Muslim world*. University of Michigan Press, 2009: 7.

<sup>8</sup> Hurd, Elizabeth Shakman. "Political Islam and foreign policy in Europe and the United States." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3, no. 4 (2007): 348.

<sup>9</sup> Fish, M. Steven. "Islam and authoritarianism." *World Politics* 55, no. 01 (2002): 22.

<sup>10</sup> Algar, Hamid. *Islam and revolution: Writings and declarations of Imam Khomeini*. Berkeley,[Calif.]: Mizan Press, 1981: 30.

true that in his earlier years he [Khomeini] implied that Mohammad's Mecca and Imam Ali's caliphate were the models to replicate. But it is also true that in later years he argued that even the Prophet and Imam Ali had not been able to surmount the horrendous problems of their societies."<sup>11</sup> Abrahamian asserts, "Populism is a more adaptable term [rather than fundamentalist] for describing Khomeini, his ideas, and his movement because this term is associated with ideological adaptability and intellectual flexibility"<sup>12</sup>

Similar to Iran's case, in *The Many Faces of Political Islam*, Ayoob argues, "There is not a single mainstream Islamist party that has not entered into political compromises to further its political objectives."<sup>13</sup> Islamism takes different shapes and is highly embedded in the sociopolitical context and power struggles of each society: "Muslim Brotherhood is as much a product of the Egyptian context as the Jamaat-i-Islami is a product of the Indian and after 1947 the Pakistani context."<sup>14</sup> Political Islam has many different faces not only among different countries, but also within countries. Different Islamist groups in Muslim majority countries have their disparities and similarities. In different circumstances, they oppose or join each other based on the groups' expediencies.

## 1.2 Research Question

Although political Islam has been in the center of academic attention during the last decade, most of the studies on the issue have a top-bottom approach in which the states are the main units of analysis. Other research mostly takes a theoretical approach that tries to examine Islam as an ideology and scrutinize whether Islam and democracy can be reconciled. A lack of study on Muslims as individuals holding certain religious and political ideas,

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<sup>11</sup> Abrahamian, Ervand. *Khomeinism: essays on the Islamic Republic*. Univ of California Press, 1993: 14.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid: 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ayoob, Mohammed. *The many faces of political Islam: religion and politics in the Muslim world*. University of Michigan Press, 2009: 10.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid: 9.



performing in a certain way in their everyday life, is clearly observed in the previous research: “An overemphasis on theological debates and religious milieus has sometimes produced a re-exoticization effect ... As a result, little attention gets paid to the historical processes through which practices and discourse are produced, taken up, or contested within specific (economic, political, and social) contexts by particular actors.”<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, as it was mentioned earlier, apart from some of the Westerners’ intention to produce a monolithic picture of Muslims representing Islamism as identical with fundamentalism, Muslims themselves have not yet sufficiently portrayed alternative forms of being Muslim.

There is a vast variation among Muslims when it comes to their political ideologies, ranging from fundamentalist Islamists to secular non-practicing Muslims. Undoubtedly, this wide spectrum projects another spectrum of different types of political demands and behaviors in institutional and constitutional levels. While the radical Islamists seek an Islamic government that entangles politics and religion by codifying Sharia law in the constitution, the seculars favor a theory of non-interference of religion in the political sphere. Various types of Islamic ideas producing distinct sociopolitical behaviors render the idea of being Islamist/secular as sorts of individual identity. People can identify themselves in the political sphere by appealing to their religious beliefs. However, in the framework of ‘politics of difference,’ Islamic identities have been rarely addressed: “Much of the scholarly literature on “[Islamic] identity” is conceptually murky, leaving the term entirely undefined or treating it as synonymous with other elements of culture, such as beliefs, ideas, norms, and practices.”<sup>16</sup> Given the influence of religious, non-religious, and anti-religious beliefs in the Middle East, it could be argued that Islamism/secularism can also be treated as an identity,

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<sup>15</sup> Soares, Benjamin, and Filippo Osella. "Islam, politics, anthropology." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. s1 (2009): S13.

<sup>16</sup> Schwedler, Jillian. "Islamic identity: myth, menace, or mobilizer?." *SAIS Review* 21, no. 2 (2001): 2.

which makes the literature of identity politics applicable to the political clashes in the Middle East.

This research aims to present a comprehensive description of the spectrums of political aspects of Muslim identities, including the fundamentalist, Islamist, secular, atheist, and etc. The main question would be ‘what are the various political types of being a Muslim?’ In other words, the research’s objective is to come up with a typology of political Islam with a focus on individual Muslims’ perspectives, rather than on the institutionalized versions of political Islam. However, as it will be argued in the theoretical framework of the research, this typology is of a dynamic and discursive nature. The Muslims’ self-narrated definitions of being Muslim can account for the inadequacy of the static conception of the unchanging political Islam. The ethnographical approach of the research would result in a more interpretive picture of the actual beliefs, values, and performances in the Muslim world. I would elaborate on the advantages of this approach in the methodology section of the research.

The political variation among different types of Muslims is highly complex and is not limited to the engagement or separation of Islam and politics. As Nilufer Gole claims, “Contemporary Islamism is a cultural and political deconstruction of the category of Muslim.”<sup>17</sup> This research concentrates on five dimensions regarding the religious identities that are highly significant and controversial in Muslim politics. It would be indicated that Muslims’ views regarding politics stand on different positions on the spectrum of ideas at least on these topics:

1. The non-Political Characteristics of Muslim Identity
2. The Recognition and Legitimation of Other Types of Being Muslim

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<sup>17</sup> Göle, Nilüfer. "Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The making of elites and counter-elites." *The Middle East Journal* (1997): 54.

3. The Political Connotations of Muslim Identity
4. Muslims' Level of Political Toleration
5. The Will to Have an International Islamic Union

Undoubtedly, political Islam concerns several other topics. However, the main issues that are widely discussed under the topic of political Islam are included in these five dimensions.

Muslims believe in different levels of interconnection between religion and politics. The variation of Muslims' views on this topic necessitates different prescriptions on domestic and world politics. Contrary to the fundamentalists who believe that "Quran is our constitution," seculars believe that Islam is not a political manifesto. There are several other religious dispositions that differentiate Muslims on their political identity. The demand for a ban on alcohol production, consumption, and trade is a good example of how politics and religion can be intertwined.

This research, similar to all other social scientific studies, has its own limitations and barriers. A comprehensive analysis of all Muslim majority countries is not only out of the potential and scope of one in-depth research, but would also skip the lessons that could be learned by focusing on and comparing between specific countries. This study attempts to respond to the main research question in Turkey and Iran. While the main reason for the case selection is the researcher's familiarity with the sociopolitical context of these two countries, there are some other motives for this choice. Turkey and Iran are generally known to be the most significant non-Arab countries in the Middle East in the sphere of world politics. Furthermore, Turkey and Iran are special in the sense that the domestic political quarrels are highly marked by the clashes between opposing religious identities. Although Islam functions differently in Turkey's and Iran's politics, the connotations and consequences of the political reading of Islam are key factors in understanding the political struggles within both countries. At the same time, there are some similar dispositions among a big segment of Turkey and

Iran's citizens, stuck between being traditional and modern, which provides the foundations for comparing the two countries.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The use of word ‘Muslim’ requires a clarification. In both countries, the religion of the individuals is stated in their identification card. People are born with their inherited religion and mostly labeled Muslim in the first place. However, there are a lot of people who consider and identify themselves as non-Muslim or even atheist. Moreover, a remarkable portion of the population in both countries does not deny their Muslim identities but do not practice Islamic rules. The differentiation between ‘good Muslims’ and ‘bad Muslims’ that is prevalent as an expression by Middle-Easterns reflects on the binary of labels and practices.

Therefore, as Nilüfer Gole indicates, “‘Muslim’ is not synonymous with ‘Islamist’, in the sense that the first expresses a religious identity and the latter implies a political consciousness and social action.”<sup>18</sup> This research uses the term Muslim in its broad meaning, which means people who are born with a Muslim identification card. Nevertheless, Muslims can hold different forms of Islamist/secular identities and practice various forms of social and political life. Therefore, while the term Muslim refers to individuals that are named Muslim conventionally, the Islamist/secular identities hint to the beliefs, values, and performances. The variation among Islamist/secular identities among Muslims, the depiction of which is the main goal of this research, would be addressed in the rest of the project.

### **2.1 The Mainstream Distorted Picture of the Political Islam**

Islamism and fundamentalism have been falsely taken to be similar in the mainstream Western mind not only in the politics, but also in the academic circles: “When religion manifests itself politically...it is conceptualized as fundamentalism...It is almost always interpreted as a negative social force directed against science, rationality, secularism - in

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<sup>18</sup> Göle, Nilüfer. "Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The making of elites and counter-elites." *The Middle East Journal* (1997): 47.

short, against modernity.”<sup>19</sup> Due to a lack of accurate study of the political Islam, Westerners tend to read all forms of political Islam in the same way. The West did not differentiate between different interpretations of Islam, nor between different types of Muslim identities.

Even in the postcolonial framework that is concerned with the shortcomings of the Western knowledge over the ‘Orient’, there have not been enough studies on the idea of political Islam; “While an intense interest in postcolonial theory has developed in Islamic countries, in 2001 Islam was just as unreadable for most postcolonial theorists in the West as for everyone else.”<sup>20</sup> As Raymon Baker argues, “There are no sound scholarly reasons for the critical gap in the Western understanding of Islam...language barriers and cultural differences have meant that these important aspects of mainstream Islam that flow from New Islamist interpretations have been largely ignored in the West.”<sup>21</sup>

However, the postcolonial theory is rich enough to explain the roots of the inadequate understanding about the Muslim majority countries. Edward Said, in his classic book, *Orientalism*, points out to the incentives behind presenting a distorted picture of the Orient. The equation of political Islam with fundamentalism as a backward, uncivilized, intolerant, and violent doctrine is of exploitive and dominative character. The Orient is presented to be inferior to the Occident and this accounts for a basis for Western intervention for the East’s salvation and emancipation. The process of Otherness or constructing the ‘Other’ of the Orient is at the heart of the Western cultural and political hegemony:

“Principal dogmas of Orientalism...[are] the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior. Another dogma is that abstractions about the

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<sup>19</sup> Himmelfarb, Gertrude. “The Illusions of Cosmopolitanism.” In *For Love of Country?* edited by Joshua Cohen and Martha Nussbaum. Boston: Beacon Press. (2002): 76.

<sup>20</sup> Young, Robert JC. “Postcolonial remains.” *New Literary History* 43, no. 1 (2012): 30.

<sup>21</sup> Baker, Raymond William. *Islam without fear: Egypt and the new Islamists*. Harvard University Press, 2009: 4.

Orient... are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities. A third dogma is that the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; ... A fourth dogma is that the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared (the yellow Peril, the Mongol hordes, the brown dominions) or to be controlled (by pacification, research and development, outright occupation whenever possible).”<sup>22</sup>

Jillian Schwedler explains, “In [Richard] Falk’s view, the “menace” of Islamic identity is that it threatens to reveal that the apparent universalism of globalization is in fact a mask worn to obscure Western hegemony.”<sup>23</sup> To understand the real picture of the political Islam is to point out to the fact that only a small majority of Islamists aim to violence and fundamentalism, which would terminate the construction of ‘Others.’ Along with Said’s arguments, West has employed all social, political, and cultural institutions such as governments, universities, public media, pop art, and etc. to produce the knowledge that introduces the Orient as homogeneous and backward. Islamic countries, as a part of the Orient, are regions where there is no sign of modern life, religious tolerance does not exist, women are highly suppressed, there is no sense of modern economy, and politics is extremely corrupted.

However, Benjamin Soares and Filippo Osella argue “While academic discourse and Western media alike have produced reified views of Islam and Muslims in abundance, such views have also emerged from within Islam itself, via Muslims’ interpretations and representations of their own religion as unitary, timeless, and unchanging.”<sup>24</sup> The presentation of Islam as *the truth* that is timeless and ahistorical by Muslims has also reinforced the imagination of political Islam as a solid, static, and rigid system of laws. Although different versions of Islam have distinct views on the adaptation of Islamic rules to

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<sup>22</sup> Said, Edward. "Orientalism. 1978." *New York: Vintage* 1994 (1979): 301.

<sup>23</sup> Schwedler, Jillian. "Islamic identity: myth, menace, or mobilizer?." *SAIS Review* 21, no. 2 (2001): 12.

<sup>24</sup> Soares, Benjamin, and Filippo Osella. "Islam, politics, anthropology." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. s1 (2009): S2.

the modern life, the general conservative approach of Islamic schools, like any other sort of ideological schools, have hardened the creation of diverse interpretation of Islam. Therefore, the equation of Islamism with fundamentalism has been a reciprocal process by the West and the Islamic schools.

## **2.2 Defining Political Islam**

Now the question is if the West recognized a distorted picture of political Islam, what exactly political Islam would be? It has been suggested that “An “Islamist,” then is a Muslim who advocates a political agenda where the application of sharia, or Islamic law, is central.”<sup>25</sup> However, this definition of Islamism or political Islam reduces various forms of political Islam to one specific type, which centers on Sharia. It not only dismisses several political Islamist parties and groups, such as AKP in Turkey and Wasat party in Egypt, that do not emphasize on the engagement of Sharia in politics, but also presents Sharia as a fixed and objective set of rules that could keep its meaning in different times and contexts, and could be used as a comprehensive set of laws for governance. As Muhammad Asad argues, “The political ordinances of Quran and Sunnah...do not lay down any specific form of state: that is to say, the Sharia does not prescribe any definite pattern to which an Islamic state must conform, nor does it elaborate in detail a constitutional theory.”<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, as it would be argued in the section (3.1.1), Post-Islamism, that current versions of political Islam are highly adapted to the prerequisites of the modern life: “Islamist parties in Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Egypt, and Kuwait have internalized democratic values to a very significant extent.”<sup>27</sup> Islamist groups and parties are more a

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<sup>25</sup> Schwedler, Jillian. "Islamic identity: myth, menace, or mobilizer?." *SAIS Review* 21, no. 2 (2001): 5.

<sup>26</sup> Asad, Muhammad. *The principles of state and government in Islam*. Univ of California Press, 1961: 22.

<sup>27</sup> Ayoob, Mohammed. *The many faces of political Islam: religion and politics in the Muslim world*. University of Michigan Press, 2009: 11.



reaction from within the Islamic discourse to the Western way of life rather than a revival of the traditional Islam: “The challenge of Islamic identity is not to the values of liberal democracy, but to the hegemonic power structures of global capitalism and the system of nation-states.”<sup>28</sup> In this sense, political Islam is extremely different from actualization of Sharia law in the state.

By a broader definition of political Islam it could be said that “Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim world and implemented in some fashion.”<sup>29</sup> This broad definition, allows a more pluralistic understanding of the term: “Islamism, or political Islam, refers to a wide variety of often competing political movements that treat Islam as the central tenet of a political project.”<sup>30</sup> However, it should be noted that, as Armando Salvatore argues, we should understand political Islam as a “conceptual and symbolic construct, and never as an unproblematic description of a clear phenomenon.”<sup>31</sup> This idea explains how and why political Islam can easily take different faces based on different contexts.

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<sup>28</sup> Schwedler, Jillian. "Islamic identity: myth, menace, or mobilizer?." *SAIS Review* 21, no. 2 (2001): 13.

<sup>29</sup> Ayoub, Mohammed. *The many faces of political Islam: religion and politics in the Muslim world*. University of Michigan Press, 2009:1.

<sup>30</sup> Schwedler, Jillian. "Islamic identity: myth, menace, or mobilizer?." *SAIS Review* 21, no. 2 (2001): 5.

<sup>31</sup> Armando, Salvatore. *Islam and the political discourse of modernity*. Vol. 4. Ithaca, 1997: xxvi.n1)

## Chapter 3 - Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 The Dynamic and Reactionary Character of Religious Identities as Positioning

There has been an intellectual effort to present Islam, as the ideology, and Muslims, as individuals, essentially abnormal, anti-liberal, anti-democratic, and anti-secular. As Pratt Nicola claims “There has been an overwhelming tendency to present Arab/Muslim culture as ahistorical and essentialized.”<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, Steven Fish, by a far-reaching quantitative study elucidates, “There is no link between democratic deficit and Islam per se but that Muslim countries are far poorer than others and that underdevelopment therefore explains the relationship between Islam and authoritarianism.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, he states, “The evidence does not show that the Islamic world has been the site of a grossly disproportionate amount of political violence.”<sup>34</sup>

Religious identities, identical to other categories of cultural identities, are dynamically constructed by social interactions, historical circumstances, cultural hegemonies, dominating discourses, and power struggles. As Schwedler argues, “Identity is subject to continuous reinterpretation and reconstruction in light of unfolding events and changing circumstances.”<sup>35</sup> Far from being a fixed essence of a person, identities are continuously being affected and shaped by numerous social factors. They can only be meaningful if they constitute a part of a collective mentality, a group’s intersubjectivity. Stuart Hall argues, “[Cultural identity] is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as

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<sup>32</sup> Pratt, Nicola. "Identity, culture and democratization: the case of Egypt." *New Political Science* 27, no. 1 (2005): 2.

<sup>33</sup> Fish, M. Steven. "Islam and authoritarianism." *World Politics* 55, no. 01 (2002): 16.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*: 17.

<sup>35</sup> Schwedler, Jillian. "Islamic identity: myth, menace, or mobilizer?." *SAIS Review* 21, no. 2 (2001): 4.

much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories.”<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, reciprocally, Muslims have also contributed to the creation of a monotonous and unchanging voice of Islam. One reason for production and presentation of the monolithic Islamic identity lies behind its reactionary nature. Muslims had to shape a strong collective sense of Islamic identity as a form of resistance against the colonizing, exploitive, and dominative Western identity. As Nicola asserts, “The process of identity construction as a means of resistance to the West contains an anti-democratic logic. Cultural practices that seek to reproduce an essentialized and homogeneous national identity in contradistinction to the West necessarily entail the suppression of internal difference within the nation.”<sup>37</sup> As a result, the uniform Muslim identity could be understood as a defensive response from Muslim countries to the West. Therefore, it could be argued, “Islamic identity formation owes more to political and economic struggles than to some clash of civilizations.”<sup>38</sup> This idea is analogous to Ayoob’s point that “Many of these [Islamist] movements seek to challenge Western hegemony in international relations.”<sup>39</sup>

Islamist/secular identities take different shapes in different contexts: “What Islamic identity meant in Iranian 1978, for example, differs not only from what it meant in Bosnia in 1996 and in Afghanistan in 1999, but even within Iran at the time.”<sup>40</sup> Clifford Geertz has done one of the first anthropological studies on Muslims, presented in *Islam Observed*. He shows that the ‘meaning’ and ‘culture’ varies according to the context in the Muslim world.

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<sup>36</sup> Hall, Stuart. “Cultural identity and diaspora.” (1990): 225.

<sup>37</sup> Pratt, Nicola. “Identity, culture and democratization: the case of Egypt.” *New Political Science* 27, no. 1 (2005): 10.

<sup>38</sup> Schwedler, Jillian. “Islamic identity: myth, menace, or mobilizer?.” *SAIS Review* 21, no. 2 (2001): 9.

<sup>39</sup> Ayoob, Mohammed. “Political Islam: image and reality.” *World Policy Journal* (2004): 10.

<sup>40</sup> Schwedler, Jillian. “Islamic identity: myth, menace, or mobilizer?.” *SAIS Review* 21, no. 2 (2001): 4.

By focusing on Morocco and Indonesia, he argues “Moroccan Islam came to embody a marked strain of religious and moral perfectionism, a persisting determination to establish a purified, canonical, and completely uniform creed in this, on the face of it, unpromising setting” whereas Indonesian Islam, “did not even pretend to purity, it pretended to comprehensiveness; not to an intensity but a largeness of spirit.”<sup>41</sup>

While Geertz’s anthropological research on Muslims has been extremely influential on further studies on Muslims, other prominent theorists and scholars such as Abdul Hamid el-Zein and Talal Asad have criticized it. Ovamir Anjum explains, “While el-Zein accepts much of Geertz’s ideas, he sees that Geertz, too, was ultimately seduced by the idea of an essentialized universal Islam.”<sup>42</sup> It is true that Geertz distinguishes among different versions of Islam based on different contexts, but el-Zein claims “Each expression of Islam creates its own web of meaning, and any attempt at synthesis will throw ‘a web of frozen points of meaning’ over the otherwise fluid, dynamic web of meaning that the subject inhabits.”<sup>43</sup> In critique of el-Zein, Asad directed harsh criticism against the idea that “Islam was whatever one’s informants said that it was.”<sup>44</sup> Although Asad accounts for different versions of Muslims in different social and historical contexts, he refrains from accepting *all* self-claimed definitions of being a Muslim. Therefore, the questions on who can be considered a Muslim, and with what mechanism a self-identification of being Muslim can be legitimized are problematic.

However, it is empirically apparent that regardless the theoretical disputes on the Muslim identity, Muslims differ from each other not only in their beliefs, but also in social

<sup>41</sup> Geertz, Clifford. *Islam observed: Religious development in Morocco and Indonesia*. Vol. 37. University of Chicago Press, 1971: 16.

<sup>42</sup> Anjum, Ovamir. "Islam as a discursive tradition: Talal Asad and his interlocutors." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 3 (2007): 657.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*: 658.

<sup>44</sup> Soares, Benjamin, and Filippo Osella. "Islam, politics, anthropology." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. s1 (2009): S16.

practices: “Although many Muslims today are engaged in various kinds of ethical self-fashioning and concerned with the correct practice of Islam, this is only one part of what is effectively a new kind of sociality.”<sup>45</sup> Muslims sometimes internalize some non-Islamic and anti-Islamic acts as a part of their culture. These sort of activities, without being considered as a denial of the Muslim identity, usually bring about a sense of shame for ignoring the ‘God’s law’. At the same time, it transforms the individual from a ‘Good Muslim’ to a ‘Bad Muslim’. Soares provides a good example of these type of non-Islamic performances: “While young men give up drink, drugs, and other illicit activities during Ramadan, they often enough return to these pleasurable practices once the ‘holy month’ is over.”<sup>46</sup>

### 3.1.1 Post-Islamism

The variation among Muslim identities necessitates a variation in the social and political connotations of being a Muslim as well. According to Eickelman and Piscatori, Muslim politics “relate to a widely shared, although not doctrinally defined, tradition of ideas and practice.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore, since there is no concrete sociopolitical set of Islamic rules, aside from codes related to dress, penalties, food, drinks and some specific social practices, the ‘spirit of Islam’ can get infused in pragmatic politics and transform it as Islamic politics/Islamism. As a result, some scholars use the word post-Islamism to describe the contemporary Islamic social movements and groups to signify the modern character of these groups, as opposed to considering them as a revival of traditional Islam. Assef Bayat suggests that post-Islamism is a departure of Islamists from the *jihadi* and *Salafi* doctrines of Islam.<sup>48</sup> For him the term characterizes the Islamist turn from duties to rights, which points out to the modernization of the political life. He alludes to Iran’s post-war era, the emergence of al-

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid: S11.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid: S12.

<sup>47</sup> Eickelman, Dale F. and James Piscatori. *Muslim politics*. Princeton University Press, 2004: 4-5.

<sup>48</sup> Bayat, Asef. "What is post-islamism?." *ISIM Review* 16 (2005): 1.

Wasat party in Egypt in mid 1990s, and the rise of Islamic parties in Turkey, such as Refah party and AKP, as examples of how Islamism have lost its authoritative feature as a source of political legitimization.<sup>49</sup>

Other scholars, such as Olivier Roy, have emphasized on the privatization of Islam as opposed to Islamization of the state by the post-Islamist ideas and groups. Roy argues that since Islamists have failed to take the political power in most of the states, they have abandoned their more radical views and have adopted values such as human rights, though in a conservative perspective. In this understanding, post-Islamism is the result of the failure of Islamism.<sup>50</sup> However, many scholars find this claim premature. According to Nilufer Gole, “Instead of disappearing as a reference, Islam penetrates even more into the social fiber and imaginary, thereby raising new political questions, questions not addressed solely to Muslims but concerning the foundational principles of collective life in general.”<sup>51</sup> As a result, Islam has become intertwined with politics in a broader sense. Political Islam became more flexible in order to permeate into politics, and thereby gained the potential to give an Islamic tune to numerous types of beliefs, traditions, and practices, making it more proper to be used as a means of power.

### **3.2 Power, History, and Political Islam**

Talal Asad has criticized Geertz’s well-known definition of religion presented in *Religion as a Cultural System* for its rigid and ahistorical conception of religion. By a genealogical approach toward religion, he tries to point out how religious ideology is

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<sup>49</sup> Bayat, Asef. *Making Islam democratic: Social movements and the post-Islamist turn*. Stanford University Press, 2007: 10-11.

<sup>50</sup> Roy, Olivier. *The failure of political Islam*. Harvard University Press, 1994.

<sup>51</sup> Gole, Nilufer. "Islam in public: New visibilities and new imaginaries." *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 174.

constructed through power, by means of discourse, throughout its history. Asad opposes Geertz's notion, since "He [Geertz] seems to be arguing that religious belief stands independently of the worldly conditions which produce bafflement."<sup>52</sup> Contrary to Geertz's formulation in which the religious dispositions are induced by theology, as a set of objective beliefs (about a 'supreme power'), practices (its ordered 'worship'), and ethics (a code of conduct based on 'rewards and punishments after this life'), Asad argues that the dispositions "are primarily social and not metaphysical."<sup>53</sup>

Asad's main argument about religion is that "The authoritative status of concepts/discourses is dependent on the socially appropriate production of other discourses/activities; the two are intrinsically and not just temporally connected."<sup>54</sup> He questions the Marx's perception of religion; "As ideology that is, as a mode of consciousness which is other than consciousness of reality, external to the relations of production, producing no knowledge, but expressing at once the anguish of the oppressed and the cynicism of the oppressor."<sup>55</sup> For Asad, the social interactions and metaphysical dispositions are reciprocally dependent on each other. Religious beliefs are not only positioned as an unworldly state of mind, but are also constituted by the everyday life and the society. By a Foucauldian approach, Asad claims that this interconnection occurs by means of discourse. However, "Discourse involved in practice is not the same as that involved in speaking about practice,"<sup>56</sup> and therefore, history is the main factor to understand the formation of religions.

Asad asserts that theology tends to obscure the occurrence of events (i.e., utterances, practices, dispositions). Thus, an anthropological study of Islam should set aside the

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<sup>52</sup> Asad, Talal. "Anthropological conceptions of religion: reflections on Geertz." *Man* (1983): 247.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid: 241.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid: 240.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid: 247.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid: 243.

theological and ideological disputes on Islam and focus on the historical circumstances and the social connotations of events that give meaning to the Islamic dispositions. By departing from Geertz's understanding of culture as "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols;"<sup>57</sup> Asad defines political Islam as:

"A discursive tradition that connects variously with the formation of moral selves, the manipulation of populations (or resistance to it), and the production of appropriate knowledge ... An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present. Clearly, not everything Muslims say belongs to an Islamic discursive tradition. Nor is an Islamic tradition in this sense necessarily imitative of what was done in the past."<sup>58</sup>

Asad provides an appropriate theoretical framework for the study of Muslim identities. He reminds us that the religion is not only abused in politics in order to gain power, as the old cliché says, but it also shapes and is shaped by politics. In Asad's view, religion and power are historically intertwined at the sociological and political levels. Individuals' religious beliefs are socially conditioned by the social relations in which they were involved while growing up. The social activities one has been permitted, encouraged, or obliged to undertake are crucial in the formation of her religious dispositions.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, social and political interests play a huge role in production, persuasion, preservation, and propagation of religious beliefs.

The Islamist/secular identities, as with other religious identities and dispositions, are created by the means of social relations and historical circumstances. The formation and preservation of Islamist/secular beliefs are socially and historically connected to power struggles and dominative discourses. Nevertheless, the institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of theology and religious authorities induce particular forms of

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid: 238.

<sup>58</sup> Asad, Talal. *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*. Center for Contemporary Arab Studies Occasional Paper Series. Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1996: 7 and 14-15.

<sup>59</sup> Asad, Talal. "Anthropological conceptions of religion: reflections on Geertz." *Man* (1983): 240.



political beliefs and values, consequently affecting the political behavior and performances. But the processes in which the religious dispositions are conditioned and internalized are significantly constituted by both power and discourses. Therefore, any proper study of Islamist/secular identities should consider the discursive traditions in which the religious/non-religious/anti-religious ideas are being practiced.

### **3.3 The Misleading Logic of Identity**

It is very common to use the Islamic/secular identities as a framework to address the domestic conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in Turkey and Iran. The main idea is how people are divided in two or more groups and they confront each other to gain more power by achieving the state power. In the case of Turkey, it is assumed that there is a rise of Islamism by Refah Party and consequently AKP, that use a Islamic rhetoric to obtain the support and votes of the Islamic or conservative (which is called *Mohafezekar* in both Turkish and Persian) parts of the population. The opposition is introduced as consisting mainly of the secular anti-capitalist groups, concerned with the transformation of Turkey into an Islamic state by AKP. It is highly common to hear from anti-AKP activists that they do not want ‘another Iran in Turkey.’ In the case of Islamic Republic of Iran, there has been a self-claimed Islamic government after the Revolution in 1979, which tries to enact Islamic rules and values and preserve the Islamic character of the society. Similar to Turkey, the discourse of the political opposition is rife with secular and liberal terms, requiring the state to depart from the Islamic tradition and become more liberal, modern, and secular.

However, these formulations of Turkey and Iran’s politics are too simplistic. The attempt to assign Islamist and secular identities to individuals and subsequently political groups and trying to understand the highly complex politics by presenting the binary of Islamist/secular, overlooks the diversity among the political groups and their demands. It has

been discussed in the introduction section, by referring to the works of Michael Connolly and Talal Asad, that the Western demand from Islamic countries to become secular and break from the involvement of Islam in the public sphere relies on a flawed understanding of Islam that dismisses the Christian foundation of secularism as a political theory. However, in this section, it will be argued that employing not only the Islamist/secular identities, but also any sort of categorical identities, established in the literature of liberal identity politics, is reductionist and fails to grasp the heterogeneity of the concrete politics.

Social and cultural diversities have long been considered as big enemies to democracy. Robert Putnam has done a large research on forty American communities and inferred that the more racially diverse the society, the less degree of social trust that follows.<sup>60</sup> Many scholars have intuitively accepted this idea: “The notion that greater ethnic homogeneity facilitates democracy simply seems to make sense. Who doubts that maintaining popular rule is going to be easier in Poland and Slovenia than it is in Macedonia and Bulgaria?”<sup>61</sup> However, some academics, including Steven Fish, have opposed this notion arguing that the empirical data from around the world does not support Putnam’s theory. There is no negative correlation between diversity and democracy: “Yet closer inspection reveals surprisingly scanty evidence that diversity countervails open politics.”<sup>62</sup>

Regardless of the democratic consequences of the social and cultural diversities, the presumptions of this type of arguments are problematic. The identity politics framework assigns various identities to socially and culturally different groups and discusses whether the multiplicity of identities is helpful in a society. However, the question of what we mean by

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<sup>60</sup> Putnam, Robert D.. "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity And Community In The Twenty-first Century The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>61</sup> Fish, M. Steven, and Robin S. Brooks. "Does Diversity Hurt Democracy?." *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 1 (2004): 155.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid: 155.

identity has hardly been addressed sufficiently with a sociological account of how identities are constructed. There are different approaches that explain the creation of identities from social constructionist framework to post-modernist ones. This section would try to point out to some of the main arguments to show that the essentialist approach of cultural identities falls short to address the questions concerning diversity and heterogeneity.

### 3.3.1 Multiculturalism as the Hallmark of Liberal Identity Politics

Liberalism has presented multiculturalism as the solution for including diverse social and cultural identities. As Will Kymlicka explains, the idea of creating a civic nation as opposed to illiberal ethnic nations is at the heart of multiculturalism.<sup>63</sup> Minority groups are no more expected to be assimilated to the majority's existing cultural norms and to "become indistinguishable from native-born citizens in their speech, dress, leisure activities, cuisine, family size, identities, and so on."<sup>64</sup> Moreover, they are given more autonomy on the topics that distinguish them from other citizens. However, "we can see multiculturalism not as unfair privileges or invidious forms of discrimination, but as compensation for unfair disadvantages, and so as consistent with, and even required by, justice."<sup>65</sup> Multiculturalism, as the liberal prescription for dealing with various identities provides a good framework to criticize the logic of identities.

Hypothetically, let us imagine that China and India become one country and want to employ multiculturalism as a 'neutral system of governance' toward different identities. The fundamental premises of multiculturalism make the state obliged to identify highly heterogeneous people, holding different positions on various spectrums of identities, in fixed and preplanned 'Chinese' and 'Indian' groups. As a result, although multiculturalism claims

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<sup>63</sup> Kymlicka, Will. "Multiculturalism." In *Contemporary political philosophy: an introduction*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002: 345.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid: 354.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid: 365.

to unite people by giving a sense of collective identity to individuals, it ends up dividing people between different groups based on exactly the same identities that it has recognized. And in the long run, multiculturalism not only produces divisions, it reinforces the differences by treating groups differently in discourse and in practice.

One crucial question is why logic of identities finds some characteristics more relevant than the others to divide people. As it is suggested in the post-structuralist racial, feminist, and queer theory, people are not different merely on the topics of race, gender, and sexual orientation; rather, it is the *society* that gives salience to skin color, sex organs, and sexual practices. People are not objectively divided between the identities as it is suggested by multiculturalism; but it is the social practices that engender this categorization. What logic of identities does is to legitimize these dimensions as the valid axis of division. It could be questioned why it does not divide people based on their artistic taste or political attitudes. The salience of particular aspects of culture is completely arbitrary and determined by the society's tendencies. As a result, multiculturalism avoids the dynamic social interactions that can blur the fixed boundaries. If one accepts that one of the sources of social tensions is social division, multiculturalism is clearly a source of social conflict.

Multiculturalism proposes superficial differences and asks individuals to internalize the divisions. At the same time, it neglects the differences in one single unit by labeling all individuals with the same identity. People belonging to the same group are not only considered the same, but are also invited to promote a more homogenous society, centered on certain features, that identifies them as a specific culture. People also have good incentives to identify themselves by belonging to a certain group. As Jean Baudrillard argues "Identity is a dream that is pathetically absurd. You dream of being yourself when you have nothing better

to do. You dream of yourself and gaining recognition when you have lost all singularity.”<sup>66</sup>

After losing singularity, people need to classify themselves in narrower identity categories to become more distinct. More and more fake and arbitrary divisions are the clearest outcome of this process.

The process of division making is more significant in the Western countries’ multiculturalism. The outcome of multiculturalist policies has been the creation of “us” versus “them.” While the project of constructing “others” in the colonialism era was of an economic exploitative nature, this new form of otherness construction is to give meaning, significance, and identity to the conformist, homogenous, and aimless crowd. Iris Marion Young summarizes the postmodern critique of the logic of identity by referring to Theodor Adorno, Jacques Derrida, and Luce Irigaray:

“Any identifiable something presupposes a something else against which it stands as background, from which it is differentiated. No utterance can have meaning unless it stands out differentiated from another. Understood as different, entities, events, meanings, are neither identical nor opposed. They can be linked in certain respects, but similarity is never sameness, and the similar can be noticed only through difference. Difference, however, is not absolute otherness, a complete absence of relationship or shared attributes.”<sup>67</sup>

Multiculturalism uses the logic of identity to give meaning to individuals. People can identify themselves to be as something different from the other thing: “Without relations of difference, no representation could occur. But what is then constituted within representation is always open to being deferred, staggered, serialized.”<sup>68</sup> The different beings are only perceivable by the lack of similarity. Nonetheless, multiculturalism conceals the otherness principle under the self-contradictory neutral presumptions.

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<sup>66</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. *Impossible exchange*. Verso, 2001: 52.

<sup>67</sup> Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990: 98.

<sup>68</sup> Hall, Stuart. “Cultural identity and diaspora.” *Identity: Community, culture, difference* 2 (1990): 229.

Following the same argument, when it comes to Islamist and secular identities, the logic of dividing people into two categories is puzzling. The framework misrepresents the actual social and political interactions in two specific ways. First, it neglects the differences within one single unit of identities. It presents the members of one identity group as to be identical, holding the same beliefs and values, performing the same social actions, and practicing the same type of political discourse. The Islamist and secular identities represent individuals as one-dimensional social agents, who are differentiated from the ‘Other’ group, based on one specific aspect. Either they are in favor of employment of religion in politics, or they are against it. However, there are numerous social, economical, ideological, political, and cultural differences within one particular group that differentiates individuals, within one specific category. The political performances are not merely determined by the individuals’ ideas on either engagement or separation of religion and politics. For instance, an Islamist person might be in favor of neo-liberal economic policies, which distinguishes his political dispositions from another Islamist person who believes in socialism.

Second, the framework of Islamist versus secular identities overlooks the similarities between the two categories. It misrepresents the actual politics in the sense that it assumes the members of each identity group to be fundamentally different from the other one. Islamists and seculars, crudely speaking, disagree on the relation between politics and religion, specifically on Islamization or secularization of the society by the political institutions. However, it does not follow that the political dispositions that they hold are different in all aspects. Using the same example, an Islamist and a secular might agree on the neo-liberal or socialist economic policies of the state, which shapes their political actions and tendencies in similar ways. It can easily result in political accompaniment of two identity groups in politics, not necessarily as a matter of expediency, but as of political ideology. However, the logic of Islamist/secular identities produces and reinforces fake political disputes.

According to Asad, the Islamist and secular identities take different shapes and content by means of social interactions and discourses. The reductionist nature of the identity politics obscures the various forms of religious dispositions that could be constructed based on particular context and societies. While the Islamist and secular identities might have specific meanings in a certain society, it might vastly differ in the other one. As it would be argued in the rest of this research, this differentiation in meanings of the identities is highly significant in the context of Turkey and Iran.

### **3.4 A Summary of the Theoretical Framework**

To sum up the theoretical framework of this research, the conventional Islamist/secular identities as the structure of any comparative study on the Muslim countries fails to grasp the complexities of the relation between religious dispositions and political practices. First, it dismisses the ongoing assembly of power, discourse, history, and social context with the dynamic identity construction process. To assume the identities as universal, static, and ahistorical concepts that exist objectively out of human consciousness is a naïve perception of an intersubjective identification. Religious identities are collectively shaped by means of particular circumstances and are outcomes of social relations, rather than theology. The religious beliefs, practices, and ethical codes are dialectically in connection with the dominative discourses that interest certain power groups. Therefore, Islamist and secular identities could only be understood as a part of Islam as a discursive tradition, in which the ideas, dispositions, and practices are dynamically in relation with social and political interactions and interests.

Second, the logic of identities is misleading because it reduces the various types of the political connotations of religious/non-religious/anti-religious dispositions into two fixed binary categories. The categorization of identities in certain number of groups disregards the

disparities among individuals belonging to one single group and affinities among individuals identified by different groups. It scales down the actual sociopolitical interactions into identifiable objective categories that misrepresent the groups' political attitudes and interests. Identities are the unstable points of individuals' identification; however, they are unable to become the lingual or conceptual points of reference for multidimensional spectrums of political ideas and practices. While people's political attitudes are positioned in specific social contexts, the logic of identities symbolizes them as ahistorical and universal.



## Chapter 4 – Methodology

To present a comprehensive picture of the political aspects of the Muslim identities, it is necessary to understand the individuals through a bottom-up approach. To investigate how Muslims differ from each other and from non-Muslims, their own narratives are the best point of reference. To present a profound understanding of the Muslim identities, I chose in-depth semi-structured interviews with Muslims and tried to relate to their self-claimed identities. Islamist/secular identities, similar to other identities, are dynamic social positions, set with certain values, beliefs, and practices, held and performed by individuals' subjectivity. Therefore, the best way to understand the identities is to approach individuals' subjectivity by means of creating an intersubjective sphere in which the subject can identify herself. Since conversation is the only way of providing an intersubjective sphere, it follows that the researcher should make dialogue with the subjects as a conceptual bridge between the minds.

As identities are about the qualities of being/performing, I had to use a qualitative research method. The research does not aim to represent the quantity and percentage of certain religious identities among the population. The richness of responses that an interview allows was the main reason for the preference of semi-structured interviews over questionnaires. As Hilary Arksey and Peter Knight explain, in an interview “[there] can be a dialogue between researcher and informant, allowing nuances to be captured (especially where video recording is used) and for questions to be clarified and adapted, and new ones to be improvised.”<sup>69</sup> I used critical sampling to interview people from diverse groups to present a picture of the variations of Islamist/secular identities among the Muslims. By asking

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<sup>69</sup> Arksey, Hilary, and Peter T. Knight. *Interviewing for social scientists: An introductory resource with examples*. Sage, 1999: 34.

questions regarding the five preplanned political dimensions of the Muslim identity, I could realize how individuals posit themselves on different points of the Islamist/secular spectrums.

To understand the existing Muslim identities in Turkey and Iran, I chose to interview individuals, affiliated with different political groups. Both in Turkey and Iran, there are parties officially recognized by the government. However, while Turkey's politics is widely shaped by the party politics, Iran's politics is divided in two main groups, principlists and reformists, each consisting of various politically relative parties. For both countries, seven political activists from different groups were selected and interviewed. Regarding each country's sociopolitical issues, I tried to have one representative as a voice of each part of the disputes. While some of the interviewees were famous political figures, others were politically active by means of activities within the political groups or major political journals and websites.

Due to living in Iran for most of my life, the level of my familiarity with Iran's politics was not comparable to my knowledge of Turkey's politics. Therefore, I did a two-weeks fieldwork in Istanbul to have a first-hand experience of Turkey's social context, and to meet various political activists. I got involved in their everyday life and meetings. Since it was only one year after the Gezi Park Protest in 2013, the political mentality was highly influenced by the recent events. Since my visit was at the time of the first of May protests, the political groups, especially the leftist ones, were highly active, having regular meetings and discussions to arrange a big demonstration against AKP's government. The fieldwork provided the opportunity to do face-to-face interviews and hear about their political life, in addition to get responses regarding my interview questions. For Iran's part, the interviews were conducted by means of Skype and other video chat applications. Both in Turkey and Iran sections, the interviews were done in English whenever the interview felt comfortable

enough to speak in English. In other cases, we spoke in Turkish and Persian. In addition to the formal interviews, I took notes from the informal conversations I had with politically aware people I met in Istanbul, which were used in the analysis of the project.

For the interviews, before getting into the main questions, I followed Daphne Keats's structure for the opening phase, which includes establishing the credentials, introducing the methods to be used, and obtaining factual background data.<sup>70</sup> For the main body of the interview, I took Bruce Berg's advice to let my interviewee to elaborate on the questions that he finds more interesting.<sup>71</sup> It resulted in a more revealing narrative. As Adler suggests, once in a while, I reassured my interviewee about soundness of his thoughts by saying words like "interesting" or "right" and by nodding while he was talking.<sup>72</sup> I created a friendly atmosphere during the interviews by intentionally breaking some of the formal rules respected in an academic interview. It resulted in a more open discussion and prevented the reluctant respondent issue. I used a mixture of general, specific, and open-ended questions. Whenever I felt a clarification of the topic would be useful, I asked some probing questions. However, I tried to avoid putting words in my interviewees' mouth and manipulating their thoughts. I made sure they believe I have enough sympathy with their thoughts and am willing to hear about what they think.

The questions, listed on the Topic Guide in the Appendix II, were categorized into three sections. In the first part, the interviewees were requested to present their definition and ideas on the broad concept of being Muslim. They were asked not to get into the political parts of the Muslim identity and focus on whether they think there is only one true

<sup>70</sup> Keats, Daphne. *Interviewing: A practical guide for students and professionals*. UNSW Press, 1999: 48-49.

<sup>71</sup> Berg, Bruce Lawrence, and Howard Lune. *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Vol. 5. Boston: Pearson, 2004: 142.

<sup>72</sup> Adler, P. A. "Adler. P.(2002)'The reluctant respondent'." *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage: 528.

interpretation of Islam and Muslim identity, or they account for different versions. In the second part, the questions concentrated on the political connotations of being Muslim. They were asked whether based on their understanding of Islam, there is any particular way of political life prescribed by Islam. In addition, some questions pointed to the concrete examples of the dispute between Islamic and secular ways of governance. For example, they were asked if there should be any mandatory/elective Islamic course taught at schools, or whether there should be a television channel run by the extreme Islamists/seculars. In the last part, the questions were in regard to the actual politics in their country, demanding them to give their opinions on the relation of Islam and politics.

After the interview stage, I employed thematic analysis to make the dataset to ‘say something’ about the research question. The coding process and choosing the patterns were based on the five dimensions of Muslim identity about which the project aims to provide a comprehensive picture. Therefore, analysis method had a deductive approach, founding the themes on the theoretical framework and the literature review. I looked into the repeated themes or patterns and tried to classify the relevant narratives into the same categories. This method of analysis makes it possible to look into the relationships, similarities, contrasts, and overlying structure among the interviewees’ narratives. I could deeply focus on aspects of Muslim identity one by one and show how individuals’ narratives of their Muslim identity break through a binary of Islamist/secular and depict a multi-dimensional spectrum of religious identities.

#### ***4.1 A Response to Possible Methodological Critiques***

In this section, I want to address two main possible critiques of this research. One would be that my interviewees have a bias about my way of thinking about Islam because they see me as a “Westernized” researcher, doing my project for an English speaking

university. Therefore, they would provide me with more liberal/secular answers than what they actually believe. The reasons can be to lessen the tension during the interviews, or to satisfy my urge to be convinced by their answers. To avoid this methodological issue, I introduced myself with a vague reference to a period of my life in which I was a devoted and practicing Muslim. Though some of the interviewees knew about my political attitude by reading my articles online, I made them to feel my empathy for their religious ideas and values resulting in a more relaxed atmosphere for presenting/performing their beliefs.

However, there was another controlling factor during the interviews that could avoid such problem. Since both in Turkey and Iran religion is continuously highlighted in politics and both sides of the Islamist and secular disputes feel politically deprived, the interviewees considered the interviews as a stage to voice their demands and identities. Almost all of them felt very enthusiastic to present their ideas as an individual, representing a political group. In addition, about half of the interviewees were public figures that have previously expressed their thoughts on issues, similar to my questions. Therefore, it was almost impossible to get false image of the subjects' Muslim identity due to this bias.

Another critique might be that contrary to the Iran part, there is no extremely religious representative among the interviewees in Turkey. My response is that unlike Iran, in Turkey the institutionalized extremists are not a major side of the political disputes. The Islamic side of the Islamist/secular political clashes is mainly advocated by the AKP's supporters who are not necessarily radical Islamists. They do not belong to any institutionalized Islamic school, similar to the ones in Iran. Although the Islamic schools might support AKP's rule in Turkey, they are not shaping the main Islamic discourse supporting the political Islam. As it will be discussed in the next chapter, while the Islamist identity in Iran is highly institutional and essentialist, it centers on an infusion of an Islamic spirit into politics in Turkey.

## 4.2 A Theoretical Assessment of Dramaturgical Interviews

The interviews are conventionally considered to be a way to have an access to the opinions and ideas that are objectively *there*, in the subject's mind and could be extracted by a skilled researcher. This framework assumes a certain type of reasonability and consciousness in how people form and have access to their beliefs: People believe in certain beliefs and values because they find them justifiable. The conventional and epistemological understanding of knowledge defines it as 'justified true belief.' A person thinks, concludes, and believes in certain ideas and then it becomes a part of her mentality. In this formulation, the social atmosphere, the content of the education, and the culture that one is exposed to have effects on what one thinks, but they do not question the objective nature of the beliefs.

However, the structural-functionalist critique of this approach leads into a different conception of beliefs. Beliefs, ideas, and values are not necessarily consciously constituted by the objective reasonability; rather, the society's complex web of relations, value impositions, power relations, and social interactions make us believe in certain sort of ideas. In a more elaborated format, Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* presents a sociological framework in which people do not necessarily believe in certain ideas; rather, they perform certain performances associated with ideas.<sup>73</sup> These performances are socially conditioned and based on the particular setting that the subject is expected to act for. Therefore, he presents different types of behaviors considering the expectations, gazes, and values of the audience that he is acting for. This subjective account of beliefs, reject the idea of beliefs as a psychological state of mind; rather it emphasizes on the performances that are constantly practiced by the individuals, resulting in particular identities. In this framework, the social life is similar to a play, and the socialization process is to learn how to play the

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<sup>73</sup> Erving, Goffman. "The presentation of self in everyday life." *Garden City, NY: Anchor* (1959).

assigned roles in the company of others who are performing their roles in front of us.

Therefore, a social scientist should act as a dramaturge of this play.

This conception of beliefs, identities, and performances result in a new understanding of interviews as well. Bruce Berg gives a very good example of how the data collection perspective on interviews differs from the dramaturgical one. He suggests that if one is interested in how frequently a subject smokes marijuana, a questionnaire might suffice, but if one is interested in the sensation of marijuana smoking, “the emotion-laden sensory experience as perceived by the subject,” an open-ended interview might be more effective.<sup>74</sup> It is only possible to see the feelings that the subject associates with smoking marijuana in her performance while talking/thinking about the experience. In the same way, it is only feasible to perceive the sentiments that the interviewee attributes to certain religious values and beliefs, by looking into how she performs while talking about them. Positing the interview as simply a data collection instrument results in dismissing the degree to which a person agrees/disagrees with a certain position, his emotions toward it, his interpretation of the statements in different contexts, and the grounds for his analyses.

Goffman’s distinction between the back stage and the front stage is particularly useful to doubt the idea of interview as a robust method for data collection. In Goffman’s perspective, people’s individuality is not constituted by beliefs and opinions they hold as a psychological state of mind; rather it is constantly performed on the front stage, which has the society as its audience. Other people’s observations, expectations, and judgments shape the way that an individual acts and introduces herself to the society. On the other hand, an individual only returns to his other self in the back stage when there is no audience, no observant. Therefore, there is a significant relation between what someone presents as his

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<sup>74</sup> Berg, Bruce Lawrence, and Howard Lune. *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Vol. 5. Boston: Pearson, 2004: 100.

opinion and performs in the society with the social expectations, settings, and context of the society. In this framework, the interviewee does not present his already shaped ideas; rather, he co-performs and co-constructs certain views through his conversation with the interviewee. Therefore, creating a stage for the interviewee that would let him perform his ideas would bring about a closer understanding of his everyday life performances. The interview provides a setting in which the subject performs as, or at least close to what he performs in the everyday life.

Questioning the nature of the narratives as merely the means of transferring the meaning results in another method of interviewing named experience-centered approach. As Squire explains “the experience-centered approach assumes that sequential temporal orderings of human experience into narrative are not just characteristic of humans, but make us human.”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, there is no separation between the interviewee and the content of the interview. It is significant to note that this narrative-based approach differs from the Goffmanian performative-based approach in which individuals are identified with their performances rather than their narratives.

Interviewing individuals provides the chance to investigate not only the content of the transferred information, but also its format. As Squire explains “Researcher may look at hard-to-transcribe fragments, contradictions and gaps within narratives, as well as the words themselves; or at the paralinguistic of for instance tone, pauses and laughter *around* words.”<sup>76</sup> As it was suggested in the interviews on the emotions attached to marijuana experience, focusing on the form in which the ideas are presented by the interviewee’s narrative can

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<sup>75</sup> Squire, Corinne. "Experience-centred and culturally-oriented approaches to narrative." *Doing narrative research* 1 (2008): 43.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*: 43.



reveal data that could hardly be done by merely focusing on the content. Sometimes people say more in their pauses than they say in their dialogues.

These two criticisms against viewing interview as a robust way of obtaining data, result in a different understanding of interviews and various methods of conducting them. In addition, it influences the way the data should be analyzed and interpreted. Elements such as the way the interviewee performs, the notions on which he puts more emphasis, the ideas making him excited or frustrated during the conversation, and the type of discourse that he chooses to explain his thoughts are as critical as the apparent meaning of his statements. In the analysis part of the interview, I referred back to this understanding of interviews as co-construction and performance of identities.

## Chapter 5 - Findings and Analysis

### 5.1 The Interviewees

As it was mentioned in the Methodology part (Section 4), the interviewees were all political activists in Turkey and Iran. While some of them explicitly classified themselves as a member of a political party or a group, the others preferred to identify themselves with their political affiliations. To have a better presentation of the interviewees' narratives, I sorted them from extremely Islamist to extremely anti-Islamist. However, as it will be illustrated in the analysis part, the multi-dimensional character of the Muslim identity on different issues deformed the initial order. That is, for example, the first person that had a radical idea about the unity of Islam and politics in general, presented a moderate view on the question of political toleration. However, I preferred not to resort the order of the interviewees' narratives for each theme. The 'T' abbreviations refer to the interviewees in Turkey and the 'I's refer to the ones in Iran. Here is a short introduction about the interviewees of this research:

**Table 1 – Interviewees' Information**

Abbreviation	Interviewee's Name	Occupation and Activities
1T	Saim Kurubas	Saim works in a recently established Think Tank in Istanbul that publicly supports AKP.
1I	Zahra Abolhasani	Zahra got her PhD in science and technology policy making. She currently works in a conservative and pro-government research institute.
2T	Dilan Kupeli	Dilan is a Kurdish girl who votes for AKP. She is a veiled young girl.
2I	Hosein Mir	Hosein studies international relations and is also a student ( <i>Talabeh</i> ) in an institutionalized Islamic school.
3T	Nihat Hatipoglu	Nihat is a famous TV host in a religious show. His show has a lot of viewers and his ideas sometimes become controversial in Turkey. He's known as an AKP supporter.
3I	Taghi Rahmani	Taghi is one of the most well known political activists in Iran that has spent years in jail for his political view and activities. He is a member of an influential group named National-Religious ( <i>Melli-Mazhabi</i> ). The group is known for its Leftist view of politics and its modern understanding of Islam.
4T	Ihsan Eliacik	Ihsan is the main figure of a recently influential group called Anti-Capitalist Muslims that were extremely

		active during the Gezi Protests.
4I	Hesam Salamat	Hesam studied sociology and teaches in a social science institute. He frequently writes for some newspapers and online journals. He identifies himself as a secular social democrat.
5T	Ahmet Firat	Ahmet is a political activist in a socialist group. He considers himself as a conservative socialist Muslim against AKP.
5I	Farhad Jafari	Farhad is a famous novelist. He became a controversial political figure after his support for Ahmadinejad in the presidential election. He identifies himself as a secular-liberal who supports the “American system of politics.”
6T	Mustafa Polat	Mustafa is Kurdish and has been in jail for his pro-Kurdish rights activities. He was banned from going to university for a while.
6I	Tirdad Bonakdar	Tirdad has studied political science. He frequently writes for newspapers and political websites. He is a secular nationalist.
7T	Zeynep Altioek	Zeynep is a member of Turkey’s parliament. She is also the vice president of the CHP party in the Istanbul branch.
7I	Banafsheh Ranji	Banafsheh has studied Media and Global Communication abroad. She works for a newspaper close to the Reformists in Iran.

I used thematic analysis in order to answer to the main research question that is “what is it to be politically Muslim.” I categorized the transcribed version of the interviews in six tables. Each table focuses on one particular theme based on one of the dimensions of the Islamic identity, presented in the ‘Research Question’ section. In tables, presented in the Appendix I, I cited the most important parts of the transcriptions as ‘Data Extracts’. By reflecting on each extract and comparing them to the other interviewees’ narratives, I can depict the heterogeneity of the Muslim identity in Turkey and Iran. I would employ the theoretical framework of the research to understand how the empirical findings can help us to have a contextualized and dynamic conception of individuals’ politico-religious identity. The main references of my arguments are underlined in the extract parts in order to make it easier to follow the analyses.

## **5.2 Muslim Identity's Dimensions**

### **5.2.1 The Non-Political Characteristics of Muslim Identity**

In the first part of the interviews, as explained in the Topic Guide, I asked them to put the political concerns aside for a while, and think of their perception of the non-political aspects of their Muslim identity. Since all the interviewees were constantly engaged with the political conversation in their everyday life, I needed to emphasize that they should distance themselves from the political issues in their country, and leave it to the second part, which was on the political connotations of being a Muslim. However, while co-constructing their narrative of the non-political identification, some found it inevitable to refer to the political aspects, suggesting the firm association of Islam and politics in their conception of Muslim identity. The data extracts can be found on Table 2 in Appendix I.

The first obvious observation was the fact that while the supporters of the Islamic government of Iran (1I and 2I) refer to the political aspects of their understanding of Islam, the supporters of the so-called Islamic government in Turkey narrate their understanding of Islam regardless of its political meanings. Islamists in Iran see the political reading of Islam, advocated by the institutionalized Shiite sect, necessary to define the Muslim identity. In order to define what is it to be a Muslim, 1I puts the obedience to the religious and political leader in the same level as conformity to the Quran's rules. As noticeable in the next table, she even sets a priority for the Valie's (Religious leader) rule before Quran's rules. Similarly, 2I thinks that the religion's main responsibility is to give guidance on the worldly matters rather than on spiritual and moral issues. This conception provides the grounds for an Islamic state as explained in the following parts. On the other hand, the supporters of AKP in Turkey (1T, 2T, and 3T) all exclude the political aspects of their understanding of Islam when they define their Muslim identity. "Belief/faith in God, the Prophet and Quran," are the keywords

of the AKP supporters' definition of Muslim identity that suggests the detachability of the Muslim identity from the political identity for the Islamists in Turkey.

However, it was not only the Islamists who mentioned the political aspects of the Muslim identity. The extreme cases of anti-Islamist “non-believers” (6I, 7I, 6T, 7T) also referred to the political incentives for someone's Islamic self-identification. 7T claimed that to question people's Islamic beliefs have political reasons in Turkey. 6T argued that Islam is not only a religious phenomenon in Turkey; and it also has social and political aspects. Similarly in Iran, 6I (See Table 3) and 7I said that although the Muslim identity can be defined only in a religious framework, people get benefits from adapting themselves to new versions of Islam, which is different from the ‘real Islam.’

The interesting point about these four cases is that they are all the examples of individuals who are being suppressed in various ways by Islamic authorities: a Kurdish person in Turkey who had been jailed for fighting for Kurdish rights, a Republican whose long-lasting government was overthrown by AKP, a secular nationalist “deprived from political activity due to the Islamic nature of the government,” and a non-religious modern girl who feels obliged to abide to the coercive rules in Iran. While the extreme cases from the both sides show impressions about the unity of Islam and politics, the moderate ones can address the non-political aspects of the Muslim identity more easily.

It was also revealing to see the fact that in order to define the Muslim identity, the interviewees named the central concepts of their political affiliations among the other basic terms that are generally used for the definition of being a Muslim. “Equality,” “peace,” and “human intellect” were the keywords that, respectively, a socialist Muslim, a peace-seeking Muslim, and a liberal Muslim used in their narratives about Muslim identity. Most importantly, 4T and 3I who are both under the influence of the teachings of Ali Shariati, an

influential Muslim thinker, repeatedly emphasized the significance of ‘equality’ in Islamic thoughts.

The same mechanism can be seen in the Islamist cases that focus on the social and political aspects of Islam in order to justify their political agenda. As it will be shown in the Table 6, the Islamist supporter (1T) of AKP, known for its neo-liberal policies, believes that “Islam protects capitalism”, that again, reminds one of the connection of one’s political agenda and his conception of Islam. In conclusion, the main point is the fact that one’s definition of Muslim identity and his political affiliations have a reciprocal connection in all cases. Whether their reading of Islam is consciously modified to justify their political attitude or their political agenda affects their interpretation of Islam, the sociopolitical and contextualized characteristics of the Muslim identity can easily be tracked.

### **5.2.2. The Recognition of Other Types of Being Muslim**

In the next question, the interviewees were asked whether they think there is only one true interpretation of Islam. As it can be seen in the extracts presented in Table 3, aside from a few extreme cases on both sides, most of the interviewees believe that there is no obvious boundary classifying the Muslim-born individuals into the categories of Muslim and non-Muslim, true Muslim and fake Muslim. Some stated that they do not see themselves in a position to determine who is Muslim and who is not. However, the common idea of ‘Good Muslim’ versus ‘Bad Muslim’ is common among the interviewees. They believe certain non-Islamic or anti-Islamic acts do not necessarily deny one’s Muslim identity. The Muslim character is a broad concept and takes diverse forms to different extents.

In the comparison of Turkey and Iran, the Islamists of Turkey were less reluctant to endorse the other institutionalized Islamic sects as true Islam. Iranian Islamists were more assertive about their own conception of Islam as the only true version. In a very radical

response, 2I even thinks of the Sunnis Caliphate as the source of corruption in the history of Islam. The defensive quality of Shiite Islam can be traced back to the mainstream Shiite narrative of Islam in which the Shiite Imams were always distressed and deprived of their legitimate right to rule the nation by the caliphates. The rejection of other sects of Islam is quite common among extremist official Shiite authorities. The recognition of individuals by other Muslims as ‘real/true Muslims’ relates to the questions on the level of toleration and the willingness to have an Islamic block in world politics, which will both be addressed in the rest of the analysis.

### **5.2.3 The Political Connotations of Muslim Identity**

To answer to the main question of the research on the political connotations of the Muslim identity, the interviewees were asked personalized questions based on their previous responses. I mainly tried to investigate on how they see the relation between their Muslim identity and political identity. In other words, whether they think their religious/non-religious dispositions necessitate any sort of political attitude or behavior. Another question was on how they think the state should deal with the disputes between Islamist and secular demands in the society. This was to examine their conception of democracy and whether they prescribe it as the legal mechanism. The data extracts can be seen in Table 4.

There is a very crucial point of dispute on whether or not Islam has any political prescription for our social life today. While the Islamist believe that Islam and politics are not two separate phenomena at all, the seculars and non-believers hold that there is no certain set of ideas that could be extracted from Islam and be applied to the modern life. While some believed that Islam and politics have two separate domains, the others pointed out to different necessities of the societies today compared to that of the prophet’s time. The religious intellectualism representatives (4T, 3I) were concerned with the project of modernization of

Islam and presenting a version of Islam that is consistent with human rights. They rejected the Islamists claims on a fixed political requirement by Islam and indicated a dynamic and anti-essentialist reading of Islam.

The Islamists provided two arguments in order to account for the Islamic state. One was to refer to the time of the prophet and claim that with the same reasons that the prophet established a government; we need to have an Islamic government: “The tradition and life of the Prophet give a model to Muslims, in which the politics and religion are entangled.” The second argument asserts that Islam has a significant amount of social and political rules and in order to preserve and practice them in the society; there is a need for an Islamic state. In this sense, the Islamic state is the safeguard of the Islamic rules.

However, these arguments face responses by the secular interviewees. In response to the first one, 5I says, “But Islamists claim that the Prophet was the only prophet that created a government. My response is that before his prophecy there was no integrated government in the region, therefore he wanted to make a central government, on top of his prophecy’s responsibilities. So we can’t say making the government was a part of his prophecy.” In response to the second argument, a socialist secular (4I) says, “Therefore it could be argued that we can have a secular and neutral government and [at the same time] Muslims can adjust their Islamic life in the private sphere.” He believes that since Muslims are able to adjust their Islamic life in the private sphere on their own, there is no need for the central power to enact the religious laws. Although the narratives are clearly in opposition with each other, this sociological and descriptive study is not concerned with the theoretical accuracy of each argument. Nevertheless, this debate discloses the diversity of the starting points of Muslims’ conception about their religion, resulting in various sorts of Muslim identities.



Another heterogeneous aspect of the Muslim identity pertains to the legal mechanism that Muslims prescribe to deal with the Islamist versus secular demands. One of the Turkish Islamists (1T) rejects the Western notion of democracy and claims that he will be bound to the religious leader regardless of his popular support. The Iranian Islamists believe the legitimacy of the government comes from God rather than from people, even though they accept a role for people in establishing the Islamic state. Therefore, the popular support is a condition for the Islamic rule. Except for the radical Islamists, all other interviewees accept the mechanism of majority rule to decide on controversial issues. As a probing question, I asked them to imagine that a so-called radical Islamic rule such as cutting the hands of thieves, regardless of whether it is actually an “Islamic law,” gains the majority’s support. I required them to take a stance and say whether they would accept this law. The answers ranged from accepting the legality of the law and proposing cultural education and social resistance to reverse it (4T, 7T, 3I, 4I, 5I, 7I), to suggesting a Supreme National Court to veto the radical Islamist rules (5I, 6I). Nonetheless, it could be simply observed how all Muslims have internalized certain level of democracy on their political views.

One crucial point to be considered in interpreting the data is to note the performative character of Muslim identity. Muslims are not all philosophers or social scientists to be able to present a consistent and elaborated set of ideas to justify their beliefs. For example a secular but practicing Muslim (5T) states:

“The hands of the thief are cut under Sharia but under democracy, they have cases to punish. I cannot say that Islam is not democratic. What I say is, Islam should not intervene in politics. Islam does not have political discourse. Well, in fact, it has some but they are all Fiqh. So they are more scientific discourses.”

Clearly, this statement is not convincing regarding why Islam’s political laws should not be enacted in the society. In addition, it is not clear why a “scientific discourse” is not capable to

be used as the basis of a legal system. However, this narrative reveals that Muslim identities are not necessarily performed consciously, under the full control of the social agent.

The same idea applies to some other narratives that present, to some extent, an irrelevant response to the question. For example a peace-seeking devoted Muslim (3T) who is primarily concerned with presenting a peaceful picture of Islam to me, a student studying in the West, forms his responses centering on a rejection of the mainstream understanding of Islam as violent and brutal. Similarly, the Kurdish respondent (6T) who has suffered for a long time from the Republic's aggressive policies against the Kurdish people, points out the non-neutral features of the Turkey's secular system on the Kurdish issues. It can be argued that people are concerned with their own everyday issues rather than grand theoretical questions regarding the relation between Islam and politics. Therefore, their political identity is mainly *conditioned* within the necessities of the sociopolitical context they live in, and not necessarily by a theological formulation of religion. As it has been presented in the theoretical part of the project and will be discussed more in detail in the conclusion part, the interviewees' narratives confirm that the religious and political dispositions are mainly formed by the social interactions, dominating discourses, and power interests, rather than by a theological inducement.

#### **5.2.4 Muslims' Level of Political Toleration**

Islamists and seculars have a lot of topics about which to disagree. In addition to women's rights, there are some highlighted subjects that are familiar to a Westerner mind as well. Having mandatory/elective Islamic courses at schools, disputes on LGBT issues and rights, mandatory veiling, and the limits of a private TV channel run by the extremists (Radical Islamists and radical Atheists) are among the topics that have been frequently addressed in the intellectual talks on the Middle East. I asked the interviewees some

questions regarding these topics in order to examine to what extent the Muslims tolerate the opposing ideas in a political sphere. Data Extracts are presented in Table 5.

The most diverse responses were given in this part. As expected, the level of toleration among the extremists of the both sides, Islamists and anti-Islamist were significantly lower than the moderate seculars or non-believers. Islamists stated that they do not tolerate the Atheist, and in cases secular activities for two main reasons. One was the negation of the God's rule, and the other was the misleading character of them for the public. For example, on the question of whether they think there can be an uncontrolled TV channel run by the seculars, they said it is fine only as long as the Islamic ideas can also be presented. Their ideal TV show was a debate in which an Islamist could challenge the secular ideas. But it should be under the control of the Islamists.

There is a meaningful difference in the political demands of the Islamists in Turkey and Iran. For example, a Turkish Islamist would not ask for a ban on alcohol consumption in general; and all he is concerned with is the alcohol consumption in public. However, the ban on alcohol in Iran is a very ordinary law that does not make an Iranian Islamist to even consider it as a demand. (1T, 2T, 1I, 2I) Similarly on the veiling issue, while a Turkish Islamist woman would ask for the freedom of dress to be able to wear headscarves at schools and governmental offices, an Iranian Islamist woman defends the compulsory veiling even for non-Muslim women. Nevertheless, both sides endorse coercion to different extents to enact the Islamic laws. In addition, a legal system based on Sharia law was one of the central demands of the Islamists in both countries. The idea of legally recognizing LGBT people was too far away from their horizon to be even asked. They have already responded in a way that it could be disturbing to ask questions on LGBT groups. Finally, the Islamists were all in favor of mandatory religious courses at schools that makes the study of Islam mandatory

even for non-believers. The proposed compulsion can be count as intolerance toward non-believers' right to choose what they want to study at schools.

The other side of the spectrum's ideas included some indicators of intolerance as well. Opposition to elective religious courses at schools (7T, 7I) was one of the subjects that differentiated the radical seculars from the moderate ones. More significantly, some opposed the freedom of dressing of Muslims in the public. The CHP member of the Turkey's parliament (7T) explicitly stated that she wants a ban on veiling in the public. Likewise, the nationalist secular Iranian activist said that Chadors (a large piece of cloth that covers almost all parts of the body except the face) should be prohibited. Therefore, it is not only the radical Islamists that require the state to engage with the religious issues. The radical seculars also have their secular demands and request the state to be non-neutral toward public disputes.

Aside from the extremist cases, the others were all tolerant with the other people's freedom to practice their beliefs. They all allowed elective religious courses at schools and TV channels for Islamists as long as they do not advertise violence. The interviewees believed that there is nothing wrong with promoting an idea unless there is a compulsion factor in it. It was remarkable to see a devoted Muslim (4I) being fine with having LGBT TV shows, or a liberal secular (5I) accepting the radical Islamists hosting TV shows. However, the level of toleration among the interviewees on different issues was not in the same order as I sorted them in the table. This indicates that there is not necessarily a correlation between one's devotedness to Islam and her level of toleration.

### **5.2.5. The Will to Have an International Islamic Union**

Are Muslims really different? To answer to this question I asked Muslims to assess whether they think the Muslim identity is different from the European identity. Next, I inquired about their impression on a union of Islamic countries based on the similarities and

mutual interest. The responses were quite different from the mainstream Western conception of Muslims as the ‘Others.’ Some extracts can be seen in Table 6.

Almost all the interviewees rejected the binary of Muslim and European identities. Some of them used the case of European Muslims to deconstruct the dichotomous categories. The narratives that insisted on an essential difference between being Muslim and European emphasized on the ideas that are supposed to be important for a Muslim and not for a European. However, they did not claim that those ideas are actually internalized by Muslims and they behave or believe in a certain way: “A Muslim should be different from a Westerner, but whether they are different, I don’t know! Cause a Muslim has some frameworks, which makes him different from one that doesn’t have it.” (2I)

On the question of the Islamic union consisted of the Muslim majority countries, besides only one identity-based/expressive response (1I), all the other respondents stated that the foreign relations must be based on the ‘interests and benefits’ rather than on Islamic identities. However, there were two critical responses that need further attention. Although the Kurdish (6T) and the ‘anti-capitalist Muslim’ (4T) respondents expressed their resentment toward Islamism, they were both in favor of the idea of an Islamic block. However, as it could be seen in their narratives, they were not concerned with empowering the Muslim identity; rather, they wanted to reverse the hegemonic domination of the West and capitalism over the world. Their Leftist, anti-neo-liberalist and anti-imperialist agenda perceives the Muslim block as an opportunity to resist the colonizing power of the Western countries. These narratives are in line with the reactionary characteristic of the Islamist movements that has been discussed in the theoretical framework.

### 5.3 A Discourse Analysis on Muslims' Narrative of Politics

After capturing the various aspects of the Muslim identity, I turned to the actual politics in Turkey and Iran to see how my interviewees' experienced-centered narrative would explain the political context of the countries. While each narrative has a lot to say about the political situation in Turkey and Iran, I put my attention on the common discourse that was mainly centered on political interests rather than religious disputes. The focus of the narratives were generally based on 'power', 'interest', 'benefit', and 'expediency' rather than 'religious dispositions', 'distinct interpretations of Islam', or 'Islamist vs. secular' struggles. There is a selection of these narratives presented in Table 7.

As it can be observed, from a radical Islamist to a radical secular, all interviewees see the political role of Islamist/secular identities in the framework of power relations. They all recognize the way in which holding certain Muslim identity would benefit or hurt someone's power status. Reviewing some extracts would be helpful:

- AKP makes a sense of empowerment. (1T)
- I think Islam endorses some of the benefits that one gets by being a Muslim. (1I)
- It's beneficial for people to show that they are Muslim. Religious people can get employed better under AKP rule. (2T)
- One want to gain power so he talks about people's freedom, the other want to get the power so he talks about the people's other world... Men like power and in accordance to that their values and beliefs get changed. (2I)
- The dispute between reformists and principlists is founded on both religious interpretations and interests. (3I)
- AKP uses symbols of Islam only for getting votes. (4T)
- They [two major political groups in Iran] might have different understandings of Islam, but they are two different political groups with irreconcilable political and economic interests. (4I)
- They [AKP] only use religion to win the political power. (5T)
- The difference [between two major political groups in Iran] is economical. (5I)
- AKP is only Islamic at discourse level. Of course there are people that are candid about their religious beliefs, but it's just a tool that is used by the AKP regime... At the time of AKP Muslims care more about money. "AKP is Calvinist." (6T)
- It [the dispute between political groups] has more apparent roots in their interests and benefits. (6I)
- Religion is used by people that I believe are non-believers, but introduce themselves as believer; they use it as a tool. (7T)

- I think there might be benefits in Iran to be a Muslim. Tranquility is an opportunity in life that you lose if you're not a Muslim. (71)

Remembering Asad's critique of Geertz's conception of religious dispositions, it can be easily tracked in the narratives how the religious identities are in a reciprocal connection with power relations. As Squire suggests on the experience-centered narratives, "Humans are imbricated in narratives."<sup>77</sup> The interviewee's personality, character, views, and beliefs are the same as the narratives that he identifies himself with. Therefore it could be argued that the experience-centered narratives of political activists in Turkey and Iran, speaks about not only the political situation there, but also about their own political identity. The apparent conclusion would be that my interviewees' political identity is highly affected by the power struggles and elements of domination and subordination.

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<sup>77</sup> Squire, Corinne. "Experience-centred and culturally-oriented approaches to narrative." *Doing narrative research* 1 (2008): 43.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion

### 6.1 Islamic Identities as a Heterogeneous Set of Positionings

In this part, I will try to read the analyses presented in the previous section in the light of the theoretical framework. In order to study the Muslim identities in Turkey and Iran, it should be clarified that the term ‘secular’ has different sociopolitical connotations in these two countries. As Gole points out, “The Turkish political concept laiklik is closer to the French word ‘laïcité’ than it is to the word ‘secularism.’”<sup>78</sup> The reason is that “Rather than Anglo-Saxon liberalism, French Jacobinism, with its highly centralized model of change, became the prototype for reform of Turkish modernists.”<sup>79</sup> Therefore, while secularism in Iran implies the separation of religion and politics, in Turkey it entails the exclusion of religion from politics. In other words, the term is used in Iran to demand a neutral government on religious issues, but in Turkey it is used for a claim to eliminate religion from politics. Therefore, it could be claimed that secularism in Iran has a more liberal implication than in Turkey. A very good framework for understanding the difference between the Turkish and Iranian secularism is to refer to the differences between the French and American ones.

In addition to the historical reasons for this distinction, the current political situation also affects the meaning of the word ‘secularism’. Nikkie Keddie claims that the Islamic Revolution cannot be considered as a religious one. She states that it was not a return to traditional Islamic discourses; contrary, it has retained many secular features of the past. In this sense, the post-revolution period in Iran was more pragmatic than ideological. Gradually, the government realized the necessity of dismissing some fundamental aspects of

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<sup>78</sup> Göle, Nilüfer. "Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The making of elites and counter-elites." *The Middle East Journal* (1997): 48.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid: 48.



conservative Islamic rules in order to strengthen the state.<sup>80</sup> The priority of preserving the Islamic Republic of Iran over the practice of Islamic laws is an explicit notion that has been repeated several times by the religious authorities. A good example would be Khomeini's decree in which he stated that even Quranic rules like prayer could be subordinated to governmental expediencies.

However, since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Islamization of the politics has happened through exclusion of the "non-Islamic" political groups. The history of the Islamic Republic has been marked by refusing democratic demands for their non-Islamic nature. The secular reformists have always faced political obstacles created by the government with a reference to the firm interconnection of Islam and politics. In this sense, all formal politics in Iran take place within an Islamic framework. However, it does not follow that all politics in Iran have an Islamic character; it only means that anti-Islamic appeals get easily blocked. The priority of expediency over religious rules does not allow any anti-Islamic demand. Therefore, seculars in Iran cannot claim to politics out of the Islamic framework.

On the other hand, Turkey has a long history of Republicanism and the authority of seculars has just recently been challenged by the rise of AKP's power. The political disputes in Turkey are always maintained by both Islamic and non-Islamic sides. As Gole argues, "There is a potential conflict of interest between democracy and secularism."<sup>81</sup> Consequently, in Turkey, the idea of secularism/*laicite* is a tool to power and it bears an anti-AKP nature. Since, contrary to Iran, an appeal to politics outside of the Islamic discourse is possible by the AKP's opposition, the secular demands are more radical compared to the ones in Iran. At the

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<sup>80</sup> Keddie, Nikki R. "Secularism and the state: towards clarity and global comparison." *New Left Review* 226 (1997): 24.

<sup>81</sup> Göle, Nilüfer. "Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The making of elites and counter-elites." *The Middle East Journal* (1997): 48.

same time, Turkish Islamists' political requests are less extreme compared to the ones in Iran. As it has been suggested as an example in section 5.2.4, while an Islamist in Turkey might pursue a ban on alcohol consumption in public, and Iranian Islamist has already achieved a legal ban on any alcohol production and consumption even for non-practicing Muslims. All these differences can account for diverse faces of Muslim identity in different political contexts.

As presented in section 5.2.1, Muslim identity also takes different shapes outside of the political sphere. When asked for presenting their thoughts on the non-political features of the Muslim identity, it was unimaginable for Iranian Islamists to separate Islam from politics. However, the Turkish Islamists could easily address their understanding of Islam without any reference to politics. For an Iranian radical Islamist, the authority of the Supreme Jurist (*Valie Faqih*) might even supersede the authority of Quran. However, Islam is not as institutionalized in Turkey as it is in Iran. Although the spirit of Islam can easily get infused in the political demands and behaviors in Turkey, as it is suggested in the Post-Islamism section (Section 3.1.1), there is no fixed and essential doctrine of a politicized Islam to the same extent available in Iran.

The essentialist and institutionalized understanding of Islam in Iran was also shown in section 5.2.2, where the interviewees were asked whether they endorse different interpretations of Islam. It was clear that Iranian Islamists had a more rigid understanding of a 'True Islam' that is distinct from the other 'worldly versions.' Although the Turkish Islamists did not necessarily express a more moderate version of political Islam, they did not base their understanding on a well-defined and articulated formulation of Islam. Presenting a fixed and absolute image of Islam is also in line with Soares's and Osella's idea on how

presenting a “unitary, timeless, and unchanging”<sup>82</sup> view of Islam by Muslims to Westerners has reinforced the reified picture of Islam as an essential phenomenon, incapable of adaptation to the modern time.

The diversity among Muslim identities is not merely limited to the differences between the Islamists in Turkey and Iran. On various issues, Muslims positioned themselves on different points of the Islamist-secular spectrum. The clear variation among Muslims’ views was already presented in the ‘Findings and Analysis’ section. Reviewing the findings of this research in the perspective of the critique of the ‘Misleading Logic of Identity’ presented in section 3.3 reconfirms the extent to which the Islamist/secular framework is reductionist to present a comprehensive picture of the Muslim identities. As it could be seen on the five dimensions of the Muslim identity, the narratives of Muslim identity could not be categorized in fixed binary groups. Even the terms ‘Iranian Islamist’ or ‘Turkish secular’ dismiss the differences in various identity aspects of members in each group. As it was argued in the theoretical part, the logic of identity overlooks the differences in one unit of identity and ignores the similarities among the members of different groups. The logic is reductionist in the sense that it asks us to disregard the multi-dimensional character of religious and political identities and to assume that Muslims are only differentiated based on their belief in the broad concept of Islamic state. But as this research shows, corresponding to the theoretical framework, Muslims identify themselves in a heterogeneous set of positionings.

It is interesting to note that even the most extreme cases of Islamism have internalized a certain extent of democratic attitude. In defense of the Islamic government of Iran, one of the Islamists called it the “most democratic government in the world,” since she believes that

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<sup>82</sup> Soares, Benjamin, and Filippo Osella. "Islam, politics, anthropology." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. s1 (2009): S2.

the Islamic government will disappear as soon as people do not want it. Other narratives of the Muslim identity also depicted a high level of belief in democratic mechanisms in order to govern the society. As a result, the findings of this research falsify the equation of Islamism with fundamentalism. Another remarkable observation was that the non-tolerant attitudes among the Muslims are not only limited to the Islamists. The radical seculars/non-believers also expressed their demands on a ban on certain religious acts such as veiling, teaching religious courses at schools, and allowing Islamists to have TV programs. Therefore, it could be argued that there is nothing unique about Islamic identities to make them intolerant to contrasting practices and beliefs.

## **6.2 Power Struggles Masked Behind Identities**

It has been suggested by a reference to Nicola, Falk, Schwedler, and Ayoob that the formation of the Islamic movements is mostly in order to challenge the Western hegemony in international relations, rather than a revival of an Islamic nostalgia (Sections 2.1 and 3.1). Although almost all the interviewees rejected the dichotomy of Muslim and European identities, there were supporters of the establishment of an international Islamic union, surprisingly even among the non-believers. The socialist and anti-neoliberal attitudes of some of the interviewees sought the Islamic union not for its expressive function, but as an instrument to reverse the Western and capitalistic hegemony. Islamism, similar to any other political concept, has been produced and used as a means of attaining political benefit. However, the decline of the world power system is only one of the power functions of Islamism.

The reciprocal relation between power and Muslim identity could be also seen in the Muslims' narratives of their definition of Islam. In section 5.2.1, it was pointed out how Muslims' definition of the non-political aspects of Islam is interconnected with their political

agenda. Muslims see the basic defining concepts of their political attitudes as a part of the foundations of Islam. As it was suggested, “equality,” “peace,” and “human intellect” were the keywords that, respectively, a socialist Muslim, a peace-seeking Muslim, and a liberal Muslim presented as one of the central determinative aspects of Islam. In addition, there was no meaningful relation between the interviewees’ definition of Islam and their political identity. The responses on the question whether they think Islam prescribes any sort of political identity were mostly based on their political agenda rather than on their religious understanding of Islam.

Consequently, it could be claimed that the power position and the political identity that one holds is highly correlated with her religious identity. As Asad’s conception of religion suggests (Section 3.2), the religious dispositions are not detachable from one’s political life experience as Marx might advocate. The social relations and the power struggles that one is involved in, shapes (/and is shaped by) the religious identity that one holds. As a result, the formation of different sorts of Islamic identities is highly related to the power struggles within the society, rather than different interpretations of Islam: “Theological discourse does not necessarily induce religious dispositions ... The connexion between religious theory and practice is fundamentally a matter of power.”<sup>83</sup>

The discourse analysis on interviewees’ experience-centered narratives of politics in their countries could also be understood by Asad’s sociological perception of religion (Section 5.3). My interviewees all viewed the political disputes in their countries more in the framework of political and economic interests rather than based on different interpretations of Islam. Therefore, the clashes between the Islamist and secular identities in Turkey and Iran

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<sup>83</sup> Asad, Talal. "Anthropological conceptions of religion: reflections on Geertz." *Man* (1983): 243 and 246.

were seen to be rooted in power games before being originated from Islamic commitments of devoted Muslims. The Islamic character of political Islam in Turkey and Iran is more of an expressive nature rather than an instrumental one.

People are not social theorists to consciously formulate their theoretical conceptions of Islam and politics. As it was claimed earlier on the performative nature of the interviewees' narratives (Section 5.2.3), Muslims present their ideas conditioned by their everyday life practices and necessities. The theological discourse only gets internalized in one's identity by means of social relations, power struggles, and discursive interactions. As Hall argues, "Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*."<sup>84</sup> Therefore, various types of multidimensional Muslim identities, including the Islamist/secular ones, are the dynamic points on which individuals' set of beliefs, values, and performances are positioned. Accordingly, Muslim identities are the points of reference for positioned power relations, which get heterogeneous shapes based on different social and political contexts.

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<sup>84</sup> Hall, Stuart. "Cultural identity and diaspora." (1990): 226.

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## Appendix I – Data Extracts

**Table 2 - On what is it to be a Muslim**

Respondent Number	Data Extract
1T	<p>Muslim should practice the orders sent by Allah, told by our prophet. To accept all the orders is what a Muslim should do. To believe in Quran and the prophet.</p> <p>Brotherhood in the world.</p> <p>I have a mission in the world, and I have to do it for my creator.</p> <p><u>If you don't care about money and power it means you are a good Muslim.</u></p>
1I	<p>A Muslim is a person whose opinions, attitudes, and practices correspond to Quran's instructions on one hand, and to the <u>Valie's (Religious leader's) rules</u> on the other hand. So I emphasize on Quran and <i>Velayat</i> (Religious leadership/guardianship)</p> <p>What I mean by Velayat is the spread of Islam in the society. The establishment of the Islamic state started with the Prophet, and then continued by the Imams, <u>and now finally we have the Velayat Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist).</u></p>
2T	I obey Quran rules and Sunnah. I obey the rules.
2I	<p>A Muslim is an individual who is submitted to God. (The literal meaning of Islam)</p> <p>Religion is a set of ideas, moralities, and laws to manage people's life and their society and provide their welfare <u>first in this world</u>, and then in the other world.</p>
3T	<p>God sent us prophets. The prophets show people how to live in the world. Other prophets' religion corrupted in a way. People lost their way. So, the last religion came. The last book is Quran, last prophets is Muhammad.</p> <p>Muhammad led people to God, to have faith in God.</p>
3I	<p>There are some principles that are accepted by all Muslims.</p> <p>Quoting Ali Shariati, Islam has only one principle, which is monotheism</p> <p>Recognizing others as you do to yourself and knowing them as <u>equal Muslim</u> is who believes in the prophet and Shiite is who believes in twelve Imams, but they are too general definition, everyone is a Muslim to some certain extent.</p> <p>It's too traditional to give a definition of being Muslim.</p> <p>A <u>neo-Muslim</u> is not seeking what is Shiite and what is Sunni; he's looking for more general criteria for being Muslim.</p>
4T	<p>Muslim means the one who support <u>peace</u>, the one who obey the God's order. God already sent his messages to us to make a peace. Since the time of Ibrahim prophet there are rules and orders like "don't kill, Don't steal, don't lie" That people who obey these Muslim are Muslims.</p>
4I	<p>Being Muslim is a system; there are various features that get connected to make us consider someone as a Muslim. It has three principles I guess, having a religious experience, having a set of beliefs and opinions, and finally practicing some sort of rituals and routines. These are the ideal type of a Muslim.</p>
5T	<p>Muslim believes in God, Mohammed, the equality principle and the 5 requirements. We learn that stealing is bad when we are born. After 9 years old we learn to practice Namaz. After 12-year old we learn to fast. It is an</p>

	<p>obligation to practice after 9 years old, but even if you don't do, you are still Muslim. In order to exit from Islam, you have to say there is no God. Only after this, you are not Muslim.</p> <p>A Muslim believes in God and the Prophet and <u>the equality principle of Islam</u>, and the necessities of Islam.</p>
5I	<p>To be a Muslim is to believe in God, Quran, and his Prophet Muhammad. Believing in the instructions and practicing the rules, which is in accordance with the <u>human intellect</u>.</p>
6T	<p>It's an ideology. Religion is a transcendental thing. <u>For me Islam is not a religious thing</u>. Everything in the society is decided by the religion. On economic level, on social level, the relation of state with everything is decided. <u>A Muslim should act according to institutionalized Islam</u>. I believe in God, but not the God that is imagined as in Islamic quality. Religion is problematic.</p>
6I	<p>To be a Muslim is to believe in a system of beliefs. It's a historical phenomenon that gives meaning to a group of people. It's not particularly strict about all beliefs; it's like a culture of groups of people in certain geographical regions.</p> <p>The practices that are involved are saying prayers, fasting, pilgrimage and etc. and in each sect there are specific practices.</p>
7T	<p>I don't call myself an atheist, but I'm not a believer neither. <u>I don't really care</u> about these issues, so it's not a part of my life anyways. That's why I don't know what being a Muslim actually is! I don't care! In my perfect world I shouldn't know what people believe. In Turkey it's not like that. It's an unnecessary thing to bring up the believing non-believing thing. It's not about beliefs. Those who do that have political reasons for doing it. I don't believe but I don't judge.</p>
7I	<p>I read Quran four times in Persian and then I lost my faith. And I got non-religious when I was 18.</p> <p>You can claim that you're a Muslim when you accept the framework and don't change it in order to <u>get personal benefit</u> of it. For example when someone says I'm a Muslim but I have premarital sex, or so many other things, can't call himself a Muslim. He calls himself a Muslim because he hasn't dealt with his conscious to completely remove it. So a Muslim should believe in the framework, do the rituals, and behave in the Islamic way. However, this is not the thing that I've seen I Muslims around me. It's ironic that I see it in Baha'is for example. They don't behave against their religion. I have a lot of Baha'i friends.</p>

**Table 3 - On whether different interpretations of Islam are true**

Respondent Number	Data Extract
1T	There are two nations, believers and non-believers. I don't care about nations. There are some theologians who say you can have sex during Ramadan. This is not an interpretation for example. <u>Sectarian differences are OK.</u> We have only one book, one prophet, and one God. If you do what one of the Imams say it's OK.
1I	We can have different interpretations of Islam; nevertheless, there are not infinite numbers of them. And they are all in the same framework. There are some principles in the definition of Islam and Muslims, which should all be considered in different interpretations. They don't contradict the principles and in this sense, our Muslimhood aims for perfection. So there are certain interpretations that are more advanced but none of them negate the principles. There are some redlines to say what is not Islamic. The first source to realize it is Quran and <u>even above Quran there is Velayat.</u> For example Quran might have proposed pilgrimage as an obligatory act, but in certain circumstances the Valie exempts Muslims. (Refers to the early years of the Islamic Republic) I can tell you some criteria of how this is decided but the main verdict is by the jurist and no one else can understand it. I think instead of saying what are the deadlines we should say who is the authority to set the deadline, and I claim the <u>authority is by the Jurist.</u>
2T	People don't understand Islam in the same way. I think there is one true Islam. But some people can't understand different aspects of it. People have different views because of their cultures. <u>You might do wrong things it doesn't mean you're not Muslim; you are just not a good Muslim.</u>
2I	There are different interpretations of Islam, but the question is whether they are true or not. <u>Islam is just one thing.</u> There is only one true and correct Islam that is superior to the other forms. Maybe the Faqih is not capable to grasp the God's law about a specific case, but God has only one rule about that case. The second Caliphate (That the Sunnis are very proud of him) didn't know any truth of Islam and was a weak person. <u>He was uninformed and had no perception of religion.</u> They misguided the people/Muslims. The economic corruption in Islam starts from the third Caliphate.
3T	The way of being Muslim is to believe in God, to accept and obey the message God sent which means Quran and to accept Muhammad as the last prophet and to do its necessities.
3I	<u>There are not clear boundaries between being Muslim and non-Muslim.</u> Some Muslim thinkers don't believe in veiling for example. An Indonesian might be different from me, but I might have some general things in common with him. But this doesn't mean that our practices are going to be the same.
4T	We can say there are misinterpretations to what it is to be a Muslim. This is the difference between political Islam and to be a Muslim. <u>According to my understanding, Muslim and non-Muslim are equal.</u>
4I	However, every individual based on the context he's raised in, his own interpretations, his own experiences and etc.; has a specific package of these three elements. Therefore, there are different types of being Muslim.

	Everyone is Muslim based on his own narrative of Islam. I'm not in a position to set a limit. I don't think there is an objective boundary between being <u>Muslim and non-Muslim</u> . Since I'm not a Muslim I don't have a normative approach toward Muslims, if I considered myself a Muslim I'd add some aspects to it.
5T	Of course there are different ways of being Muslim. I'm a Sunni, but there are Alevis and Shias that have different beliefs. Yes it is possible that you don't belong to any sect but you are a Muslim. There is a line between Muslim and non-Muslim:
5I	<u>Definitely there are different types of being Muslim, as we have it in different regions.</u> The same that there are different understandings of all other things like a novel. <u>Equal to the number of the people, there are different number of understandings of Islam.</u> I believe that men should be allowed to have their own understandings of Islam and be free to practice their ideas. And therefore, we shouldn't prioritize one to the other.
6T	Not interested in the question!
6I	There are people that know themselves as Muslims, but are not necessarily bound to the rituals and practices of the religion, who are called ' <u>Horhory Mazhab</u> ' [Similar to 'Bad Muslim' in Turkey's context]. <u>I'm not in a position to judge them</u> but there are contrasts and conflicts in their talks and practices. It's comic for me but I don't insist telling them that they are not Muslim or whatever.
7T	<u>I don't know what being a Muslim actually is!</u> I don't care! In my perfect world <u>I shouldn't know what people believe</u> . In Turkey it's not like that.
7I	<u>I don't think you can have personal interpretation in your own favor; Islam is a certain thing.</u> But people have different understandings based on the people you grow up with, or how you got socialized in family, at school, by media. There are different interpretations of Islam that are congruous with the real Islam, that means they are close to it; <u>but because of our limits to have access to the history, we can't realize what the real Islam is.</u>

**Table 4 - On the relation of Islam and politics**

Respondent Number	Data Extract
1T	<p>As a Muslim, when I think about politics I feel like I'm cheating on my religion.</p> <p><u>I don't believe in democracy, the Western ones.</u> I hope some day - Insha'Allah- my older brothers create a system that consists of religious things; I'm waiting for that.</p> <p>In Quran it says if you have a religious leader, if he has been elected, we bound to him... <u>if you have a religious leader who's not elected, anyways we bound to him,</u> this is important for me also.</p>
1I	<p><u>I think religion and political prescriptions are not separated at all, they are completely intertwined. Because religion's social aspects are much more than its individualistic aspects.</u> At least Islam is like that. <u>Even the individualistic aspects, since are planned to make the individual situate in the society, are social in a sense. Therefore we need to have an Islamic state that can establish all these rules.</u> It's impossible to do that without an Islamic state. Therefore all these reasoning necessitate political connotations. We don't have something more private and individualistic than <i>Namaz</i> (prayers) but it's still a social matter.</p> <p>Because Islamic state is interconnected with the choice of people, that means <u>as long as people don't want it, it doesn't get established;</u> as what happened at the time of Imam Ali or Imam Khomeini.</p>
2T	<p>I want democracy. Cause when there is democracy there's happiness. I want freedom cause it's the most important thing. And they can be tolerant toward each other.</p> <p><u>I want religion and freedom together.</u></p> <p>The non-religious can do whatever they want. If their freedom doesn't affect me, it's not my problem</p>
2I	<p>Since when there is no Imam; people should not be left on their own, <u>the same political authority that Shite recognizes for Imams is applied to the Faqihs as well.</u> Therefore, Faqih gets legitimized at the time that there is no present Imam. The Faqih becomes the governor of the society. (The theory of Velayat-e Faqih) <u>So the legitimation comes from God not from people.</u> <u>The Prophet created a government and it's verifiable historically.</u></p> <p>Secularism can be derived from Sunni Islam. People choose the Caliphates that Sunnis legitimize.</p> <p><u>The tradition and life of the Prophet give a model to Muslims, in which the politics and religion are entangled.</u></p> <p>Again by referring to history, there is no doubt that Imam Ali was the legitimate Caliphate after the prophet, but when he doesn't have public acceptability, he is silent and doesn't claim to the governance. <u>So people have a special role in Islamic government.</u> But there is always a suppression of the minorities, even in the Western thoughts.</p>
3T	<p>If you are asking whether Islam has a political perspective or not, Muhammad was an orphan, poor, no parents. <u>He resisted Mecca's oligarch, Mecca's aristocracy, Mecca's mafia.</u></p> <p>Islam is against radicalism, terrorism; <u>Islam support peace,</u> Islam is against killing people, to cut head, to exploit people. Islam supports all people to live safely, even Atheists.</p>

3I	<p>No, Islam doesn't have one specific political prescription. And it does not <u>suggest a political attitude.</u></p> <p>No religion is non-political. <u>Islam does not necessitate one particular political behavior.</u> And making a government by the prophet was not a part of his prophecy and revelation.</p> <p>As a religious intellectual, <u>I try to make religion in lines with human rights and put them in the laws. But I don't believe the law should employ all Sharia laws.</u> I think we need to get to the law-based government rather than legal government. We should make our ideas to be <u>used in the laws by the majority vote mechanism.</u></p> <p><u>I will resist the backward laws even if they have the support of the majority, that's why I was jailed for years.</u> If you have the power you should avoid it, even with controlling political institutions. Even Shiite Imams had different strategies based on the circumstances to oppose the injustice.</p>
4T	<p>Islam and political Islam differ from each other. There is two different understanding of religion. The 10 rules are important, others not necessary. <u>Human rights are universal.</u></p> <p>The universal rules should be accepted and be used by governments. These rules can be seen not only in Quran but also European Union.</p> <p><u>I am against all things political Islam supports.</u></p> <p><u>I am against the understanding of classic Islam state. But I am also against secularism.</u> I suggest neither secular nor religious state. In the Muslim world, there's no need to use "secularism". We should be careful that government should be fair. <u>It is enough to be based on equality.</u> Governance comes with elections. If a religious man wants to rule, he should be elected.</p>
4I	<p>I have a pluralist understanding of politics. So depending on what type of Islam we're talking about, its political connotation differs. <u>I don't think Islam essentially has some political consequences.</u></p> <p>I can see that Islam, compared to Christianity, has more potential to become politicized that means to establish a government. <u>However, I don't want to believe that the only relation between Islam and politics is necessarily the political Islam. I don't think there is any direct prescription of any sort of political system in the Quran.</u> Therefore it could be argued that we can have a secular and neutral government and Muslims can adjust their Islamic life in the private sphere.</p> <p>I think when it comes to political disputes; it should get into the public debates. There would be a hegemonic struggle between social forces. <u>So I accept the democratic mechanism as the basis of legal rights, but this mechanism can easily turn to some laws against the so-called fundamental rights.</u> So we accept the mechanism but still try to pass the secular laws within the mechanisms.</p>
5T	<p><u>The politicians who call themselves Muslim should not be in politics.</u> I think Islam should not be politicized. <u>Islam and politics have completely different fields of concern.</u> If you implement all of the rules of Islam in politics, then the country will be under sharia law.</p> <p>When you practice all the rules of Islam, you do not need any other regime. The rules of Islam cannot be changed as it is composed of the rules of God. Example: the hands of the thief are cut under Sharia but under democracy, they have cases to punish. <u>I cannot say that Islam is not democratic. What I say is, Islam should not intervene in politics.</u> Islam does not have political</p>

	discourse. Well, in fact, it has some but they are all Fiqh. So they are more scientific discourses.
5I	<p>As far as my Quranic studies tell me (I didn't have any other religious education), <u>Islam is not a religion that wants to give its tone and color directly to your social and political life. When you read Quran, you don't see anywhere that God gave the order to make a government to the prophet.</u> But Islamists claim that the Prophet was the only prophet that created a government. <u>My response is that before his prophecy there was no integrated government in the region, therefore he wanted to make a central government, on top of his prophecy's responsibilities. So we can't say making the government was a part of his prophecy.</u></p> <p>There are some rules about the inheritance, punishment rules, and etc. <u>that were only suitable for the time of the prophet,</u> but it doesn't follow that it says anything about the way of governance, political institutions, and etc.</p> <p>We should be respectful to the majority's ideas. But there is a limit to this theory. When it violates some internationally approved norms, then, I don't suggest that democracy accepts their political rule. I think we should refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.</p>
6T	<p><u>Islam doesn't require an Islamic state.</u></p> <p><u>In Turkey there's secularism but they don't accept Kurdish people, but in Iran Kurdish people are culturally (socially) freer. They can speak their language.</u></p> <p>Religion is not a thing that we can say everything is according to it. <u>Religion is man-made</u> and is in itself problematic. You should make people around you Muslims.</p>
6I	<p>In Shiite Iran, the political consequences of Islam are different from other countries.</p> <p>The Islamic Revolution in Iran changed the political conception of Islam. The traditional and conservative Muslims joined a political understanding of Islam. This is a new phenomenon.</p> <p>My ideal government is a Laic one. In secularism, religion and government get separated. <u>In Laicite the emphasis is on the separation between religion and politics.</u> But it is only a dream in Iran to happen. But I definitely don't believe in a religious government.</p> <p><u>There should be some institutions to veto the radical Islamist ideas, even if they have the majority of the population's support. To be more precise, there should be a Supreme Constitutional Court that decides on such cases.</u></p>
7T	<p>In a true democracy, secularism should be kept aside, <u>and religion has nothing to do with ruling of the state.</u></p> <p>This is a true fact; Islam takes part [in politics] I think Islam tells you to gain more people in your religion. Islam controls private life. No other religion, except Islam, has anything to do with inheritance. Of course every religion has that, but others had a reform but Islam didn't. <u>Manipulative parts of Islam are in Islamic politicians' hand right now.</u></p> <p><u>It's used by people that I believe are non-believers, but introduce themselves as believers.</u></p> <p><u>In this republic they shouldn't claim to things based on their religion. They can use the law; they can use lawyers. But if it comes out by democratic tools, what can I do, I will suffer by myself. If it uses the real tools.</u></p>
7I	<u>I don't think Islam necessitates a particular type of political life or ideas. I think one's political attitude is also shaped by the atmosphere she has lived</u>



	<p>in. <u>A Muslim can keep his religion private.</u> As we know in the democratic countries, things are decided based on the majority's demands. There is a force over someone's will that determines rules, which is the <u>legal law based on the majority's decision.</u></p> <p>Everyone might have some ideas and principles, <u>but no one can dictate it on the others. It might be something against myself as well, cause someone can say why you want to dictate a law against execution...</u> I don't know, I think there are some ideas that everyone should get to, like violence is bad and so on. <u>I think maybe at the time of the prophet, for the necessities of that time, they had to do some stuff, but it doesn't apply to our time.</u></p> <p><u>If the majority of a country wants an Islamic state, there's nothing to be done. All we can do is to rely on cultural education and informing people.</u></p>
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**Table 5 – Some concrete examples of what Muslims want**

Respondent Number	Data Extract
1T	<p><u>Sharia court is the right that I want.</u></p> <p>Our holiday should be Friday like the past Muslims want this, so we'll fight for this... Azan was practiced; we couldn't go to Mekka... it was forbidden to read Arabic</p> <p>Republican dictatorship made us wear the cap that is for Jewish people not Muslims.</p> <p><u>I want execution to come back. Cutting the hand of thieves as well.</u></p> <p>If you put a duty, which is for a man on a woman, sooner or later the society would corrupt... now, women are being consumed as well... It's good for them to be teacher, doctor, and non-governmental jobs.</p> <p>Women are the real leaders of the society; they take care of the children.</p> <p><u>Erdogan's mom is not modernly educated, but she grows a leader.</u> I want to live like a Muslim, not like a Christian</p> <p>[He points to the shoes and asks if the men and women (the left and right shoes) are equal?]</p> <p>Alcohol: This is the same in Russia; <u>no one says that they can't drink. Islam does not force anyone to believe.</u> So that means the Islamic and constitution doesn't force non-believers to practice... <u>Of course they are allowed to drink, but they can't drink here [in public places] because they would say something to my wife and my children... Then I would kill them.</u></p> <p>Being unveiled doesn't disturb public peace, but alcohol does... Russians, they are not Muslims, why did they strict that? When you're drunk you lose your conscious.</p> <p>We don't care about unmarried couple to live together ... or who fucks whom! But no mom or dad, even the most republican ones, even the communists don't like it!</p> <p>You can't restrict kissing in the publics but you can teach at the schools. The people would solve it, but not the leaders.</p> <p>They are not ready, <u>but if they are we will put legal restrictions</u> ... [at the end of the conversation:] there should be a ban on kissing.... [Then changing it:] a referendum should decide.</p> <p>Dhimmis (non-Muslims), we should protect their rights.</p> <p><u>I would ban the erotic shops and posters.</u> And also sausages (haram food).</p>
1I	<p>For example about the question of <i>Hijab</i> (veiling) that so many people think its compulsory aspect is set by coercion, <u>I don't think the Islamic government should compromise about it.</u> I don't mean they should use coercion, but they should use cultural means to solve it. There's a level of passing the laws that has become normal, <u>but if someone comes out completely unveiled, it's still a red line.</u></p> <p>I don't think the secularist can have a TV channel to promote and advertise their ideas. <u>I don't mind a debate in which both sides can argue, but if it's just from one side that the public audience can't analyze the ideas presented, I dispute it.</u></p> <p><u>I believe that Islamic teaching should be mandatory in the education system.</u> I think the most fundamental responsibility of the Islamic state is nurturing the public.</p>
2T	<p>CHP doesn't want veiled girls; that's why I vote for AKP, but AKP is not</p>

	<p>perfect. <u>But it gives me freedom for my religion; the most important thing for me is religion</u></p> <p>I can enter the school with my scarf, I feel freer.</p> <p>When my sister in Europe, people had a bad eye on my veiled sister. But this year when I was there they respected me because of Erdogan.</p> <p>Alcohol should be forbidden in official meetings</p> <p><u>Atheist can have TV channels but they should not be reachable easily.</u> My little sister shouldn't be able to reach it easily. It affects her mind. In Turkey atheists are few!</p> <p>When the majority of a country is Muslim, the laws should be based on religion. But freedom is also important, <u>for certain things people can't be free like LGBT. I don't think the gay marriage should be legalized.</u> Turkey is a Muslim country. But what I said that 'they are free as long as they don't interfere with my life' is only about alcohol and not the gay marriage.</p> <p>Islam is a utopian dream, it can't happen in the society today.</p> <p>I don't want my mom's job cause it makes her to take care of us less.</p> <p><u>It's in human nature that women take care of children.</u> It also protects women.</p> <p>Women are more sensitive than men. My friend for example had an academic job and she had some problems about her works, and she was very upset and she quit and she's happy.</p>
2I	<p>Religious state means a state that works within the framework of the religion. As long as the atmosphere is scientific, rather than destructive the debates are fine... The Imam's debates are so famous. There can be a channel that is consisted half from seculars and half Islamists. <u>If they conform to moral norms, why shouldn't the secularists have a channel? But it should be under the control of the Islamists. But an atheist can't have a channel.</u></p> <p>Women's body should not be seen. There should be some principles about this, and so the government should react to the transgressions. But the type of the covers and clothes is not of question.</p>
3T	<p><u>The red line is determined by the society, we can't. If these leads the young people to a bad manner it is red line.</u> We talk to them, we warn them. We say, "determine your boundaries" because it is not just saying, "there is no God".</p> <p>Morality is important.</p> <p><u>They can do their propaganda. They don't have to believe. But it is important how they are affecting people's morality.</u> Every mosque, church... should protect itself. Or these can lead to anarchy. If so, there would be no family structure.</p>
3I	<p><u>Religion as a pillar of morality in the society should be promoted. But there should not be compulsion. I don't think education should be separated from religion, but people should have the right to choose.</u> The state can't be neutral on religion. I don't see any problem with promoting certain ideas unless it blocks or avoids certain ideologies to be presented to the public. <u>Everyone should be allowed to advertise his own ideas.</u> There is no state in the world that doesn't promote certain ideas. <u>As long as the promotion of thoughts does not lead into practice they should be allowed to have a TV channel.</u></p>
4T	<p>You can advise a person who has medical problem to quit drinking alcohol. But You can't force him by using government power. That's enough. <u>What I am saying is that the things which government can interfere should be the same as what is punished in Quran, nothing more than that.</u></p> <p>Kissing, state can't interfere but if somebody is disturbed and saying to the</p>

	<p>officers then you can say “go and kiss each other somewhere else.” On the other hand, state shouldn’t interfere.</p> <p><u>Except defamation, everybody can say his thoughts.</u> There is nothing wrong about people’s ideas promoting. It is freedom of thinking. There can be atheist institutions, by using media you can make atheism propaganda.</p> <p><u>LGBT people should be able to have a TV channel.</u></p>
4I	<p><u>I can accept to have elective religious courses at schools.</u> I don’t support it as a secularist, but it’s fine to have the elective ones. The educational system must be secular, in lines with a global citizen identity.</p> <p>I think there can be an Islamist TV channel, promoting their ideas. There shouldn’t be any limit on what they present. <u>However, I think the red line should be violence and advocating for war.</u></p>
5T	<p>There are of course political rules in Islam. Of course, we need to take them into account. But some laws, like the rules of inheritance (that makes women inherit half of what a man gets), <u>have emerged from the Islam that belongs to 800 years ago and the world has changed a lot since then.</u> Therefore, regarding the inheritance, we should take into account the modern equality principle for women.</p> <p>It is right and OK that women cover their head. It is one of the requirements of Islam. But there are still people who are not covered but they still practice Islam, even more than the covered ones. So we should not put it into strict rules.</p> <p><u>The religious courses in education should be obligatory for Sunnis.</u> But if you are Christian in Turkey, they should be able to take their religious courses. If you are atheist, you don’t have to take.</p>
5I	<p><u>I agree with selective religious courses at schools.</u></p> <p>Yeah, even the extreme thoughts should be able to have TV channels. I don’t think making limitations are the right way to control thoughts. It’s better to use education.</p> <p><u>I don’t want any type of discrimination. No one should be limited for his thoughts and ideas.</u></p>
6T	<p><u>All groups should be able to have a TV channel... but before it comes to the point that they advertise Jihad</u></p>
6I	<p><u>I think it’s better to at least have the Islamic courses selective at schools.</u></p> <p><u>Their removal seems impossible.</u> The religious classes were the most boring in my own experience. I don’t personally want my child to go to these classes.</p> <p>There shouldn’t be any discrimination against veiled women. However, <u>I believe the Chador veiling should be prohibited because of the preventive character that it has for a woman’s social roles and also because of the unpleasant signals that it gives to an observer.</u></p> <p><u>As long as Islamists don’t promote violence, they can have a TV channel.</u> The invitation to violence is the red line, not only for Islamists, but also for all other groups.</p>
7T	<p><u>I personally reject veiling due to some freedom, based on democracy people should be equal and free and this is something against that. “So it’s nonsense to have freedom of unfreedom.”</u></p> <p>Real thing is discrimination between men and women. I believe that except the political situation and political symbol as veiling, <u>even the way that you have headscarves is a symbol of which party you’re from.</u> Discriminating can</p>

	<p>not be free. <u>How can I be sure that it's their choice.</u> She doesn't even know that world. <u>To me it's like giving freedom to kill.</u> I don't like this person, so I should have the freedom to kill him. It's very ridiculous.</p> <p>Do I want my child to get educated by a veiled woman? <u>It's the same for piercing, tattoos, very short skirt because these are symbols.</u> I don't care what they believe; I just don't want them to teach my children.</p> <p><u>So I want a ban on veiling in the public.</u></p> <p><u>Education should be privatized.</u> They could have their own schools. However they want their children to be prepared in a religious way. Take your children to these schools, pay for that.</p> <p><u>There can't be any Islamic course at school, even elective ones.</u></p> <p><u>Islamists can have a TV channel though.</u></p>
71	<p><u>I think there shouldn't be any religious course in the schools. It applies to any ideological teaching.</u> It could be Marxism, Islam, or Christianity. <u>I think they can have private institutions like going to church on Sundays, or Friday prayers.</u> <u>I think it is fine to have elective religious courses. But the requirement is that there must be all sorts of options; if they present Islamic courses, they should teach Christianity, Judaism, Bahaism and etc.</u></p> <p><u>I think if a TV channel promotes some ideas, there should be some redlines like advertising for violence, or use of weapons, or forcing people to accept a religion.</u></p> <p><u>I oppose the mandatory veiling.</u> It's one of my red lines. I'm against any type of coercion. Though I'm grown up with this idea, I couldn't ever perceive it. It has always been a weird thing to me, I never got used to it.</p> <p>I think a religious and veiled lady should be able to be employed as a teacher. Nevertheless, <u>the education must be secular.</u> It's not only about religion; I think the teacher shouldn't promote other things like homophobia as well.</p>

**Table 6 – On Muslim and European Identities**

Respondent Number	Data Extract
1T	<p><u>Islam protects Capitalism</u></p> <p>The West is more powerful and we are doing their culture. If we are powerful, they will follow, they will obey.</p> <p><u>Yeah I want united Muslim nations, I want Caliphate...</u> I can't do anything for Palestine. If I had power I'd send my troops to Israel, to England... where Muslims are treated badly. <u>If my brother in Egypt is executed, my government should raise his voice.</u></p>
1I	<p>I don't separate being European from being Muslim because a European can be a Muslim as well. That one is a geographical issue and the other one is an ideological matter. But if you mean Western thinking, which is materialist, of course they have a massive difference.</p> <p><u>I think it's ideal to have an Islamic block/nation; it's our wish. Though right now there are different and contradictory definitions of Islam,</u> it's still great to have it. I think our goal is to have Islam worldwide, and having this nation is the first step.</p>
2T	<p>They are different because they have different religion.</p> <p>There are some cultural differences.</p>
2I	<p>A Muslim should be different from a Westerner, but whether they are different, I don't know! <u>Cause a Muslim has some frameworks, which makes him different from one that doesn't have it.</u></p> <p>Iran's government for its <u>stability</u> needs to unite with some countries. But the question of which countries; all depends on whether there is a <u>mutual benefit</u> with that country or not. There is interest for Iran to unite with all Islamic countries, especially Syria. Because there are some things in common like Allah and the Prophet. However, <u>we don't consider Wahhabis among Muslims. But Sunnis are Muslims.</u></p>
3T	<p>To be a Muslim means to be good person. Islam is not against Modernism. Modernism is not against Islam. Islam doesn't have such a war. Islam doesn't want to use nuclear bombs to kill people. Islam is against that. To be a Muslim is to be a person that God desire.</p> <p>In terms of morality Islam have some criteria. <u>Muslims don't support the powerful one; they support the one who is right.</u></p>
3I	<p><u>The differences between Muslim identity and Western identity is not necessarily religious, it's cultural and geographical as well.</u> A Chinese person is also different from a Westerner. There is not anything such as globalization, what we have is making something globalized.</p> <p>We should make foreign relations with countries in the region (Muslim countries) based on the <u>national interest</u>. Any type of union making policy should be based on the national rights and interests.</p>
4T	<p><u>European values are really close to Islamic values. But they are capitalist.</u></p> <p>There is lots of exploitation. It is not the same as Muslim. I believe heaven will be in the world. Not afterworld. In the world when there is no class, no border, exploitation, war, it will be heaven. I believe in afterworld but this world is more important for me.</p> <p><u>There should be a union among Muslim countries.</u> There should be no border. They should finish the exploitation; the gap between classes should be destroyed. Islamic world need this. <u>Instead of being a part of EU, they should</u></p>

	do something for Islamic unit.
4I	<p>I think being Muslim and European are two different categories. We know them by having a bipolar character. But still we have the European Muslims, which means these two identities can reconcile with each other.</p> <p>It's inevitable to have a block of Islamic countries in the region in foreign policy. It is the same as the European Union. <u>The countries in the region should make relations based on their interests</u>, but since they are all Islamic, the block might get an Islamic character. <u>I think interest shapes the foreign policies rather than the identities.</u></p>
5T	<u>There is a difference in terms of life style, belief, and practice. The style of Muslims even differs between Izmir and Diyarbakir.</u>
5I	<p>If being Western means to have the European life style by respecting your wife, going to theater instead of picking up girls on the streets and etc. I don't have any problem with being Western. In this sense, I don't have any objection against being Western. <u>But if being Western means to be immoral, I see a huge contrast between these two identities.</u></p> <p>The experience of the European Union showed that making a political block is not as easy as the theorists have assumed and people resisted to that, and it's about to collapse.</p> <p><u>I think to make a union based on religion is a wrong idea. There would be huge resistance against it. As we can see there are a lot of conflict in media between different sects.</u></p>
6T	<p><u>They are different in eating food, in wearing. But there are just small differences.</u></p> <p>Islamic countries should get closer to each other because they understand each other better. (Giving the example of Kurdish people that should unite)</p> <p>Politics is decided by the US or by the Europe. <u>They are colonizers and they want to put their hegemony on the others.</u> It's the politics of Europe to fragment the society and put pressure. Colonizers do the Shiite and Sunni separation. <u>They should unite against it.</u></p>
6I	<p>Modernism, though having Western origin, is more globalized today. Maybe being Muslim and being Western have some frictions with each other, <u>but if you mean modern by Western, no, I think they are reconcilable.</u> It has practically happened. Even if theoretically and epistemologically there is a conflict between Islam and modernism, practically they have approached each other. The fact that Islamists became revolutionary is an indicator of how modernized they got.</p> <p><u>Maybe the Islam world makes sense in the religious and cultural sense, but in international relations it is meaningless, and illusionary.</u> We shouldn't put all the eggs in one basket and say we just want to invest on Islamic countries.</p>
7T	<p>I consider myself a European.</p> <p><u>It's possible to be a modern Muslim.</u></p> <p>A lot of good messages are in Islam.</p> <p><u>The Muslim identity should not make Turkey get closer to other Muslim countries.</u></p>
7I	<p><u>There is no incompatibility between being Muslim and being European.</u></p> <p>There might be someone that goes to a nightclub, drink a lot of alcohol, have sex and calls herself a Muslim. This might be narrative of an Iranian Muslim, which I know it happens!</p>

**Table 2 – On the relation between Islam and actual politics in Turkey and Iran**

Respondent Number	Data Extract
1T	<p>The majority was treated very badly by the minority during the time of republicans (<u>headscarf ban</u>). Of course people would get angry. Erdogan is more democratic. He gave (Waqf) to Armenians and others <u>but the republicans didn't do anything for other ethnicities.</u></p> <p>There are always a lot of newspapers that curse Erdogan, but they say he's dictator. If he was a dictator no one could call him a dictator</p> <p>He's a leader, when he talks in European Union, I say wow, he's a leader. <u>AKP makes a sense of empowerment. "self-reliance"</u> When we see a scarfed women near our leader we feel scarfed girls can go everywhere.</p>
1I	<p><u>I think Islam endorses some of the benefits that one gets by being a Muslim.</u> Some of the benefits might be about the legal rights that one gets by being Muslim, and some our duties that he has. So the rights come with duties. Islam doesn't force anyone to become Muslim, but if someone benefits from being under the Islamic state, for example the safety, they should pay some extra money, the <i>Jazzie</i>.</p> <p><u>I believe many of the political disputes have roots in the groups' understanding of Islam; their level of belief in Velayat, their ideas on the role of religion in politics.</u> Especially I believe it result from whether they think religion is a private issue or a social one.</p> <p>I believe the main theory of governance in Iran is Islamic now, the general leadership is also completely Islamic, but the more we come to the lower levels it loses its Islamic character.</p> <p><u>I believe the Iran's government is the most democratic government</u> cause I feel whenever people don't want it, since there is no coercion against people, they can change their government,</p>
2T	<p>Corruption by AKP damaged me. <u>They say we are religious but this news is so different from being Muslim.</u> They introduced being Muslim and being corrupt. So I'm not supporting AKP 100%.</p> <p>AKP raised the economic level, that's why some people vote for AKP cause economy is the most important thing for the people. Because when there is money there is peace.</p> <p>I like the Islamic rhetoric Erdogan uses.</p> <p><u>It's beneficial for people to show that they are Muslim. Religious people can get employed better under AKP rule.</u></p>
2I	<p><u>There is no benefit in Iran to be Muslim.</u></p> <p>I hate principlists, but I extremely hate reformists. I'm an Islamist. I don't believe in the current factionalism. <u>The conflict between the factions is merely a power struggle.</u></p> <p>One want to <u>gain power</u> so he talks about people's freedom, the other want to get the power so he talks about the people's other world. And they destroy men's both this world and the other world. When they see each other they have fun together and do their business together as well.</p> <p>I don't want to talk about the Islamic parts of Iran's government, because I might sound too critical. One of our main critiques is about the judiciary system that doesn't enact the Islamic law. However, sometimes for the <u>expediency</u> of the Islamic society, some non-Islamic things are done. <u>Men like power and in accordance to that their values and beliefs get</u></p>



	<p>changed, and goes for the ideas that benefits him the most. However, the reformists are more careless about religious issues. And they bullshit more!</p>
3T	<p><u>Turkish people are religious. And AKP can understand the people.</u>          People vote for AKP because they are not fighting against the society, against people. They know people well. <u>People don't like radicalism. AKP is in the middle.</u></p>
3I	<p>In a country that 90% are Muslims, it is not a plus to be a Muslim, unless the government favors a particular ideology. <u>So what matters is that if you support the government or not, rather than if you're Muslim or not.</u>          I don't think the theory of Velayat Faqih is close to the Shiite conception of Islam. I don't believe in it.  <u>Iran's government sometimes acts based on expediency rather than Sharia.</u>  <u>The Expediency Discernment Council</u> is a good indicator of this thesis that whenever the Sharia and the constitution/parliament conflict, the Council would change the law based on the expediency.          However, any religious government makes some taboos that stick into like veiling or music, which are not stable and change as the time passes.  <u>The dispute between reformists and principlists is founded on both religious interpretations and interests.</u> There is always a relation between what someone thinks, his interests, and the circumstances. People are not philosophers.</p>
4T	<p><u>No, AKP is not Islamist; they are conservatives. But this of course includes Islam. In turkey, there is a capitalist system.</u>  <u>AKP uses symbols of Islam only for getting votes.</u>          They are given money, service, roads, and etc. I voted for AKP 2002, but after that I didn't. People say they are stealing but they are working.</p>
4I	<p><u>I think there is difference between Muslims and non-Muslims in Iran in the sense of legal rights.</u> Even there is a legal disparity between different types of Muslims, Sunnis and Shiites. For example the governor of the Sunni parts are not Sunni. So the differences are political. Even in the sense of lifestyle, some people can't practice how their religion requires them.          I think Iran's general political atmosphere has become Islamic after the Revolution. It has influenced the legal, social, and political systems. <u>Since I don't have a normative perspective toward Islam, I think Iran's government is Islamic;</u> but some Muslims might not find it the true Islam. The first political person has an Islamic authority, the rules came out of the classic Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and the clerics have the upper hand in politics. I don't think a secular idea can get general acceptance in Iran because of the limits of the politics. <u>Islamic Republic's identity making process has happened by means of exclusion of the secularist groups.</u>          Iran's government like any other government is tickled with everyday life and therefore, <u>sometimes there is nothing very Islamic about it.</u> So the Islamic part gets only an expressive function and it's just a gesture. It acts like any secular government, for example in technical and civil matters, in modernization process, progress, renovation and etc. So I think Islam has an expressive function in Iran's politics for excluding the 'others'.          I don't think the clash between the Reformists and Principlists have anything to do with different understandings of Islam. <u>They might have different understandings, but they are two different political groups with irreconcilable political and economic interests.</u></p>

	<u>I identify myself as a social democrat. I don't think Islam is a threat to social democracy.</u>
5T	<p><u>AKP is not completely Islamist.</u> They define themselves as Islamist but <u>they only use religion to win the political power.</u> For example, they changed the laws in Turkey according to the modern EU laws but then they started 4+4+4 system where the girls can be out of school after 4 years. What they intend to do is to get women out of labour market- because in their perspective, women should not work in public and stay at home.</p> <p>The right-wing parties always invested in public goods although they stole (engaged in corruption). So the Turkish people think for 60 years that as long as they work (provide services) we'll vote for them, no matter if they steal.</p> <p><u>AKP created dependency among his voters. They say if AKP is not elected, you won't receive any of the services we provide.</u></p>
5I	<p><u>How does the creation of the Expediency Discernment Council fit into the Islamic principlism?</u> There is nothing religious in it and it's a tool for the secularization of the political system. <u>So the Islamic Republic does not differ from other sorts of political systems in the world and is not Islamic.</u> It's very obvious that people in Iran don't want religious government.</p> <p><u>I don't see any essential conflict between reformists and principlists. Those are different names for the same group.</u> They are both governmental Left and Right factions of the Iran's last 30 years history. They have very strong family ties between them. <u>The difference is economical.</u></p>
6T	<p><u>AKP is only Islamic at discourse level.</u> Of course there are people that are candid about their religious beliefs, but it's just a tool that is used by the AKP regime.</p> <p><u>AKP tries to make a bourgeoisie society in the Kurdish society.</u> They want to make a difference between bourgeoisie and poor people. So money is the main issue.</p> <p>AKP uses a discourse that embraces all the society.</p> <p>At the time of AKP Muslims care more about money. "AKP is Calvinist."</p>
6I	<p><u>The relation between Islam and politics in Iran is more like the connection between Islam and power.</u> For entering the political sphere and <u>power circle</u> you inevitably have to believe in or at least pretend to believe in the Islam that the government supports.</p> <p>Iran's government is a theocratic one that has founded its legitimacy on the people's religious beliefs.</p> <p>Islam is to some extent the basis of the Iran's foreign policy, domestic politics, compulsory veiling (which is now one of the apparent aspects of the Islamic republic), and etc.</p> <p><u>I know Iran's government as an Islamic one. It has a lot of Islamic features.</u></p> <p>Difference in interpretations of Islam is one of the sources of the conflict between reformists and principlists. <u>It has more apparent roots in their interests and benefits.</u> So the conflict is a result of a mixture of all these together.</p>
7T	<p>AKP is further Islamic party. It's beyond Islam. They bring everything in extreme. <u>They are a fundamentalist party.</u></p> <p><u>Religion is used by people that I believe are non-believers, but introduce themselves as believer; they use it as a tool.</u></p> <p><u>They are taking control of education, taking control of law.</u></p> <p>Mandatory education of Islam. More child labour is possible. You can get</p>

	<p>married when you're 13.</p> <p>I don't think people vote for AKP economically because Turkey is not in a good economic situation.</p>
7I	<p><u>I think there might be benefits in Iran to be a Muslim.</u></p> <p>Tranquility is an opportunity in life that you lose if you're not a Muslim.</p> <p>If <u>we're not too cynical to say that it's all political games,</u> we can say the political disputes in Iran are the <u>results of different understandings of Islam.</u></p> <p>Reformists think of religion more as a private thing that doesn't necessarily have to be political; some of them believe that the current system is not the true Islamic governance.</p> <p><u>I believe Iran's government is Islamic.</u> I don't say like Reformists that it's not the true Islam. Every government needs to base its pillars on some ideas, the found it on Islamic rules. When they want to segregate woman and men, obligate veiling and etc.; they need to justify it on some sort of ideas. They have the Islamic ones.</p>

## Appendix II – Topic Guide

### Part 1

- What is it to be a Muslim? How do you define being a Muslim?
  - What are the main characteristics of being a Muslim?
  - Do you think everyone can have his own interpretation of what Islam is? Are there different ways of being Muslim? Is one interpretation superior to the others? Do you call it the true Islam?
  - Where is the limit for being a Muslim? What distinguishes a Muslim from a non-Muslim?
  - If we distinguish between being born as Muslim and becoming Muslim; what to you think matters in the latter? Being born in Muslim society? Education? Social classification? Etc.?

### Part 2

- What is it to be politically Muslim? What are the political connotations of being a Muslim? How does the Muslim identity relate to the political views and behaviors?
  - How should the state be? How should it treat seculars and Islamic people
  - Should there be any employment of Sharia law?
  - Should there be any law based on religion?  
What type of secularism or religious government do you want?
  - What do you think about the limits of the public media? Should the atheists and radical Islamists be able to have a TV channel? What is the limit of toleration for you?
  - What about women social roles and legal rights? Do you think they should have the same social roles and legal rights as men?
    - What do you think about veiling? Should it be allowed/compulsory? Should the veiled girls be able to get employed in the governmental positions?
  - What do you think about education? Should people be educated to be Muslim? Can there be Islamic/anti-Islamic courses in the public schools? Mandatory or elective?
  - How do you think being Muslim is different from being European/Western?
  - Do you think Turkey/Iran should try to establish better relations with the Islamic countries (as in a Islamic Union), rather than the Western countries? Does the Muslim identity matter in foreign relations?

### Part 3 - Turkey

- Can I ask what party or ideology do you politically support?
- Do you think AKP is an Islamic party?
  - Do you think the dispute over supporting or rejecting AKP has a religious/secular nature?
  - Why AKP wins the elections? Is AKP benefiting from its Islamic rhetoric?
    - Based on your experience from people around, what do you think is the main factor for AKP's popularity? (Religion vs. economy)

- What does modernization mean to you? Do you think Turkey is becoming more modern?
- Do you think the idea of being Muslim is changing during the time as well?
  - o How AKP is affecting the religious identities?

### Part 3 - Iran

- What makes someone religious in Iran?
- Is there any benefit in Iran to be a Muslim?
- Can I ask what political group you identify yourself with?
- Are you Islamist/secular?
- Do you think Islam affects Iran's politics?
- Do you think Iran's government is Islamic? How?
  - o What makes it Islamic? Be specific and name the aspects.
  - o Do you think the dispute between reformers and principlists have roots in different understanding of Islam?
- What do you think about the rest of the country? Do they want an Islamic state?
- Do you think the meaning of being religious is changing in Iran?
  - o How Iran's government affects religious identities?