

# **CONSERVATIVE WOMEN AND CHILDREN BOOKS AS EVERYDAY POLITICS**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This master's thesis explores the evolving relationship between conservative women in Turkey and religion, along with the transformation of traditional gender roles, focusing on their book-buying behavior for their children. The lifting of headscarf bans in universities and public institutions in 2007 sparked economic and cultural shifts among conservative women, prompting them to redefine traditional gender roles from a more egalitarian perspective and establish a rational and individualized connection with religion. As a result, these women have embraced a rationalized and individualized religious identity, advocating for gender equality, and distinguishing themselves from previous generations and lower-class women.

The thesis investigates the preferences of these women regarding children's books, revealing that they tend to favor texts that avoid explicit religious terminology, prioritize values education, refrain from didactic styles, and emphasize gender equality. Conversely, they tend to avoid books that primarily focus on religious education, religious rituals and rules, didactic language, and reflect traditional gender roles. These purchasing behaviors not only reflect the changing attitudes of these women but also impact the best-selling books of publishers catering to this demographic.

In this context, the thesis examines how children's books serve as a reflection of social change and act as a medium for transmitting these changes to future generations through the book purchasing behavior of mothers. The research draws on in-depth interviews conducted with mothers and publishers, as well as a survey involving 81 mothers, to provide comprehensive insights into the subject matter.

Overall, this thesis sheds light on the evolving dynamics between conservative women, religion, and gender roles in Turkey, showcasing the role of children's books as an indicator of social change and a vehicle for transmitting these changes to the next generation.

**Key words: Religion; Gender; Children Books,**

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## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Research Methodology .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Literature Review .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Children Books as Litmus Test.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Chapter I: Unveiling Dynamics of Changing Religiosity and Conservative Women .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Secular State and Veiled Woman.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Children Literature and Political Islam .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Gender (In)equality and Headscarf Issues .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Chapter II: Gender Equality and Conservative Women: A Class-Based Perspective.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>AKP Period and Conservative Women .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Re-reading of Traditional Gender Roles .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Changing Religious Identity and Conservative Women .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>53</b>

## INTRODUCTION

*"...When we first published the book, we faced harsh criticism, especially from fathers who accused us of promoting feminist ideals. However, if we were to publish the book today, I am confident that we would receive a more positive reception. Today, women are more aware of the importance of raising strong and independent daughters, as they themselves have become increasingly liberated.<sup>1</sup>"*

Publisher Melike Günyüz who is editor-in-chief of Erdem Publishing Group, which has been publishing in Turkey for more than 20 years stated that they published a book which is named as *Küçük Kız (The Little Girl)*<sup>2</sup> about the emancipation of a woman 10 years ago and received a lot of criticism from the conservative segment of their clientele. On the other hand, she believes that if they were to publish the book again, they would receive a lot of attention from the same social group.

Similarly, Betül Doğan, a 30-year-old mother of one and PhD graduate, said "When I was a child, I remember that we read a lot about the issue of veiled women. It was like this in most homes at that time... But when I teach religion to my son, I use an inclusive language rather than promoting a specific ideology. I try to break away from the language of 'us' and 'them,' which was widely used during our time<sup>3</sup>."

Considering the statements made by these two women who are conservative publisher and conservative, well-educated mother, it is possible to support two arguments: Firstly, there has been a change in conservative groups in Turkey over the last decade. Secondly, the change is reflected in the children's literature books that are being purchased or not purchased. This thesis asserts that there has been a significant shift in the way conservative women in Turkey

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<sup>1</sup> Melike Günyüz, Detailed Interview, 10 May 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Fatima Sharafeddine, *Küçük Kız*, İstanbul: Erdem Çocuk, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Betül Doğan, Detailed Interview, 20 April 2023.

perceive religion and approach gender roles in the past decade, and that this change is also evident in the children's literature texts that mothers choose for their children. In this context, I argue that children's literature texts serve as both a tool for transmitting social identity to future generations and as a litmus test for observing the social structure. This thesis will focus on examining how the relationship between conservative women, religion, and gender equality has evolved in the past decade in Turkey. It aims to explore the factors that have sparked this change and highlight the differences between today's women-mothers and the previous one. Additionally, the study will discuss whether this presumed transformation is reflected in the children's books that mothers purchase (or do not purchase) for their preschool-aged children. The argument put forth is that the children's books serve as a field that reflect the social change and that an instrument to the transferrin an identity among intergeneration.

The assertion that there has been a change necessitates us to demonstrate how it occurred in the past. Therefore, in the first chapter of the thesis, I will explain the previous generation's (mothers of women in their 30s today) relationship with religion and gender roles. Within this context, I will argue that in the late 1990s, conservative mothers developed a political bond with religion and chose to teach their children "religion as a political identity". To support this claim, I will present evidence from detailed interviews, highlighting the role of children's books in this process of transmission. Furthermore, based on the interviews I conducted, I will discuss that traditional gender roles did not undergo critical examination in the late 1990s, and as a result, they did not find a place in children's books as an identity to be imparted to the child.

In the second chapter, I will argue that conservative women have reevaluated traditional gender roles and religious identity in light of their changing social, economic, and cultural status. Government policies have been instrumental in bringing about this transformation. Within this framework, I will examine the class and cultural shifts, employing the "the personal is political" approach. Conversely, the transition in social class among conservative women has

opened up avenues for personal empowerment. This newfound agency has empowered women to redefine their connection with religion and challenge traditional gender roles, leading them to adopt a unique standpoint distinct from that of low-income women and the previous generation.

As I observe that, today, they share children books promoting gender equality with their children, aiming to establish an egalitarian approach to gender roles in the next generation. I will argue that children's literature books are a litmus test to reflect this change and that the books are instrumentalized by conservative women to convey ideological perspectives of the women. Likewise, I will argue that conservative mothers, whose socio-economic conditions have improved and who belong to the upper-income and cultural strata, have moved away from viewing religion as solely a political identity. Instead, they have developed a rational and individualized relationship with religion. I will demonstrate how they transmit this religious identity shift to their children and assert that, in this context, they also utilize children's literature books, much like their own mothers did.

## **Research Methodology**

The research is based on the qualitative methodology of semi-constructed in-depth interviews. I conducted interviews with the owners of *Fibula* and *Erdem Publications* to gather insights into publishers' observations of the market, feedback from families, and customer trends in the book industry. I chose Erdem Publications due to their extensive experience over 20 years in the field. Additionally, the fact that their target customer group consists of conservative families made it more convenient for me to observe the claimed changes. The combination of their long-standing presence in the field and their appeal to conservative families allowed me to collect valuable data on the group and the changes that occurred among conservative mothers in the last decade.

Furthermore, I conducted a detailed interview with Reyhan Büyükgümüş, the owner of Fibula Publications. There were two main reasons for selecting this publishing house. Firstly, Fibula Publications has been active in the sector for three years, which is useful for showing young conservative mothers' book choices. Secondly, based on Büyükgümüş's statement, they cater to a class group rather than a specific social group through their pricing policy. This enabled me to observe the book preferences of conservative families from high-income and cultural backgrounds, understand their considerations when choosing books, and examine how this customer profile influences publishers' preferences. I focused my questions on preschool books for both publishers.

I specifically selected texts appropriate for the preschool age range to ensure that external factors such as school, teacher influence, or the child's involvement in the book selection process were eliminated. By opting for books specifically designed for children in the preschool period (0-6 years old), I sought to prioritize the preferences of mothers in the book-buying process. This methodology enabled me to observe the purchasing behavior of mothers while reducing potential variables that could impact the results.

Moreover, I conducted in-depth interviews with three mothers who had obtained master's, graduate, and doctoral degrees. By specifically choosing mothers from the postgraduate category, my objective was to collect data from women belonging to the higher cultural stratum. The educational achievements of these women guaranteed their economic independence, providing valuable insights into the preferences and inclinations of the affluent segment of society. This methodology allowed me to investigate the dynamics of change within a specific cultural and economic class.

During the interviews, I inquired about how these mothers learned about religion and gender roles within their own family upbringing and how they shared these concepts with their own children. By comparing across generations, I aimed to examine intergenerational changes.



Additionally, I explored whether children's books are utilized as a tool for identity transmission by discussing both the books they read to their children and the books they purchased for them.

Additionally, I conducted a survey with the participation of 81 women, who define themselves as conservative. The participants were chosen by snowball method. I presented the participants with a selection of preschool children's books (ages 0-6) and asked them whether they would purchase these books for their children (in the case of gender-related books) or which books they would choose from the same topic (in the case of books about religion). During this process, my objective was to eliminate all other variables associated with the books. To achieve this, I did not provide participants with information such as the publisher, author, price, age range, illustrations, or page quality of the books. Instead, I only shared the names of the books and provided brief explanations about their contents. This ensured that participants could solely evaluate the books based on the content presented to them<sup>4</sup>.

## Literature Review

Literature provides a suitable ground for understanding a culture, the structure of society, and certain social changes. It is a branch of art that often reflects what remains in the collective memory<sup>5</sup>. Although there are numerous academic studies that explore the relationship between literature and society, there is a scarcity of research addressing whether the aforementioned variables can also be examined through children's literature, not only in Turkey but also worldwide.

Since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, there have been numerous scholarly studies examining the school curricula within the framework of the regime's "nation-state"

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<sup>4</sup> Google survey, accessed on 8 June 2023, [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14Eevg\\_hVLHanASQnjs-3m-gydYqmmFxBa\\_SUomtViTU/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14Eevg_hVLHanASQnjs-3m-gydYqmmFxBa_SUomtViTU/edit)

<sup>5</sup> Kemal Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Edebiyat ve Toplum*, İstanbul: Timaş Presshouse, 2017, 14-15.

policy<sup>6</sup>. These studies investigate the promotion of nationalism or the objectification of children and childhood by the regime in shaping “ideal citizens”<sup>7</sup>. They primarily analyze textbooks as children's texts, unveiling an indoctrination process where the state ideology takes center stage instead of the child.

There are also qualitative studies that analyze how authors and publishers present the content shared with children through textual analysis. One such example is the article written by Ayşe Saktanber in 1991. In the article entitled "Muslim Identity in Pictured Children's Books", Saktanber analyzed how religion and gender roles were represented in children's books published between 1980 and 1990. According to Saktanber, traditional gender roles that were widely practiced in the family and society during this period were reflected in children's books as they were, providing concrete data for reading the social structure of the time<sup>8</sup>. Her observations through pictured children books show that, children books represent social structure as much as other literary genres. However, her article examines how the social structure is portrayed in children's books through qualitative textual analysis conducted on books published by specific writers and publishers. Women, the subjects of Saktanber's article are mainly active in domestic roles, do not have a professional life, try to meet the physical needs of children, and provide emotional and social support to their husbands. Men, on the other hand, are portrayed as authoritarian characters who earn money, establish a disciplined relationship with their children, and have the first and only word in the religious education of children<sup>9</sup>.

Similarly, Elizabeth Grauerholz published an article entitled as "Gender Representation in Children's Literature 1900-1984". The article primarily centers on analyzing quantitative data

<sup>6</sup> Güven Gürkan Öztan, *Türkiye’de Çocukluğun Politik İnşası*, İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Presshouse, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Füsün Üstel, *“Makbul Vatandaş”ın Peşinde II. Meşrutiyet’ten Bugüne Vatandaşlık Eğitimi*, İstanbul:İletişim Presshouse, 2009, 127-155.

<sup>8</sup> Ayşe Saktanber “Muslim Identity in Children's Picture-Books” in Richard Tapper (ed.) *Islam in Modern Turkey Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State*, IB Taurus, 1991, 171-188.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 171-188.

to investigate the correlation between the portrayal of male and female characters in award-winning children's books recognized by the American Library Association and the prevailing social structure. The author highlights a noteworthy surge in the depiction of female characters during the period of 1950-1970, which coincided with the heightened visibility of women in various societal domains. In contrast, male characters attained a significant representation during the 1920s, particularly through narratives centered around cowboys and folktales. Grauerholz posits that these representation trends are intricately influenced by social conditions, their transformations, and the subsequent time lags<sup>10</sup>. The research findings indicate that children's books are strongly influenced by socio-political conditions, and they serve as a reflection of the prevailing social structure through their illustrations, characters, and content. These books act as a medium through which societal values, norms, and ideologies are conveyed to young readers. The imagery, characters, and themes depicted in children's literature are shaped by and respond to the broader social and political contexts in which they are created. By examining these elements, we gain insight into the ways in which children's books both shape and are influenced by the society in which they exist.

In 2020, Time magazine featured an article titled "*Why a Children's Book Is Becoming a Symbol of Resistance in Hungary's Fight Over LGBT Rights*," shedding light on the inherently political nature of children's publishing. The article highlighted the release of a children's book called "*A Fairy Tale for Everyone*" in September 2020. This book reimaged traditional fairy tales by introducing LGBTQ characters into the narratives. Surpassing all expectations, the initial print run of 1,500 copies sold out within a mere two weeks, demonstrating the significant demand for such inclusive literature. However, the conservative right-wing Orban government responded vehemently to the book, with certain members of parliament even engaging in

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<sup>10</sup> Grauerholz, E. and Pescosolido, B. A. (1989, March). Gender Representation in Children's Literature 1900-1984. *Gender and Society*, Vol 3, 113-125.

homophobic acts such as burning sections of the book. This strong reaction underscored the contentious nature of LGBTQ representation in children's literature and highlighted the book's role as a symbol of resistance within the broader context of the fight for LGBT rights in Hungary. The incident highlighted how children's books can become focal points for political and social debates, transcending their traditional perception as apolitical and innocuous<sup>11</sup>. The publication of this book, the significant public attention it garnered, and the subsequent intense criticism and attacks from the government highlight the realization that children's publishing is far from being a trivial matter. These events provoke us to contemplate two fundamental questions.

First and foremost, it is essential to acknowledge that it was the families, not the children themselves, who were responsible for purchasing this book. Examining the reasons behind the significant interest exhibited by families and reflecting on whether such attention would have been garnered if the book had been published three decades ago are crucial avenues for inquiry. Understanding the motivations and societal dynamics at play can shed light on the evolving attitudes and beliefs surrounding LGBTQ representation in children's literature. Secondly, the book's transformation into a political crisis, despite the widespread interest it generated among large segments of society, raises intriguing sociological questions. Exploring the underlying sociological factors that contribute to both the crisis and the public interest in the book can provide valuable insights. By delving into the social, cultural, and political contexts surrounding the controversy, we can gain a deeper understanding of the societal forces at play and the dynamics that shape the reception and interpretation of children's literature within a broader sociological framework.

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<sup>11</sup> "Why a Children's Book Is Becoming a Symbol of Resistance in Hungary's Fight Over LGBT Rights" Accessed on: 10 May 2023 <https://time.com/5897312/hungary-book-lgbt-rights/?fbclid=IwAR1vOk8RAebZwqY4q3bucapDlz3q50rqLj34DIHrpAMRNW8Eo-wzN5By160>

The core motivation behind prioritizing the exploration of social change through children's literature texts in this thesis stems from the inherent political nature of such books, as exemplified by the aforementioned example. Although there is existing research on children's books, there exists a gap in comprehending these texts through the lens of families' purchasing behavior. Thus, this thesis endeavors to investigate how two generations navigate social change by analyzing the children's books they choose to introduce or withhold from their children. It is my firm belief that social change and the transmission of identity to future generations are deeply political phenomena. Within this framework, children's literature texts serve as vital indicators. By examining the choices made by families in selecting these books, we can gain insights into the intricate dynamics of social change and the ways in which values, ideologies, and identities are propagated. Understanding the political dimensions embedded in children's literature texts allows us to grasp the broader societal implications and the intergenerational transmission of beliefs, thereby providing valuable insights into the complex mechanisms of social transformation.

### **Children Books as Litmus Test**

When embarking on this thesis, my original intention was to explore social change within conservative circles in Turkey. However, as I immersed myself in extensive literature review and conducted field observations, while considering the scope of the thesis, I discovered a compelling focus: the notable transformation occurring among conservative women. In the past decade, this change has become increasingly pronounced, accompanied by a significant shift in the relationship between religious beliefs and traditional gender roles. As a result, three fundamental reasons emerged that led me to concentrate on the evolving landscape of conservative women in this study.

First, throughout the socio-political history of modern Turkey, women, particularly those who wear headscarves, have played a prominent role. They have been active participants, rather than passive stakeholders, in religious policies of governments and in the interactions between conservative groups and governing bodies<sup>12</sup>. The veiled woman has consistently been at the center of attention. Various biopolitical factors have treated the veiled woman as a subject of political and social significance, leading to policies that question and/or redefine her public position<sup>13</sup>. Within this context, observing the socio-political and economic transformations within conservative groups becomes crucial, and the conservative woman emerges as a vital social group to study.

Secondly, Bahattin Akşit conducted an extensive field study on religiosity in Turkey, which involved in-depth interviews with 2,500 participants selected from eight different regions across the country. As part of this research, participants were posed the question, "What is the place of women in Islam?" The responses from conservative respondents varied, with some stating that women and men are not considered equal in Islam, citing specific physical attributes, while others highlighted that Islam grants women numerous positive privileges. On the other hand, secular groups generally perceive Islam as imposing restrictions on women and limiting their freedoms. Despite the divergent perspectives on the place of women in Islam, a common acknowledgment emerged among almost all social groups: the perception of women as the primary caregivers of children. The majority of participants expressed the belief that it is the mother's responsibility to raise and shape children as social beings, attending to their physical needs and moral development. Consequently, women in Turkey are predominantly regarded as the primary caregivers in the upbringing and formation of children. This

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<sup>12</sup> Nilüfer Göle, *İslam'ın Yeni Yüzleri*. İstanbul:Metis Presshouse. 2017, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Aynur İlyasoğlu, *Örtülü Kimlik İslamcı Kadın Hareketinin Oluşum Öğeleri*, 2015, 78.

observation highlights the significant role that women play in the nurturing and development of the younger generation within the societal context of Turkey<sup>14</sup>.

Thirdly, drawing from observations made during interviews with publishers, it became evident that irrespective of their socioeconomic status, it is typically mothers who actively engage in shopping and purchase books for their children, particularly during book fairs<sup>15</sup>. Hence, it is clear that women persist as the primary caregivers for children and remain the primary consumers of children's books. Therefore, studying the purchasing behavior of mothers regarding children's books offers a significant and fruitful avenue for observing the social changes among conservative women in Turkey over the past decade. By examining the choices and preferences of mothers in this context, we gain valuable insights into the evolving perspectives, values, and transformations within conservative women's roles and identities. This analysis provides a lens through which we can understand the shifting dynamics and social progressions occurring within conservative groups, offering a nuanced perspective on the broader societal changes taking place in Turkey.

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<sup>14</sup> Bahattin Akşit (et. al.), *Türkiye’de Dindarlık Sosyal Gerilimler Ekseninde İnanç ve Yaşam Biçimleri*. İstanbul: İletişim Presshouse, 2012, 225-227.

<sup>15</sup> Melike Günyüz, Detailed Interview, 10 May 2023.

## **Chapter I: Unveiling Dynamics of Changing Religiosity and Conservative Women**

Women and the upbringing of children have become highly politicized topics in Turkey. The social and political status of women, their education, their role in the workforce, and their position within the family are subjects frequently discussed by politicians and academics. The upbringing of children and the creation of childhood as the future generation and ideal citizens have impacted from the political climate, ideological approaches, and societal changes. Therefore, women and children have often served as a fertile ground for observing social transformations and political changes.

In this chapter, I will examine the women policies implemented by the state since the establishment of the Turkish Republic and the responses formulated by Islamic communities in reaction to these policies. I argue that the conflict between secular state policies and conservative groups has resulted in the emergence of Islam as a political identity and ideological framework. Throughout the chapter, I will evaluate how this political identity manifests through women policies and women's movements. These policies and responses have significantly influenced the social and political status of conservative women, as well as their perspectives on religion and gender roles. Based on my research and observations, it becomes apparent that over the past decade, conservative women from upper-class backgrounds have developed a more rational and individualistic approach to religion. This has led them to distance themselves from the political and ideological dimensions associated with religion, which was more prevalent among previous generations and conservative women from lower-class backgrounds. Furthermore, highly educated and economically independent women have redefined traditional gender roles in accordance with their changing socio-political and economic positions. In this regard, this chapter will focus on the historical background of the significant changes that have taken place among conservative women from high-class backgrounds in Turkey, particularly during the last decade. It will explore the historical context of religious identity in Turkey, with



a particular emphasis on the role of children's books in shaping political identities and conveying traditional gender roles to the next generation.

Hacer Özel, a 30-year-old mother of three children, is currently pursuing a master's degree in sociology and educational sciences. During detailed interviews, when asked about her parents' relationship with religion, she provided the following response:

*“When I was child, religious life at home was very much influenced by political events. In this context, being religious had a different meaning as it was identified with producing a response against the secular system. I remember that the headscarf issue was discussed many times in the house, especially after February 28.”<sup>16</sup>*

Similarly, Zeynep Kırbaçoğlu, is a 30-year-old mother of two children and a PhD student in political science department at a public university in Istanbul said:

*“As far as I remember, my family's relationship with religion was very much influenced by the political conjuncture, even completely intertwined. While raising us, my family's political Islamist ideology-sensitivity was evident in many areas. The theme of "ummah consciousness" was common in the books they bought at home. I remember that they bought children's magazines, etc. that dealt with issues such as the Palestinian issue, the genocide in Bosnia, etc. I also read a lot of books on the lives of the Companions and the Prophet. There were books called "A Prayer for Everyday" and "A Hadith for Everyday", and these were the books we constantly looked at. When we got a little older and were able to read books on our own, they would buy books by right-wing writers, and these were usually about the consciousness of the cause, headscarf awareness, the difficulties faced by head scarved people, and so on”<sup>17</sup>.*

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<sup>16</sup> Hacer Özel, Detailed Interview, 13 April 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Zeynep Kırbaçoğlu, Detailed Interview, 12 April 2023.

Based on the accounts provided by these two young women, it is evident that both families have established a political connection with religion. The prevailing political conditions of the time directly influenced their relationship with Islam and the specific aspects they emphasized while imparting religious teachings to their children. Furthermore, the Özel family identifies with a nationalist political stance, whereas the Kırbaçoğlu family aligns with an Islamist perspective. The fact that conservative identities from contrasting political views share a similar approach to religion and strive to transmit it to the next generation highlights the notion that religion in Turkey encompasses not only a way of life but also an ideological and political dimension.

Akşit argues that it is not possible to understand the phenomenon of religion in Turkey and to measure the religiosity of the individual by excluding the political life shaped around the axis of Turkey's modernization efforts<sup>18</sup>. According to his perspective, religion and politics are deeply interconnected concepts, maintaining a reciprocal relationship. Individuals' religious beliefs and practices are not separate from the political context; rather, they can be seen as a political stance that emerges through a synthesis of social memory and the prevailing political climate. In a study by Sami Zubaida, which compares Turkey, Egypt, and Iran, it is argued that Islam is not merely experienced as a religious practice but also as a social identity<sup>19</sup>.

While there are numerous factors contributing to the intertwining of religion and politics, I find it essential to examine this issue within the context of "conservative women's public sphere" due to both the thesis's focus and the issue's centrality. Nilüfer Göle argues that comprehending the relationship between Islamist politics and democracy requires an examination of women's public sphere. She emphasizes that the headscarf, which became a focal point of Islamic struggle in the 1980s but had its origins in the 1920s, is not only a key

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<sup>18</sup> Akşit, *Türkiye'de Dindarlık*, 97.

<sup>19</sup> Sami Zubaida, "Trajectories Of Political Islam: Egypt, Iran And Turkey", *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 71, 2000, 66.

element of political claims by Islamist groups but also a significant indicator of the Islamization of public discourse. The presence of headscarved women in the public sphere carries great significance in the Muslim community's connection with religion and politics. According to Göle, the public sphere shaped by secular elites through modernist projects was inherently gendered and authoritarian in nature<sup>20</sup>. Consequently, the headscarf issue represents both a form of rebellion against the authoritarian system and a modernist approach advocating for the restoration of fundamental rights. It serves as a symbol of resistance, challenging the imposed limitations and asserting the demand for individual agency and the recognition of basic human rights. By challenging the gendered and authoritarian nature of the public sphere, the headscarf issue becomes a catalyst for broader social and political transformations, highlighting the aspirations for freedom, equality, and autonomy within conservative women's experiences.

### Secular State and Veiled Woman

In the first decades of the Turkish Republic, the new regime was eager to modernize and secularize the society rapidly. Woman, in the minds of the Republican elite, was central to this process. For instance, the founder of Turkish Republic (1923), Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in one of his speeches, said “In some districts, I see women who veil their faces and hairs with a scarf and never communicate with men. What is the point of this attitude? A civilized woman should not be behaving savagely as such. This funny situation has to be immediately changed.”<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, an array of judicial regulations was made to promote the position of woman in the society<sup>22</sup>. By doing so, the Republic was freeing the Turkish woman from the social and religious norms of *ancient regime*. However, this modernization attempt put the woman in the

<sup>20</sup> Göle, *Islam'ın Yeni Yüzleri*, 22.

<sup>21</sup> Enver Ziya Karal, *Atatürk'ten Düşünceler*, Ankara: METU Publications, 2003, 78.

<sup>22</sup> These regulations encompassed the implementation of the Turkish Civil Code in 1926, which disregarded the influence of religion in shaping gender and family dynamics. The code introduced measures such as the prohibition of polygamy, the requirement for civil marriage instead of religious ceremonies officiated by an imam, granting the right to vote and be elected, and recognizing the right to divorce.

middle of a struggle, in which there was the modern woman, the representative of the new Republic, mostly referred as *Cumhuriyet kadını* (woman of the Republic) and there was the veiled, conservative woman, the representative of backwardness.

In the following period, the "veiled woman" has consistently been at the forefront of the ideal citizen profile that the secular state aims to construct, and the social visibility of conservative women has become the focal point for the state's discourse on matters pertaining to religion. However, undoubtedly, the most pivotal historical event that intensified the headscarf issue, leading to social tensions and occasional conflicts, was the legal prohibition imposed on conservative women, barring them from entering universities and working in public institutions after the military coup on February 28, 1997. These bans have played a significant role in strengthening conservative circles driven by religious motivations. The experience of "political exclusion" resulting from this coexistence has once again elevated the relationship this group has with religion to a political platform. From time-to-time Turkey witnessed numerous protests and street demonstrations, with the veiled woman becoming the focal point of the conflict between the conservative group and the secular state<sup>23</sup>.

In the post-1990s political landscape, the conservative identity's connection with religion became intrinsically linked to its association with politics, thus assuming an ideological stance. The demand for the freedom to wear the headscarf at public institutions was not solely a religious request but also a political one. Consequently, it was impossible to interpret the relationship established by Muslims during that period with religion without considering the prevailing political context. This phenomenon is referred to by Göle as the politicization of Islam<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Nilüfer Göle, *Modern Mahrem, Medeniyet ve Örtünme*, İstanbul: Metis Presshouse, 2019, 134.

<sup>24</sup> Göle, *İslam'ın Yeni Yüzleri*, 29.

## Children Literature and Political Islam

This ideological stance of conservative circles in conflict with the secular state was not only evident in the public and political domains but also in literature. Following the year of 1980, the publication of "*hidayet*<sup>25</sup> novels" reached the peak, focusing on the experiences of veiled women and the socio-political challenges they faced<sup>26</sup>. Kenan Çayır interprets the presence of literary texts during this period of intensified political struggle as "an endeavor by individuals to resist secular impositions and construct new narratives." Consequently, Islamic literature emerged as a novel medium through which to contemplate the processes of civilization and modernization. It served as a platform for expressing alternative perspectives and providing counter-narratives to the dominant secular discourse<sup>27</sup>.

These books sought to shape a new Muslim identity through the medium of literature, highlighting the challenges faced by veiled women in their struggle against the secular state. In the post-1980s, these books became prominent in many households, serving as the texts that parents introduced to their children during their pre-adolescent years. Their purpose was to foster religious and political awareness, nurturing a sense of identity and consciousness within the younger generation. By integrating these books into their children's upbringing, parents aimed to instill values, perspectives, and a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical landscape, reinforcing the significance of religious and political dimensions in their lives. In this regard, *hidayet novels* played a pivotal role in raising a generation that embraced both religious and political values within their families. In essence, these books, which extensively depicted women's struggles for the headscarf in Islamist literature, not only reflected the socio-political

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<sup>25</sup> The term "*hidayet*" is employed to denote guidance obtained from the revealed sources of Islam. Within Turkey's conservative circles, this term signifies an individual's transition from a non-Islamic lifestyle to embracing and adhering to Islamic principles.

<sup>26</sup> Kenan Çayır, *Türkiye'de İslamcılık ve İslami Edebiyat*, İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Presshouse, 2015, 106.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 107.

conditions of the era but also concretized the Islamic community's unique narrative through modern tools, instrumentalizing literature for the transmission of identity.

This tension between conservative groups and the state was also evident in the child-rearing practices within conservative families. These families, desiring to instill a religious identity in their children, placed great emphasis on the notion of "religion as a political existence." This approach directly manifested in the literary texts they chose to share with their children. Zeynep Kırbaçoğlu's recollections of her own family further exemplify the central role of ideological Islam in shaping the upbringing of children by previous generations. Her family's political identity was defined as followers of the right-wing and Islamist ideology, although they did not align themselves with any specific political party that existed before the conservative AKP (Justice and Development Party), which is in power Turkey since 2002. According to her,

*"I remember that they bought children's magazines, etc. that dealt with issues such as the Palestinian issue, the genocide in Bosnia, etc. I also read a lot of books on the lives of the Companions and the Prophet. There were books called "A prayer for every day" and "A hadith for every day", and these were the books we constantly looked at. When we got a little older and were able to read books on our own, they would buy books by right-wing writers, and these were usually about the consciousness of the cause, headscarf awareness, the difficulties faced by headscarved people, and so on."<sup>28</sup>*

Similarly, Hacer Özel defined her family's political identity as nationalist and conservative and she mentioned about her childhood period:

*"I remember reading a lot of youth novels in my teens that brought the headscarf issue to the agenda. In addition, my parents were always very prescriptive and restrictive in conveying religious teachings to us."*

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<sup>28</sup> Zeynep Kırbaçoğlu, Detailed Interview, 12 April 2023.

Also, Betül Doğan who has a son and is a Phd graduate, described the political identity of her family as apolitical conservatives and said:

*“My family's religious stance was very much influenced by the political structure. Since the secular state's attitude towards Muslims disturbed them, they positioned themselves against this system. My sister was an imam hatip student during the 28 February period, stories of people being beaten with batons were talked about in the house. When we were young, my father used to buy and read a lot of books. I can say that we usually read books that instilled an identity in us. I remember that we read a lot about the Bosnian genocide, the Palestinian issue, the children of the ummah, etc. It was like this in most homes at that time. the social memory and pain of conservatives was also passed on to children. Books, magazines and other visual materials always bore the traces of this memory.”<sup>29</sup>*

According to the accounts of these three women, each of them grew up in conservative families with distinct political affiliations. Despite their differing political views, all three families were significantly influenced by the socio-political climate of their time. While imparting religious values to their children, their objective was to instill a politicized religious identity that aligned with their respective ideological stances. Through the interviews I conducted with these women, who spent their formative years in the late 1990s when the headscarf issue was a widely debated topic in the public sphere, traces of the headscarf struggle can be discerned in the books their families purchased during their childhood. These families utilized children's and youth books as a means of religious education, using children's literature texts to convey their religious identities. Consequently, the socio-political context of that era is reflected in the texts produced during that time,

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<sup>29</sup> Betül Doğan, Detailed Interview, 20 April 2023.

while children's literature serves as a conduit for the transmission of the religious identities within these conservative families.

## Gender (In)equality and Headscarf Issues

According to Göle, the public visibility of veiled women represents a modern movement that challenges not only the secular state elite but also the traditional interpretation of Islam<sup>30</sup>. This movement re-examines gender roles within the family structure and rejects the confinement of women to the domestic sphere. The Islamist movement critiques both the modernist agendas of secular authorities, aiming to enhance women's visibility in the public sphere, and the class distinctions imposed on women. From this modern Islamic perspective, women are seen as symbolic agents, not subordinate or substitute figures. Contemporary Islamic activists strive for modern education, urban lifestyles, political engagement, and public visibility, while simultaneously rejecting the state-imposed modernity and secular values<sup>31</sup>.

In addition, Aynur İlyasoğlu argues that the headscarf protests in the 1990s had a class dimension. These actions, primarily driven by the educated conservative segment, are interpreted as a struggle against intellectual deprivation and the pressure to conform to lower-class status. İlyasoğlu considers the actions of headscarved women as a modern response to the system and an internal process of modernization, reflecting their desire to assert their agency and challenge societal expectations<sup>32</sup>.

In this context, the headscarf protests encompassed more than just a rebellion against the impositions of the secular state; they also represented a women's movement advocating

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<sup>30</sup> Göle, *İslam'ın Yeni Yüzleri*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>32</sup> Aksu Akçaoğlu, *Zarif ve Dinen Makbul Muhafazakar Üst-Orta Sınıf Habitusu*. İstanbul: İletişim Presshouse, 2019, 34.



for the visibility and public presence of conservative women. The demands of the protesters extended to equal rights to education, the removal of barriers to economic independence, and unrestricted participation in the public sphere. As a result, these protests challenged the constructed image of women within Muslim thought, which traditionally confined them to the domestic sphere. By asserting their right to wear the headscarf and actively engage in public life, these women defied societal expectations and pushed for a redefinition of women's roles and agency within the conservative community.

Furthermore, in the 1990s, there was a significant rise in the establishment of magazines spearheaded by intellectual conservative women. These publications showcased articles authored by highly educated and affluent women. One noteworthy example is the magazine "Woman Identity," which made its debut in 1995. Within the pages of this magazine, numerous conservative women from higher income brackets, such as doctors, academics, and writers, contributed insightful articles. These articles frequently depicted women in the following manner:

*"A woman, who is both a mother to her children and a pioneer for the future, should be knowledgeable and cultured. She should strive for self-improvement in every aspect. It is essential to recognize that a generation capable of critical thinking, understanding its history, and practicing religion well can only be nurtured by cultured and educated mothers. Additionally, women should manage their households, possess sewing skills, and take on additional responsibilities when necessary. They should support their husbands in achieving greater success in their endeavors."<sup>33</sup>*

Although women are depicted as "superheroes" in this portrayal, there is a subtle novelty to it. They are presented as strong and cultured individuals capable of handling diverse responsibilities, rather than being portrayed as passive consumers or submissive figures.

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<sup>33</sup> Gülhan Cengiz, "Annelik", *Kadın Kimliği*, March 1995, Vol:1, 19.

However, this depiction of women does not yet imply an egalitarian approach between genders. Women are still positioned as the central figures within the household and the primary support for their husbands. Therefore, traditional gender roles persist in practice.

This traditional approach to gender roles becomes apparent in the language used when raising girls and boys, as well as in the assigned tasks and responsibilities. Girls are frequently assigned more active duties related to domestic chores, while boys are tasked with responsibilities outside of the home. Girls are encouraged to engage in childcare, whereas boys are often given more passive roles in this regard. Since gender issues were not a priority for these mothers, their attitudes were not reflected in the children's books and texts they read to their children. In the 1990s, children's books and magazines typically depicted families with traditional roles for males and females, thereby reinforcing conventional gender norms<sup>34</sup>.

In conclusion, religion in Turkey has become a political identity among all conservative segments, irrespective of their political affiliations. This can be attributed to various factors, but the main catalyst was the attempt to marginalize Muslims through certain secular state policies. The period following the 1997 coup d'état marked a significant moment when debates surrounding the public visibility of women intensified, further solidifying the political connection between conservative groups and religion. Children's literature books played a dual role during this time, serving as a means to observe the social and political dynamics of the era and as a tool for transmitting identity across generations. They reflected the social and political structure of the period and carried significant implications for understanding the relationship between religion and society.

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<sup>34</sup> Ayşe Saktanber, *Muslim Identity in Children's Picture-Books*, 1991, 177.



Figure 1 In the book of *Küçük Kız*, a woman embarks on a journey while her relatives are astonished how her husband would deal with housework during her absence.

During the post-coup years of the late 1990s, conservative women's movements reached their peak, representing both a political uprising and a challenge to traditional gender roles from within. However, it is important to note that gender equality was not as politicized as religion among conservative mothers during this period. As a result, there was less emphasis on sharing books that specifically focused on gender equality issues, and conservative publishers were less likely to publish books in this field. The primary focus remained on religious identity and the preservation of traditional roles within the family structure.

## Chapter II: Gender Equality and Conservative Women: A Class-Based Perspective

*“About 12 years ago, we published a book called “The Little Girl”<sup>35</sup>. The book features a young girl who was married off as a child. Prior to her marriage, she worked in the fields with her father and helped her mother with household chores. After getting married, she continued to work in the fields with her husband, became a mother, and also took care of household tasks. One day, the girl realizes that she has always lived for others and has never done anything for herself. She expresses her desire to play the flute, which draws negative reactions from those around her. They question why she wants to play the flute, reminding her of her responsibilities towards housework and the children, and telling her that women don't play the flute. Despite this, the girl decides to pursue her passion and learns to play the flute. Upon returning, we see that she is a very happy woman, and her happiness brings joy to those around her. When we first published the book, we faced harsh criticism, especially from fathers who accused us of promoting feminist ideals. However, if we were to publish the book today, I am confident that we would receive a more positive reception. Women are now more aware of the importance of raising strong and independent daughters, as they themselves have become increasingly liberated.”<sup>36</sup>*

Melike Günyüz, the editor-in-chief of Erdem Publishing Group, which has been publishing in Turkey for more than 20 years and whose customer profile consists largely of conservative groups, highlighted that when they released a children's book on women's emancipation 10 years ago, they encountered a notable reaction, particularly from fathers, resulting in the book's limited popularity compared to others. However, she expressed her belief that if the same book were to be published today, it would garner significant sales and be highly

<sup>35</sup> Fatima Sharafeddine, *Küçük Kız*.

<sup>36</sup> Melike Günyüz, Detailed Interview, 10 May 2023.

popular. This observation suggests a shift towards a more egalitarian and progressive perspective on the social position of women among conservative families over a decade. The publisher's focus on conservative families as their primary audience suggests that this change has taken place within the specific social group of conservative families.

The question that arises is: What has transpired in the past decade that has altered the perception of gender equality among conservative mothers? It can be argued that a significant political decision played a crucial role in prompting women to prioritize the issue of gender equality: the lifting of the ban on wearing headscarves in universities in 2007 and the subsequent liberalization of headscarf regulations in the public sector. These policy changes have likely contributed to a shift in conservative mothers' perspectives on gender equality.

In this chapter, I will examine the transformation of conservative women in terms of gender equality and religious beliefs. I will analyze this change through the lens of children's books, specifically exploring which books conservative women choose to share with their children and why. Firstly, I will delve into the women policies implemented during the AKP period, which have had an impact on the socio-economic and cultural standing of conservative women. Secondly, I will explore how the evolving gender and religious perspectives of conservative women, influenced by their changing socio-economic status, are reflected in the selection of children's books by mothers.

### **AKP Period and Conservative Women**

In 2001, the AKP was established, and it achieved significant success by winning the 2002 general elections and becoming the sole ruling party. The AKP secured 363 out of 550 seats in the Turkish Parliament.<sup>37</sup> This major success was followed by the implementation of

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<sup>37</sup> *Resmi Gazete* [Official Gazette], "3 Kasım 2002 Milletvekili Genel Seçimi Sonuçları," 10 November 2002, Access date: 1 June 2023, <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/doc/dosyalar/docs/2002MilletvekiliSecimi/turkiye/milletvekilisayisi.pdf>

economically liberal and politically democratic policies in its first decade. The AKP adopted a more inclusive approach, embracing diverse ideas and identities beyond its previous strict Islamist ideology.<sup>38</sup>

The AKP defines its political identity as "conservative democrat," which sets it apart from former Islamist parties. This definition allows the party to encompass both Islamic groups and nationalist right-wing circles. Furthermore, the AKP has adopted Western concepts such as human rights and democratization to create a space for religious freedom and the expression of Islamic identity. Therefore, they were evaluated as "a creative and alternative modernity"<sup>39</sup> and "a new right-wing party which use modern codes to be legal in the secular system"<sup>40</sup>. Moreover, Zehra Yılmaz argues that Islam has globalized based on "homogenous principles," like human right, democracy, and liberalization, particularly during the 2000s<sup>41</sup>.

Furthermore, the AKP had the full membership of the European Union as one of its primary goals. Unlike previous Islamist parties, the AKP did not directly oppose the secular regime. Instead, it conveyed messages indicating that it had changed and reconciled with the secular values of Turkey. During the first decade of AKP government, the party implemented two significant constitutional reforms that greatly increased the social and political visibility of Muslim identity in Turkey.

One of the significant legislative reforms implemented by the AKP was the removal of the disadvantageous system that discouraged graduates of Imam Hatip schools, designated initially for training imams, from pursuing non-religious fields. Previously, if a student from an Imam Hatip school chose a non-religious field, their grades would be automatically decreased by the system. This unjust treatment of students studying in Imam Hatip schools was viewed as

<sup>38</sup> Ziya Öniş, "Monopolising the Centre: The AKP and the Uncertain Path of Turkish Democracy," *The International Spectator*, Vol. 50, 2015, 25.

<sup>39</sup> Cihan Tuğal, *Pasif Devrim: İslâmî Muhalefetin Düzenle Bütünleşmesi*, İstanbul: Koç University Presshouse, 2010, 98.

<sup>40</sup> Tanıl Bora, "2002 Seçimi ve Siyasî Güzergâh Problemleri", *Birikim*, 2002, 164.

<sup>41</sup> Zehra Yılmaz, *Dişil Dindarlık İslamcı Kadın Hareketinin Dönüşümü*. İstanbul: İletişim Presshouse, 2015, 79.

a violation of their rights, and the new regulation was framed not as a religious motivation, but as a restoration of fundamental rights and freedoms<sup>42</sup>.

Secondly, and more significantly, in 2007, the headscarf ban at universities and other public institutions was lifted through judicial reforms. This reform can be seen as a means to dismantle the bureaucratic oligarchy that previously restricted veiled women from freely pursuing their studies at universities. It was considered a restoration of a fundamental human right for women<sup>43</sup>. On the other hand, from the perspective of secular groups, this reform was seen as an obstacle and a threat to the secular norms of the republic. For many years, the secular regime had sought to control the socio-political visibility of veiled women in order to protect the secular and modern ideology of the state, as well as to create an ideal image of modern and secular women in the Republic.

The liberal and democratic women policies implemented by the AKP have had a direct impact on the social, political, and economic visibility of conservative women. While there is no official institution that provides direct data on the distribution of the number of headscarved students in universities over the years, information obtained from ÖSYM (Student Selection and Placement Centre) and YÖK (Council of Higher Education) reveals interesting trends. Prior to 2007, the number of female students applying for university entrance exams showed fluctuations. However, starting from 2007, there has been a steady increase in the number of female students wearing headscarves who are applying for higher education<sup>44</sup>. This increasing trend indicates a clear correlation between the removal of the headscarf ban and the rise in the number of female applicants. Similarly, there is also an upward trend in the labor force participation rates of women who wear headscarves. These rates demonstrate that the liberal

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<sup>42</sup> Emel Çokoğullar, "2002-2012 Dönemi'nde Türkiye'de Siyasal Alan, Din ve Özgürlük", *Uluslararası Politik Araştırmalar Dergisi*. Vol:7, 24.

<sup>43</sup> Zehra Yılmaz, *Dişil Dindarlık*, 190.

<sup>44</sup> Ömer Toprak, "Türkiye'de Başörtüsü Yasağının Yükseköğretimde Cinsiyet Dengesi Üzerindeki Etkileri," Accessed on: 12 May 2023, <http://www.sosyalbilimlervakfi.org/tr/2021/04/turkiyede-basortusu-yasaginin-yuksekogretimde-cinsiyet-dengesi-uzerindeki-etkileri/>

and democratic policies implemented by the AKP have contributed to the economic empowerment and educational advancement of conservative women.

## Re-reading of Traditional Gender Roles

With the removal of the headscarf ban, conservative women experienced a significant increase in their participation in social and educational life. This resulted in greater opportunities for education, employment in high-profile positions, and the ability to hold official positions within the state.<sup>45</sup> These policies implemented by the AKP demonstrate a commitment to supporting the social visibility, economic independence, and education of women. As the economic and intellectual conditions of women improved, traditional gender role approaches began to modernize and become more egalitarian. This aligns with the concept expressed by Carol Hanisch's phrase, "The personal is political," which emphasizes the interconnectedness between personal experiences and political contexts<sup>46</sup>. Hanisch's argument about the interconnectedness of women's personal experiences, gender inequality, and social structures resonates with the changes observed in Turkey. The AKP government's modernist, liberal, and democratic policies, especially during its early years, were aimed at improving the social, economic, and intellectual rights of women. These policies not only affected women's everyday lives on a micro level but also had broader implications for their social and economic class. It is worth noting that the emergence of the egalitarian approach among women who actively raise gender issues in their daily practices is influenced by both political and class dynamics. The fact that these women are often well-educated and come from higher-income groups suggests that the transformation towards an egalitarian perspective is influenced by their access to education, resources, and social networks. Thus, the changes in women's social status

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<sup>45</sup> Aksu Akçaoğlu, *Zarîf ve Dinen Makbul Muhafazakar Üst-Orta Sınıf Habitusu*, 130.

<sup>46</sup> Meltem Altan, "Radikal Feminizm: "Kişisel Olan Politik" Söyleminde Aile", *The Journal Of Europe - Middle East Social Science Studies*, Vol:1, 2015, 3.



and class play a significant role in shaping their understanding of gender equality and their ability to advocate for it within political realms<sup>47</sup>.

It is possible to discuss the political and class dynamics of the egalitarian perspective on gender roles followed through the reactions that developed as a result of the AKP government's annulment of the Istanbul convention in 2021. Istanbul Convention (a plan, envisaging to take action against persecution of women and domestic violence) which has been framed and supported by EU. There are many debates about the Convention both among politicians and public. The AKP, which had initially adopted this convention, implied rejecting it under the pretext that it would support any gender groups to be protected from violence. Since the government has adopted a strict anti-LGBT approach, this Convention became more controversial among conservative circles. However, it was interesting to see that both KADEM (Women and Democracy Association), a pro-AKP woman organization and Reçel Blog, who is a website which women -a majority of them are conservatives, anti-AKP and feminist- write their opinions and share.

Despite their differing political identities, these two women's organizations, consisting of educated and high-income women, criticized the government's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention and expressed their support for it. However, according to a report titled "What Do People Say about the Istanbul Convention" published by KONDA, while 70% of university-educated women claim to know and support the Istanbul Convention, this percentage drops to 18% for women with a high school education. Similarly, the support for the convention among white-collar female employees is at 68%, whereas it drops to 28% among housewives<sup>48</sup>.

In the context of gender equality and the reevaluation of traditional gender roles, the political structure plays a pivotal role in determining, changing, and implementing approaches

<sup>47</sup> Aksu Bora, *Kadınların Sınıfı Ücretli Ev Emeği ve Kadın Öznelliğinin İnşası*, İstanbul: İletişim Presshouse, 2005, 45.

<sup>48</sup> Konda report, Istanbul Sözleşmesi, Ağust 2020, Accessed on <https://konda.com.tr/uploads/barometre-111-istanbulsozlesmesi-c17ac43bb57310f6be6dd7237c7fa3dcc24953a93535c01a20e64c76bb5424e7a.pdf>

that directly impact daily practices. The conservative women's right to education and their ability to pursue high-profile professional careers are outcomes of political decisions made by the AKP government. The transformative effects of these political decisions extend beyond changes in social class. They also influence the perception of gender roles within the microcosm of daily life. Hanisch's concept of "the personal is political" is relevant here, as it highlights the interconnectedness between personal experiences and broader political contexts. The political decision to support women's rights and empowerment has resulted in a shift in societal norms and individual attitudes towards gender roles. Furthermore, the class differentiation that arises from these political decisions creates a new realm of agency for women. The opportunities for education and professional advancement enable conservative women to challenge traditional gender expectations and contribute to a more egalitarian society. The personal experiences of these women are intricately connected to the political decisions that have paved the way for their social and economic empowerment, ultimately shaping their individual lives and the broader social landscape.

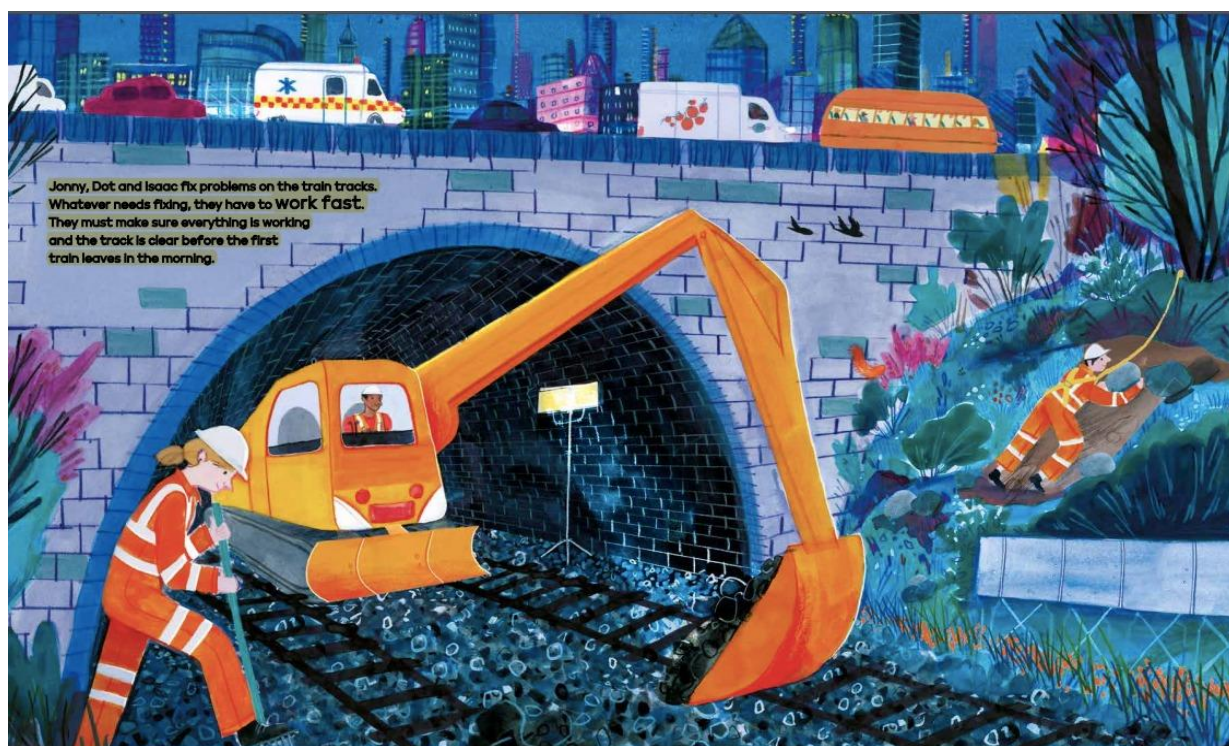


Figure 2 In the book of Gece Boyunca, a woman is seen as working in a manual labor.

The changing dynamics of gender roles and the reevaluation of traditional norms are being experienced differently across social classes. Women from privileged backgrounds, regardless of their conservative or non-conservative stance, have begun to reinterpret and challenge traditional gender roles from an egalitarian perspective. This indicates a departure from the paths followed by women from lower social classes. The reactions to the Istanbul Convention, which addresses gender-based violence and promotes women's rights, further highlight the intersection of social class and women's position in the public sphere. Different social classes engage with this issue in distinct ways, reflecting the influence of political discourse in shaping societal perceptions of women. These reactions and debates surrounding the convention reveal the diverse constructions of women within the political landscape.

The increased involvement of women in the workforce has brought about notable changes in the division of domestic duties and the perception of gender roles within households. Traditional gender norms are being replaced by more modern and egalitarian perspectives. This transformation is not limited to the adult sphere but also extends to the upbringing of children. Mothers, in particular, are selecting children's books that align with these evolving gender identities and values. These books serve as a means for mothers to instill a sense of gender equality in their children, nurturing a shared understanding and fostering a relationship with gender equality from an early age.

As mothers increasingly embrace gender equality, we can observe a parallel shift in the values portrayed in the books their children read. Reyhan Büyükgümüş, the editor-in-chief of Fibula Publishing House, highlights the growing popularity of books such as “All Through the Night”<sup>49</sup>, described by Büyükgümüş as the second best-selling book. This demonstrates that parents prioritize texts that promote and support the concept of gender equality when purchasing books for their children.

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<sup>49</sup> Polly Faber, *Gece Boyunca*. (Saraç, S.B. Trans) Istanbul: Fibula Presshouse, 2022.

*“All Through the Night” is our second best seller book. In the book, the occupational groups that work while we sleep at night are discussed in a language that children can understand. 10 different occupational groups are introduced and women are represented in 7 of these night-time jobs. Being a driver, road maintenance worker, police that are very masculine jobs were handled with female characters during the book. Those who buy the book have three main different motivations. The first group is the families which have a member working nights. The book helps children realize that they are not alone and develops empathy skills. The second group prioritizes the labor issue and aims to raise awareness by saying to their children, “there are people who work at night and they do important work.” Third and largest group that prioritizes gender equality and believes that women can do masculine work and can work at night. Although there is a lot of emphasis on female employees in the content, we have never received negative feedback about it. On the contrary, quite a lot of people prefer the book for this reason<sup>50</sup>. ”*

Also, Günyüz further mentioned that conservatives are increasingly embracing the importance of sex and privacy education for children. She emphasized that this education is not limited to girls but is equally provided to boys.

*“Some of our books have been bestsellers in every period, while others have never had the impact we expected and some have even been heavily criticized. However, for the last 10 years, our book “The Red Line” has consistently been among the top five bestsellers. The book's subject is bodily privacy, and it is purchased by mothers of both girls and boys. We have experienced much higher sales than we anticipated, and it has become popular among both conservative and secular audiences.<sup>51</sup> ”*

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<sup>50</sup> Reyhan Büyükgümüş, Detailed Interview, 11 May 2023.

<sup>51</sup> Melike Günyüz, Detailed interview, 10 May 2023.

The popularity of gender equality and bodily privacy education books as the top best-selling books from both publishers offers valuable insights into the preferences and values of parents who buy these books. Günyüz notes that the dominance of these approaches and themes, which may have faced opposition in the past, signifies a transformative shift in the identity and mindset of book-buying parents. This shift has been effectively transmitted to their children through the strategic use of children's literature. In-depth interviews I conducted with conservative, educated, and affluent mothers further support the publishers' thesis, confirming that these parents actively seek out books that promote progressive values and contribute to shaping their children's understanding of gender equality.

*“I especially pay attention to this issue in the books we buy, there are still too many sexist books on the market. Especially in fairy tale books, girls are characterized as passive and boys as heroes. I try not to buy such books, and if I do, I try to change them while reading. There is a book published by Domingo Publications that we read together called "Your Choice, Your Fairy Tale". In the book, we can create a new fairy tale by choosing the main characters of many classic fairy tales together. Thus, we can get rid of the classic gender weave a little bit. Princes are not always saviors, sometimes they are waiting to be saved, for example<sup>52</sup>.”*

Zeynep Kırbaçoğlu voiced her aversion to books that reinforce traditional gender roles when choosing literature for her son. She stressed her hesitation in exposing her child to narratives that portray men as strong saviors and women as weak and emotional characters. Similarly, Hacer Özel shared a similar motivation when selecting books for her own children. According to her,

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<sup>52</sup> Zeynep Kırbaçoğlu, Detailed Interview, 12 April 2023.

*“Cemile is the book we have read the most recently. In the book, the girl's father prepares a cake for her mother's birthday party, which will be attended by her mother's colleagues. There is a role distribution that we are not used to. The father is at home, the mother is working, the food is cooked for the mother, and moreover, the father not only fills an essential need, but also takes part in entertainment times. I don't buy books in which there is equality between men and women, but if there is a clear patriarchy, I don't buy that book. For example, I recently came across a book in which the mother is portrayed as very tired and disorganised, but she is shown as energetic and well dressed. I don't like to read stories where women are in the background.”<sup>53</sup>*

In her response, Özel emphasized her inclination to share literature with her child that promotes egalitarian and non-traditional gender roles within the household. This alignment between the choices of both mothers underscores the publishers' observation that books embodying an egalitarian and contemporary perspective on gender representation are more prevalent and influential in terms of sales.

As part of my thesis study, I conducted a survey with 81 conservative mothers to investigate their book preferences. The survey focused on their willingness to purchase the book titled *"Man Can Cry"* for their children. This book explores social behaviors that are often associated with specific genders and challenges the notion that certain emotions are only appropriate for men or women. The book presents these ideas in a language suitable for children aged 3-6, allowing them to understand and question traditional gender norms. While 40.7 % of the participant mothers said *I definitely buy the book*, 40.7 % said *I can buy*, 7.4 % said *I don't buy*.

On the other side, in the book titled *Yiğitcan and Cansu Playing Football*, a boy (Yiğitcan) playing football and a girl accompanying him are discussed. In the book, the sentence

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<sup>53</sup> Hacer Özel, Detailed Interview, 13 April 2023.

"I was going to say let's play football, but girls don't play football!" draws attention. When I ask to the mothers whether they would buy the book for their children, %43.2 of participants said *I don't buy*, % 17.8 said *I can buy*. When analyzing the responses provided by the mothers regarding these two books, alongside the insights gained from detailed interviews, it becomes apparent that educated and affluent mothers are reluctant to expose their children to texts that promote traditional gender roles. Instead, these mothers prefer to share books with their children that promote gender equality or feature balanced gender representations. It is not coincidental that there is a correlation between the inclinations of conservative mothers and the themes found in the best-selling books of publishers Günyüz and Büyükgümüş, which revolve around gender equality and bodily privacy. The prioritization of gender equality by conservative mothers when selecting texts to share with their children has led to an increased demand for these books from these publishing houses.

However, it is important to note that this preference is not universal among all mothers. Melike Günyüz explains that her customer profile, based on her observations at book fairs, can be divided into two distinct groups. The first and larger group comprises well-educated and economically privileged conservative mothers, while the second group consists of lower-income conservative mothers. Günyüz notes that her bestselling book, *"The Red Line,"* which focuses on bodily privacy, is predominantly preferred by mothers from the first group. Similarly, Büyükgümüş mentions that a majority of their customers come from high-income families, based on their pricing strategy. According to Büyükgümüş, their best-selling book, *"The All Through the Night,"* is preferred by various social groups, including high-class families. When considering the customer profiles of the publishers, it becomes evident that mothers who favor egalitarian gender roles tend to belong to higher cultural and socioeconomic groups. In summary, as mothers' educational attainment and economic opportunities increase, there is a notable emphasis on the theme of gender equality in the books they choose to share

with their children. It is observed that mothers impart their own ideological views to their children through the medium of children's books.

## **Changing Religious Identity and Conservative Women**

In 2007, headscarf ban at universities and other public institutions was removed by certain judicial reforms. The mean of this judicial reform can be evaluated both as putting away the bureaucratic oligarchy, which prevented veiled women from studying freely at universities and returning a fundamental human right to women. When removing headscarf ban, the participation rate of conservative women in social and education life was increased sharply. As a result, conservative women have obtained the chance to be well-educated, to become state official and to work in high profile jobs. These policies of AKP regime aiming to support social visibility, economic independency, and education of women led to a class shift among conservatives both economically and culturally<sup>54</sup>.

In Turkey, as women's socio-economic visibility increased, there has been a shift in social class, not only in terms of economic advancement through greater independence but also in terms of cultural advancement through equal educational opportunities. With this transition in social class, women's perspectives on various issues have diverged from those of lower-class women. Şerif Mardin argues that the relationship with religion is influenced by class differences. He suggests that various socio-cultural and socio-economic groups establish distinct relationships with religion. Mardin's concept of "Islam of the elites versus Islam of the ordinary people" highlights fundamental differences in the relationship with religion in Turkey, which can be attributed to class differences<sup>55</sup>. According to Mardin, the term "elite" encompasses not only the religious elite but also a broader group consisting of economic,

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<sup>54</sup> Aksu Akçaoğlu, *Zarîf ve Dinen Makbul: Muhafazakar Üst-Orta Sınıf Habitusu*, 91.

<sup>55</sup> Şerif Mardin, *Din ve İdeoloji*, İstanbul: İletişim Presshouse, 2021, 75.



political, and cultural elites. Mardin asserts that factors such as group consciousness, collective behavior, and belonging to a religious group significantly shape and determine the relationship with religion among ordinary people. He argues that membership in a religious group is more prevalent among individuals with lower incomes and those belonging to lower cultural groups<sup>56</sup>. On the other hand, Mardin maintains that the educated and affluent class, referred to as the elites, experience religion in small aspects of their daily lives, approaching it in an individualized and rationalized manner. For this group, group consciousness does not serve as a significant indicator of religiosity. When the liberal and democratic policies of the AKP regarding women's rights increased the economic well-being and educational level of conservative women, it also triggered a class shift among conservatives, particularly women. As a result, their economic status and intellectual conditions changed, leading to a shift in their religious attitudes towards a more rationalized and individualized approach, as Mardin pointed out<sup>57</sup>.

Similarly, Zehra Yılmaz argues that the form of religious interpretation evolves in parallel with the socio-economic changes experienced by women. According to Yılmaz, the changing social conditions, including urbanization, increased education, economic transformations, the rise of an educated middle class (particularly among women and young people), and increased global interconnectedness, have necessitated a reexamination of Islam.

In the context of the new global and capitalist world, religious texts are being approached from

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>57</sup> The relationship between low-income women and the prevailing political discourse, as well as their distinct daily experiences compared to upper-class women, cannot be solely attributed to group behavior. The presence of class privilege has granted conservative women a sense of agency. These women face a modern conflict not only in terms of their religious practices and the state's regulation of their religious rights but also in relation to the traditional role of women within religious norms. This agency is directly linked to the social class they belong to or aspire to be a part of. Within this context, Nilüfer argues that during the headscarf debates in the 1990s, educated upper-middle-class women who wore headscarves displayed a distinct attitude that set them apart from the lower-income group. They claimed to possess superior knowledge of the "true" religion. Nilüfer describes veiled students as new actors within the Islamist movement and suggests that their symbolic capital, as described by Bourdieu, represents the socio-political divide between religious and secular spheres. She interprets their emergence as actors based on their social status and class attainment.

a rational perspective, taking into account new lifestyles, and placing emphasis on modern concepts such as democracy, freedoms, and fundamental human rights<sup>58</sup>. The increased accessibility of information, facilitated by factors like the internet and new media, has dismantled the monopoly on religious knowledge. As a result, there has been a rise in the availability of alternative interpretations. With the accelerated pace and enhanced accessibility of religious knowledge, individuals now have the opportunity for personal understanding and interpretation, leading to a shift from group consciousness to a more individualized perception and approach to religion<sup>59</sup>. The notion that religious individuals are becoming more individualistic and moving away from "Islam as a political identity" solely as a result of higher education levels and the emergence of the religious middle class may oversimplify the complexity of this process. A more accurate characterization of this transformation in the Turkish context, as proposed by Yılmaz, would be "an endeavor to reinterpret Islam in accordance with the evolving global order and its accompanying lifestyles"<sup>60</sup>. The group in which this change is most clearly observed is undoubtedly conservative women.

It is evident that women with greater intellectual knowledge and economic empowerment, in contrast to the previous generation and lower-class women, ascribe significantly less "political meaning and function of social cohesion" to religion. This transformation in mothers' identities is also reflected in how they impart Islamic teachings to their children and in their selection of children's books, whether to purchase or avoid, that align with their evolving perspectives. Günyüz notes that there has been a significant shift among conservative women, particularly in the last 10 years, resulting in the readership being divided into two distinct classes. She said:

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<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, 80.

<sup>59</sup> Oliver Roy, *Küreselleşen İslam*, (H, Bayrı Trans.) İstanbul: Metis Presshouse, 2016, 83.

<sup>60</sup> Zehra Yılmaz, *Dişil Dindarlık*, 80.

*“Almost all our readership, which consists of buying mothers, has transformed into well-educated and economically independent conservative women. By well-educated, I mean women who are intellectually self-educated, not necessarily university graduates, but who exhibit certain characteristics that distinguish them from women with lower education. In 2023, we participated in two different book fairs, and it was evident that the parents, mostly mothers, who attended were divided into two groups. The first and larger group consisted of well-educated mothers with high economic awareness and income. We rarely had to guide them in selecting books as they already knew what their children needed. For instance, when a mother whose child had lost a pet came to the stand, she immediately asked for a book on the theme of death and left after getting the book. Another mother examined and purchased a book about a young girl who aspires to be a writer. The second group consists of mothers with a relatively lower level of education. They typically ask whether the books are approved by the Ministry of National Education or express their trust in Erdem Publications. They tend to choose books based on titles and cover design, without questioning the content as they either trust us or do not prioritize their child's needs. Our books with religious content are particularly popular with this group, and they often ask for Merve Gülcemal's books, which we sell a lot to them.”<sup>61</sup>*

Also Reyhan Büyükgümüş made a similar observation. According to her,

*“The main thing that determines our buyer base is our price policy. We maintain high quality standards for our books' content and visuals. Also, we are a publishing house that is not restricted to a certain area and does not publish uniform books. So, when this quality can be provided by economic well-being, our audience automatically becomes people in the better income group. As far as I can see, the issues that*

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<sup>61</sup> Melike Günyüz, Detailed Interview, 10 May 2023.

*economically high families that is our main readership, hope to share with their children or do not want to share with their children are similar. Our audience is divided not ideologically but class-wise, and their behaviors, approaches to the book, and expectations are similar at some point. When purchasing books for their children, these families take into consideration whether the content meets their child's needs, encourages their creative thinking, prompts questions, and utilizes a literary language rather than a didactic one. Therefore, even if the books we publish aim to shape children's behavior, we prioritize entertaining texts that achieve this through implicit language. This choice aligns with our customer profile's expectations...<sup>62</sup>”*

These two publishing house owners have different goals in their publishing careers. Erdem Publishing Group focuses on economically accessible books that can be preferred by different social class groups, while Fibula aims to target the upper class with its pricing policy. However, the purchasing behaviors of conservative mothers from both segments, those belonging to the upper economic class who shop from Günyüz, and the conservative segment who prefer Büyükgümüş, exhibit similar characteristics. Observations from both publishers indicate that well-educated and financially prosperous mothers do not buy books for their children based on trust in the publishing house or unconditional loyalty to the author, but rather make specific purchases that prioritize their child's needs. Additionally, these parents do not prefer didactic content or direct behavioral training as prominent features in the books they choose. This behavior pattern also applies when buying religious texts for their children. Günyüz mentions that mothers with lower levels of education, who trust the author and the publishing house, tend to purchase Merve Gülcemal's books, which are more instructive and use direct religious terminology.

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<sup>62</sup> Reyhan Büyükgümüş, Detailed Interview, 11 May 2023.

*“...On the other hand, our published books do include universal human values. They cover topics such as solidarity, sharing, kindness, patience, which help shape a child's relationship with the world. Families have the freedom to choose the language they use when sharing these texts and the values they wish to convey to their children. Our decision not to focus on direct religious values allows us to reach a broader readership...”<sup>63</sup>”*

From the other side, Büyükgümüş stated that their preference is to publish literary texts that convey certain values to children rather than focusing on religious texts. This publishing policy aligns with the expectations of their customer profile. Based on this data, it can be concluded that mothers belonging to the upper cultural and economic class do not rely on a specific publisher or the publisher's texts when purchasing children's books. Instead, they make direct purchases based on the book itself and the individual needs of their child. These mothers prioritize literary quality over didactic content. Moreover, there are noticeable similarities in the preferences of this group of mothers when it comes to buying texts that directly deal with religious subjects. The responses provided by the mothers I interviewed in detail also align with the observations of these two publishers. According to Kırbaçoğlu,

*“I do not want to introduce my child to an ideological or political religion like my parents. When I give religious education, I proceed on a moral basis. Questions such as how to be a good person, how good behavior is rewarded in our religion are more prioritized for me than how to pray. when I buy books for my child, I prefer texts that will reinforce good behavior, but I do not necessarily buy religious books for this. When buying books with religious content, I prioritize books that offer rational and understandable answers to the child's questions about religion. For example, I recently*

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<sup>63</sup> Melike Günyüz, Detailed Interview, 10 May 2023.

*bought the "I wonder about God for younger children" series. Books that answer questions such as why I can't see God, where is God, who created God. It does not give answers with verses or hadiths, my parents would answer with verses when I asked them such questions, I think explaining with verses is too abstract. In this book, he first gives logical answers, then links some verses to the subject and presents them in a language that the child can understand. As a mother, I think that my biggest responsibility regarding religious education is to ensure that my child is a good person, to satisfy his curiosity about religion and then to leave him free in his choices.<sup>64</sup>”*

Similarly, Betül Doğan said,

*“When I teach religion to my son, I use an embracing language, not an ideological one. I try to break down the language of the other and us, which was widely used in our time. Therefore, the symbols of different cultures and basic rituals and values are the issues I prioritize. Good has the same definition for everyone, everyone calls the same things good and the same things bad, and I want to raise my child as a good, religious and conscious citizen of the world. In this context, yes, I make use of children's books. However, I think books that claim to provide religious education can be very faulty, didactic and patriarchal in terms of their content and handling of the issue. For this reason, when I buy children's books, I generally prefer books that reinforce good behavior. Thus, I have many alternatives and I have the chance to choose the one that is right for me.<sup>65</sup>”*

According to Özel, Kırbaçoğlu, and Doğan, well-educated conservative women have a different approach to religion compared to their families, with two main distinctions. Firstly, these women do not view religion from an ideological or political perspective; instead, they see

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<sup>64</sup> Zeynep Kırbaçoğlu, Detailed Interview, 12 April 2023

<sup>65</sup> Betül Doğan, Detailed Interview, 20 April 2023.

it as a part of their everyday lives and personal spheres. Secondly, when it comes to religious education, they prioritize teaching rules, rituals, and the concept of ummah (the global Muslim community). They emphasize the importance of "being a good person" in a child's religious upbringing. As a result, while children's books are used to reinforce positive behavior, texts that directly employ religious terminology are avoided in this context.

Among the survey participants, 93.6% had completed undergraduate or graduate degrees. Regarding personal income satisfaction, 69.1% of the respondents answered positively. Furthermore, 70 of the participating mothers identified themselves as religious or very religious. As part of the survey, I presented a selection of children's books and asked the mothers to choose a book solely based on its content, without providing any information about the age group, publisher, author, price, or genre.

Firstly, I presented the participants with a choice between two books that focused on the concept of "kindness" for children. The first book was titled "My Sweet Values: The Race for Goodness," while the second book was simply titled "Kindness." In the first book, the main character exemplified kindness by sharing their possessions with those in need. The book incorporated religious terminology such as Sadaqa (charity given voluntarily to please God) to convey the concept of helping to the child. On the other hand, the second book featured different illustrations on each page, depicting various acts of kindness such as helping, sharing, greeting, and smiling faces. This book did not include any religious terms. Interestingly, 51.9% of the mothers preferred the second book<sup>66</sup>. This finding aligns with the information gathered from interviews, where mothers expressed a preference for texts that reinforce positive behavior in children without the use of religious terms.

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<sup>66</sup> Google Survey: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Rollerinin ve Dini Kimliğin Çocukla Paylaşılmasında Çocuk Edebiyatı Metinlerinin Yerine Dair Bir Araştırma, Access on: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14Eevg\\_hVLHanASQnjs-3m-gydYqmmFxBa\\_SUomtViTU/edit?usp=drive\\_web](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14Eevg_hVLHanASQnjs-3m-gydYqmmFxBa_SUomtViTU/edit?usp=drive_web)

In addition, I asked the participants to choose between two books that centered on the life of Prophet Mohammad. The first book, titled "Three Children and a Dream," explores the social backdrop of Mohammad's birth, the miracles surrounding his arrival, and the challenges he faced after being chosen as a prophet. The overarching theme of the book emphasizes the eternal struggle between good and evil. On the other hand, the second book, titled "I Know My Prophet," focuses on showcasing the admirable qualities, moral values, and preferred behaviors of the Prophet. It aims to familiarize children with the Prophet's teachings and character. Surprisingly, 82.7% of the participating mothers expressed a preference for the second book<sup>67</sup>. This finding aligns with the outcomes from the interviews, demonstrating a consistent preference among mothers. They tend to present Islam to their children not as an ideological matter but rather as a nurturing concept that promotes overall well-being.

As conservative women gain access to higher education, their cultural aptitude and employment opportunities within prominent business groups have increased. This upward social mobility has also reshaped their relationship with religion. Unlike the previous generation, these women, who belong to the higher economic and cultural stratum, no longer maintain a strictly political and ideological connection with religion. Instead, an individualized and rationalized approach is becoming more prevalent among conservative women from more privileged backgrounds. These women prefer not to share children's literature texts that employ didactic and overtly religious language with their children. Rather, they prioritize instilling the values of "being a good person" while raising their children. Consequently, they opt for religious texts that provide values education or other materials that promote the motivation of "being a good person" in their children. This

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<sup>67</sup> Google Survey: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Rollerinin ve Dini Kimliğin Çocukla Paylaşılmasında Çocuk Edebiyatı Metinlerinin Yerine Dair Bir Araştırma, Access on: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14Eevg\\_hVLHanASQnjs-3m-gydYqmmFxBa\\_SUomtViTU/edit?usp=drive\\_web](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14Eevg_hVLHanASQnjs-3m-gydYqmmFxBa_SUomtViTU/edit?usp=drive_web)



indicates that the personal connection that mothers establish with religion is also reflected in the books they prefer or choose not to purchase for their children.

## CONCLUSION

In particular, the ban on headscarves in the public sector and universities, which was implemented during the military coup of 28 February, has had a direct impact on the relationship between conservative groups in Turkey and religion. This ban has intensified the existing tension between the secular state and Muslim groups. Consequently, the issue of conservative women's public visibility has become a focal point in the tension between the state and conservative groups. Following the AKP's rise to power in 2002 and the subsequent lifting of the headscarf ban as part of democratization and human rights efforts, conservative women in Turkey have experienced an increase in visibility, socio-economic status, and cultural standing in the public sphere. This transformation has led to a shift in their relationship with religion and traditional gender roles, driven by government policies. Within this context, I propose examining the class and cultural shifts from the perspective of the "the personal is political" approach. On the other hand, the transition of conservative women in terms of class has introduced a realm of empowerment for these individuals. This newfound empowerment has enabled women to redefine their connection with religion and traditional gender roles, allowing for the emergence of a distinct viewpoint that differs from that of low-income women and previous generations.

While the previous generation was influenced by the prevailing political climate and embraced a politically and ideologically oriented religiosity, contemporary conservative women no longer view religion as solely a political matter. Furthermore, unlike their predecessors, today's conservative women have developed an individualized and rationalized religious identity. This shift in religious identity is also evident in their book choices for their children. In the past, the previous generation would share books with their children that focused on topics such as the headscarf issue and the consciousness of the ummah, allowing them to transmit a politicized version of Islam to their children. However, today's women

prioritize books that impart values education, devoid of religious terminology, and emphasize the importance of "being a good person". They also tend to avoid texts that employ didactic language, explain religious rules and rituals, or employ religious terminology. Furthermore, while low-income women may prefer children's books that utilize didactic language and religious terminology for their children, conservative women belonging to the upper-income and cultural groups prioritize books that promote values education without relying on religious terminology.

Furthermore, conservative women who are actively engaged in the business world and possess higher levels of education have redefined traditional gender roles, adopting a more egalitarian perspective. The previous generation's perception of women as "heroines of the household" has been replaced by an egalitarian viewpoint that recognizes the equality of men and women. This new perspective acknowledges that women and men have equal rights and responsibilities, both in the social sphere and within the home, and rejects the segregation of emotions and work based on gender. This shift in gender perception between the previous generation and today's women is also reflected in their choices of children's books. While the previous generation would often purchase books that depicted women as passive and obedient figures confined to the home, contemporary conservative women actively avoid books that reinforce traditional gender roles. Instead, they prefer children's books that do not categorize emotions based on gender, avoid sexist depictions of work environments, and treat women and men equally in terms of domestic responsibilities. The emphasis on gender equality and bodily privacy in the bestselling books of the two publishing houses I extensively interviewed (one of which primarily caters to conservative families and the other targets the upper-income group) further reinforces this priority among women. It is evident that today's conservative women, particularly those with higher

education and income levels, prioritize books that promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender norms.

In this context, it is evident that children's literature plays a significant role as a means for families to transmit their ideas, lifestyles, truths, and approaches to events to their children. The content of the books parents choose to buy for their children can provide valuable insights into their own social identities. Throughout different periods, parents naturally gravitate towards texts that align with their own ways of thinking when selecting books for their children. Therefore, children's books serve as instruments for the intergenerational transmission of identity. Furthermore, the themes that are included or excluded in children's literature, as well as the popularity or lack thereof of certain contents, act as a litmus test for observing the dynamics and trends of society. These factors provide valuable indicators to discern the societal dynamics and prevailing trends. By examining the choices made in children's literature, we can gain valuable insights into the values, beliefs, and aspirations of a given society or community.

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