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PROFILE OF POWER: MUSLIM, TURKISH WOMEN AS POLITICAL LEADERS

by

Sumeyye Pakdil

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy
degree in Religious Studies in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2016

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Ahmed E. Souaiaia

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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To Baris Kesgin…

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ABSTRACT

In many places around the world, and in a variety of ways, women are constrained from fully participating in political life. They are given few, if any, reasons to believe in their potential as visionaries and leaders. The rationale for limiting women's opportunities in the political sphere is often rooted in religion. Religion, or some interpretations thereof, expects them to focus their energies and talents on the private sphere. Because the discussion of women's roles and capacities in private sphere has been left to religion and women have brought their private lives into their public lives as women, wives, and mothers, it is important to examine religion's influence on women who are active participants in the public sphere. In this study, utilizing interviews conducted with female members of the Turkish parliament, I seek to show the ways in which women have challenged both the state and religion in order to increase their social and political competence, power, and agency. I record and analyze the ways in which contemporary female leaders in Turkish politics perceive the influence that religion—specifically Islam—has had on their understanding(s) of themselves and their political aspirations.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

In this project, I profile politically active women in a Muslim society –more specifically in Turkey. I explore the question of how female leaders experience the influence of Islam in contemporary Turkish politics—has had on their understanding(s) of themselves, their public and private lives, their political philosophies and aspirations. In many places around the world, and in a variety of ways, women are constrained from fully participating in political life. The rationale for limiting women's opportunities in the political sphere is often rooted in religion. Religion, or some interpretations thereof, expects them to focus their energies and talents on the private sphere: society can grow and thrive only when women stay home and leave the business of politics to men. Religion, however, often gives women mixed messages about their roles and capacities. Many women take advantage of this ambiguity to interpret their relationship to the realm of politics in creative and sometimes surprising ways. It is important to examine religion's influence on women who are active participants in the public sphere. In this study, utilizing interviews conducted with female members of the Turkish parliament, I show the ways in which women have challenged both the state and religion in order to increase their social and political competence, power, and agency. I find that critical self-reflections of many politically astute Muslim women show that the influences of religion on their consciousness are complex and flexible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Women are constrained from fully participating in public and political life as a result of the strict gender relationships based on male leadership and women's submission. Religion, or some interpretations thereof, expects women to focus their energies and talents on the private sphere. Religion, so it is argued, teaches people that society can grow and thrive only when women stay home and leave the business of politics to men.[1] Women are given few, if any, reasons to believe in their potential as visionaries and leaders. Many, if not all, of these statements especially pertain to one of largest belief systems in the world, Islam. Prevailing notions of Islam is taken for granted as *she is absent* and how the religion approaches women in society.

In this dissertation, I challenge the common premise that the rationale for limiting women's opportunities in the public and political sphere is often rooted in religion, and specifically in Islam. Instead, I argue that women, especially religious women can and do access power. I offer the public and private spheres dichotomy in seeking answers to women's ascend to power in conservative societies. I record and analyze the ways in which contemporary women leaders in Turkish politics perceive the influence that

[1] "Religions tend to emphasize ontological differences between men and women, noting that men are predisposed to leadership, activity, and a strong work ethic, while women are naturally nurturing, passive, and receptive" Burke (2012). Also see, Wadud (1999), and Kandiyoti (1987). I will present more evidence for this conclusion in Chapter 3.

religion—specifically Islam—has had on their understanding(s) of themselves and their political aspirations.

Research on women in Islamic societies as well as gender and women's political and leadership position in Islam is relatively scarce.[2] This dissertation is a contribution to the efforts dealing with this deficit in critical research on these subjects. Rich in depth, scholarship on gender and politics is primarily confined, in its breadth, to Western countries. Research about gender and politics in the context of religion are even scarcer. However, both politics (more specifically, through state institutions) and religion (through religious institutions) play a key role in constructing individual and group identities. These identities can take distinct forms in different social, political and cultural environments. Hence, although I am doing my work from discipline of religious studies, it is crucial to expand our understanding of the interaction among gender, politics and religion in various Islamic societies.

There is a dire need for such studies, because one may expect discrepancies between the perceptions of religion and what religion may prescribe to its followers[3]. Indeed, Islam, in fact, gives women mixed messages about their roles and capacities. Some women take advantage of this ambiguity to interpret their relationship to the realm of politics in creative and sometimes surprising ways. Indeed, since the introduction of Islam, women are present in the public sphere –and, some figures are so with major influence in social, political life. One of the common examples is Aisha, during the prophet's time. Whereas in predominantly Muslim societies women are fewer in the

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[2] Friedland, Wang, and Wang (2013); Halder (2004); Jalalzai and Krook (2010); Bilgili (2011).

[3] I do not claim that what applies in this research to women in Islam can be generalized to apply to women in religion in general. My research considers only women in Islam, and specifically Islam as taught and practiced in Turkey. Some aspects of religion, as defined by scholars of religious studies, may not apply to Islam in the context of this research.

public sphere in comparison to their male counterparts (much like other countries), it is also in these societies that women have assumed the office of the head of government – unlike many Western states. Large Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, and Turkey have all had women in leadership roles.[4] Furthermore, in predominantly Muslim societies, women are also present in national politics in other capacities than the head of government. More specifically, I am interested in women in the national legislatures of predominantly Muslim societies. In this dissertation, I am seeking a "profile of power" that enables Muslim women to rise to power —both in early Islam and in contemporary Muslim societies. Accordingly, I seek to identify traits, characteristics, and conditions that are shared among 'Muslim women who were public and political leaders throughout the history of the Islamic civilization.' Then, with the application of the public and private spheres framework, I draw a profile of women in power in the example of Turkey's women parliamentarians. Turkey has a long history of women's presence in politics. More specifically, with such background, in modern Turkey, a conservative political party, the Justice and Development Party (JDP), that has been in power since November 2002. During the JDP era, the number of women in the Turkish parliament increased notably; therefore, the women Members of the Parliament from JDP offer a relevant case study.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the background to this dissertation. I first discuss women's status in a historical context before and during the emergence of Islam. In this chapter, I elaborate on interpretations of women's status in Islam, and introduce profiles of some leading women at time of the Prophet (Aisha, Khadija, and Umm Salama). In

[4] In Indonesia, Megawati Sukarnoputri served as the country's first female president from 2001 until 2004; Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto was the country's prime minister twice between and , and later . Tansu Ciller of Turkey was prime minister from 1993 to 1995.

Chapter 2, I also talk about women and leadership in Islam in a broader perspective and in the example of Turkey more specifically. In this chapter, I aim to offer examples of and a basis of a discussion of Islamic interpretations of women and leadership.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the theoretical framework that builds upon the historical context and expands the existing discussions with respect to women's public and political roles in Islam. I begin with the discussion of public and private spheres, and where women belong politically and religiously. First, I offer a review of literature on the public and private spheres of life, and focus specifically on Islamic public and private spheres. In this chapter, I concentrate on the interrelation between public and private spheres and women's roles in both. Moreover, here, I highlight how important it is to understand their coexistence in political and religious lives. Here, I elaborate on the public and private spheres of life as a means to further problematize the roles of religion, culture, and the state in sanctioning women's place in all walks life. My objective in this chapter is to situate women politicians in the context of formal state structures and dominant religious belief(s), and assess the ways women politicians interpret these contexts.

Based on this context, I then focus on the contemporary example of Turkey and the role of women in politics in that case. In Chapters 4 and 5, I deal with the Turkish example in detail. First, starting Chapter 4, I establish the methodology and research design, and outline the hypotheses of the study as well. Also, earlier in the chapter, I present a brief introduction to the case of Turkey. More specifically, Chapter 4 is about uncovering how Turkish women in politics chart their course and construct their public identities in accordance with the triangular relationship among state, religion, and gender. In this chapter, I present a detailed account of the interviews with the Justice and

Development Party's women representatives in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on politics, Islam, gender, and leadership.

Chapter 5 is a further analysis of the interviews, where I articulate women politicians' perceptions of their own roles in the last decade of Turkish politics, and the extent to which these have been informed by constructions of gender, under the influence of religion. In this discussion, I relate the findings of the dissertation, the interviews' conclusions to the existing research on politics, Islam, women, in general, and within the context of Turkey, in particular.

In this dissertation, I recommend for looking at the relationship between women and politics from a religious perspective. Since religion, Islam that is, is seen as inherently patriarchal and Muslim women as lacking of agency in public and private spheres, I posit that Turkish Muslim women, by using religion's effects on their lives as resistance and/or empowerment, have effectively challenged social norms and power relations and have exercised and reconciled agency by religion in politics. My argument, which is supported by the data I collected in Turkey, is different from what others', including that of the most recent scholars such as Saba Mahmood, Nilufer Gole, and Deniz Kandiyoti. Although they look at women, religious women, their agencies and roles in society from a religious perspective, I build upon that literature and also add politics and the dichotomy of public and private spheres in Islam to this discussion, to which I present evidence from interviews conducted with the women members of the parliament in Turkey to support my argument.

Here, I offer a unique approach to profiling women in power in predominantly Muslim societies first by bringing in the debate the public and private spheres framework

to contextualize women's status in Muslim societies—in this case, modern Turkish society. Second, for I address the issue in an interdisciplinary construct, in my argument, I develop associations among disconnected literatures on women in politics in religious studies, political science, anthropology, sociology, and law. The methodological approach is essentially interdisciplinary, combining case study and ethnographic approaches. I am going to present theoretical backgrounds and debates about this research in chapters 3 and 4. This research, to summarize, situates women politicians in Turkey in the context of formal state structures and dominant religious belief(s), and assesses the ways women politicians interpret these contexts.

In conclusion, I make the case that, critical self-reflections of many politically astute Muslim women show that the influences of religion on their consciousness are complex and flexible. Women politicians' constraints in politics derive from cultural, traditional norms rather than religious origins. While some women appear to unconsciously conform to these constraints, majority –if not all, of the women politicians interviewed suggest ongoing efforts to tackle the impositions of the public and private spheres of life.

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF ISLAM

In this chapter, I first discuss examples of Islamic interpretations of texts dealing with women and leadership and then present a brief background of the contemporary Turkish case. This chapter is essential to this dissertation because it sets the context of women's profiles in historical Islam and present-day Turkey. Looking at major female figures in early Islam at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, I argue that studying discourses on women in the hadith, Qur'an, and Islam throughout the history is an objective way to understand cultural and social differences in women's positions in Islamic societies. In early, nascent Islamic society, one can find Muslim women seeking their place in Islamic life. In this context, Muslim women's status can be explored first and foremost in original Islamic sources.

In this chapter, I review the historical background of women's status in pre- and early Islamic societies in the Arabian Peninsula based on accounts from the relevant literature. Examples from early Islam are crucial to this dissertation to demonstrate that women's leadership in Islamic societies is neither new nor impossible. To the contrary, women leaders in early Islam provide very powerful examples of how women could become leaders during the foundational years of Islam[5]. In this chapter, I focus on three

[5] First century of Islam (622 AD – 719 AD), especially the time between hijrah and the death of the Prophet.

major women leaders from the Prophet's time: Aisha, Khadija, and Umm Salama.[6] I selected women from this period because I contend that it was the only time when the interpretations of men had not changed the religion. These women demonstrate women's roles and status in then-emerging Muslim society. For instance, I show that the importance of Aisha's role in the first civil war lies not in her defeat but in her personality and leadership gathering men to serve a purpose. These examples can inform discussions of women's public and political leadership in Muslim societies, including the following chapters in this dissertation.

The selected women from the history of Islam became visible in public affairs and grasped power individually or collectively. Here, it is important to keep in mind the relationships among power, authority, and influence, which, as Souaiaia (2010) and Burke (2012) argue, interact in unexpected ways and challenge social structures and institutions. It is also important to consider religious women and agency in Islamic history from the perspective of power, autonomy, and influence, characteristics not often attributed to religious women in the literature. As Burke recognizes, social institutions, customs, and traditions constrained the actions of the three women studied, but they still exhibited agency and leadership through unexpected ways.

In this chapter, I also introduce the Turkish example, which one can find women at the center of political conflicts between men and women and between the state and religion. Here, as in the discussion on Islam and women, I aim to situate Turkish women in politics historically.

[6] I do not argue that the leadership contributions to the Islamic religion and societies made by other Muslim women, whether mentioned in the Qur'an or not, are irrelevant. For more on other female figures in Islam, see Souaiaia (2010).

The discussion in this chapter is also crucial to establish a foundation for the following chapters because the oft-made references to the 'degrading status of women' in public and private spheres in the Qur'an is at odds with the Islamic ideal of women's full conscious human agency and responsibility and potential on the earth as the caliph of God. Next, based on the Qur'an and the hadith, I discuss how Islam situates women in life, and against this background of historical examples and readings of the Qur'an and the hadith, I claim that the absence of women in the public sphere of predominantly Muslim societies is not attributable to religion or Islam alone. As I argue later, women's absence must be understood through the concepts of the public and private spheres.

Women's Status in *Jahiliyya* and Early Islam

The lives of women in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam present a complex story of lives constrained and free. Patriarchy had growing influence on social, economic, and religious matters before the arrival of Islam, so women's status was already degraded in many ways. Before Prophet Muhammad started preaching Islam, gender relations in the pre-Islamic Arabian society changed in the fifth and sixth centuries from a matrilineal to a patrilineal structure (Ahmed, 1992). Islam emerged amid Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and pagan customs and adapted existing rules to its teachings. Regarding women's status in society, Ahmed argues that, "to the various prejudices against women and the mores degrading women that were part of one or other tradition indigenous to the area before Islam, Islamic institutions brought endorsement and license" (87). The basic features of women's social subordination were created before Islam, and the new religion adopted them. In line with Ahmed, Montgomery Watt (1956) and Nikkie R. Keddie

(1990) argue that, although the Qur'an brought some improvements to women's lives, it also introduced certain limitations.

The Islamic religious order reshaped or preserved some cultural and religious values and customs. Esposito (1975) shows that social and legal practices that diminished women's status arose from the influence of ancient and medieval social customs. Social and legal practices from the time of the Prophet continued to inform women's place in society through the reintroduction or reinforcement of the same or similar social customs from the perspective of Islam. Put simply, Islam did not radically change the status of women. Like others, I argue that Islam maintained continuity with some contemporary social values and norms.

According to Ahmed (1992) and Keddie (1990) the exclusion of women from the public sphere began during urbanization in the second millennium B.C. which created a new division of labor. Agriculture was the basic economic activity and required heavy labor, so men worked the land, and women as work as housewives and mothers. As a result of these processes, women's public economic and social status started to diminish. Also, a related argument is that hunting, as it is seen as male activity as a result of the need for physical strength and size, constrained women's movement. However, it should be added that the biological differences between men and women tells us little about the society we live in, but "for humans, biology becomes important largely as it is interpreted by the norms and expectations of human culture and society" (Rosalda and Lamphere, 1974: 4). Other explanations of exclusion of women from public sphere are the rise of capitalism and patrilineal kinship (see Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974).

Mesopotamia hosted many civilizations (including eventually Islam) which interacted in many matters, including divorce law, virginity, veiling, and the seclusion of women (see, Keddie, 1990). When the Prophet Muhammad introduced Islam in the 7th century, the Arabian Peninsula was a land with multiple traditions and people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Islamic notions of gender and gender relationships in society emerged in this context, where "conceptions, assumptions, and social customs and institutions relating to women and the social meaning of gender derived from traditions in the Middle East and shaped the very foundations of Islamic formulations of gender" (Ahmed, 1992:5). Social and cultural differences created critical distinctions in discourses and institutions, so "the core discourses of Islam have played a central role in defining women's place in Muslim societies" (Ahmed, 1992:1).

Here, it is also important to mention that the expansion of the Prophet's Islamic state throughout the region led to the conquest of new cities whose people had their own laws, regulations, jurisdiction, and administration, which enabled differences in the application of religion. Most conquered cities were allowed to continue to govern themselves according to their rules while paying taxes to the Islamic government. This practice, maintained for many centuries, shows the new religion's capacity to adopt various local, ethnic, religious, cultural, and social elements.

This historical context is important because the meanings of gender have evolved and been redefined socially, institutionally, and practically. Interactions and clashes among social customs have forced the development of new cultural modes for adjustments. In this instance, Abbott (1941:259) contends that changes in social conditions and contact with new cultures as a result of expansion may be among the

reasons why women in the Arabian Peninsula lost some public privileges and prestige they enjoyed before Islam. However, according to Abbott, the Prophet intended to protect early, well-established public and private practices. Abbott explains that "Mohammad avoided drastic innovations and he tolerated and adopted such public and private practices as had become well established through long usage, provided these were reasonably compatible with the cardinal doctrine monotheism and the requirements of a theocratic state." (1942a: 106). Furthermore, Abbott claims that incidents in the time of the Prophet demonstrate his administrative skills in immediate local situations. In other words, the Prophet's practices and norms were specific for individual and local conditions and did not make profound social changes, at least not until the end of his life. Contrary to this view, Ahmed argues that the Prophet's administrative practices show that "Islam selectively sanctioned customs already found among some Arabian tribal societies while prohibiting others. Through these changes Islam fundamentally reformulated the nexus of sexuality and power between men and women" (1992:45).

During the first century of Islam, women were active and visible in public and religious life and had a voice in decision-making processes in social matters. Keddie claims that "it was during the first centuries of Islam that there were the most women scholars, some of them were also teachers whose lessons might be followed by men" (1990:91). The Prophet ensured that women participated in public affairs in noticeable ways. Women were permitted to attend prayers and mosque events, go on pilgrimages, and memorize and recite revelations (Abbott, 1942a). Although women were more active in the first century of Islam than in the coming centuries, their positions were always secondary to those of men. Despite examples of women's visibility in public, not much is

known about their active leadership. Except for Umm Waraqah, whom the Prophet commanded to lead prayer until her death, Abbott (1941) finds no evidence that of active leadership by a woman as a public official, preacher, or *imam* in early Islamic society.

The Prophet's leadership demonstrates that he recognized women as free and participating members of the new state. Moreover, until personal reasons led him to seclude and exclude his wives, he did not ban women's active involvement in state service. In Abbott's (1942a:119–120) account, the Qur'an includes no specific saying or example from the Prophet that restricts women from active leadership in public. To the contrary, there are such examples as Umm Waraqah, whom the Prophet appointed *imam* (prayer leader) in her household.

It was not the religion but the interpretation of religion[7] and its interaction with other cultures and customs that gradually transformed the social understanding of gender. These experiences suggest, and I argue, that who interprets the text in what context and at which time determine the impacts of the interpretation on society. Furthermore, I claim that men have heavily dominated these interpretations. As Osman argues, "in patriarchal systems in general, male authority derives from male responsibility" (2015:2). Therefore, it can be argued that all organized religions, including Islam, treat a certain degree of male responsibility and authority as just.

Ahmed (1992) identifies two distinct voices in Islam regarding women's visibility in public: an ethical vision and a practical-legal vision. Osman (2015) has a similar understanding of the discussion of women's status in Islam, which he says tends to take two approaches: legal and mystical. Like the ethical vision, the mystical approach is egalitarian and respectful of both sexes because it perceives women not as sexual beings

[7] Throughout this research, I consider religion as the scripture rather than practice.

but as social beings (Osman, 2015). Contrary to the practical-legal vision, the ethical vision of Islam does not construct a hierarchy of the sexes because its basic principle is *insan;* it is an Arabic word and literally means human being. The institutional or pragmatic-legal voice has always been masculine, patriarchal, and practical and had more influence than the ethical vision in Islam. In many Muslim societies this practical-legal vision has shaped the ideology of gender, and in all societies, egalitarian and misogynist interpretations of religions have been practiced alongside each other due to the extent of male responsibility and authority. So far, the male consciousness and patriarchal mentality have dominated society.

In the decades after the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 C.E., the Muslim community had to deal with different political, social, and religious issues, primarily due to expansion into the Middle East and beyond to North Africa, Spain, and Central Asia. In the Byzantine and Sasanian empires, the newly emerging Muslim community encountered new cultural and social norms, such as veiling and seclusion. Abbott describes these encounters: "the second half of the first century of Islam brought to the fore some of the evil social consequences resulting from the rapid and extensive conquests of the Arabs" (1942b:351). Abbott, Keddie, Watt, and others argue that, as a consequence of these expansions, women's influence in public diminished, and their activities became restricted to private duties, such as housework and childrearing, in the first century of Islam. The declining status of women supports the argument that "the meaning and social articulation of gender informing the first Islamic society in Arabia differed significantly from those informing the immediately succeeding Muslim societies" (Ahmed, 1992:238).

However, it is evident that women's status was declining before early Islam. Highly influential and powerful women existed before and after Islam, but generally, their power was limited to religion and private realms. Many women in pre-Islamic Arabia had some degree of power or authority as seers, soothsayers, judge-arbiters, and prophetesses (Smith, 1985). It is also true that Prophet Muhammad respected and trusted women. In fact, the Prophet "was strongly influenced by a number of powerful women, and attempted to provide for equal participation of women in religious life of the new community" (Smith, 1985:20). It should be emphasized that, in pre-Islamic (*Jahiliyya*) and Islamic societies, women's power and influence varied, and their main occupations were believed to be wives and mothers.

Smith (1985) finds two main differences in the lives of women in and Islamic Arabia. Whereas personality determined the role and position of women in pre-Islamic society, law did so in post-*Jahiliyya* society, though personality continued to make a difference for some women in Islamic Arabia. Second, although *Jahiliyya* women were seen as property to an extent, they did not experience the kind of isolation women suffered under the Islamic state. After the death of the Prophet, the "degradation of women in Islam is the result of social influences for which the principles of Islam are unjustly made responsible, but which were in fact the outcome of the social relations of the peoples converted to Islam" (Goldziher,1971: 271).

Although different rules applied to men and women in the time of the Prophet, Muhammad was clearly attentive to the need for women's visibility in society (see, Sechzer, 2004). However, that situation changed dramatically after his death, especially under the rule of Umar, the second caliph. Although the Prophet recognized Umar's

conversion as a triumph, Umar was known for his harsh treatment of women (Mernissi,1993: 130). According to historical records, Umar limited women to praying at home, appointed separate *imam*s for men and women in mosques, and forbid the Prophet's wives from going on pilgrimages (a measure later reversed) (Smith, 1985; Sechzer,2004). To justify these decisions, Umar cited verse 33:53[8], which is believed to have been revealed specifically for the protection of the wives of the Prophet. Nevertheless, Umar extended this verse to all Muslim women. "While these stipulations are generally applicable to all women and to all Muslims, the verses here emphasize that since the Prophet's wives are not like others, they ought to exaggerate in abiding by these guidelines, and be more careful than other women" as a result of their high status (Osman, 2015: 85). Also, in the Qur'an, the Prophet's wives are told that they will be judged by different standards than other women as the result of their position in society. Umar did not follow the Prophet's example in relations between men and women and, though a spectacular leader, was known for his violent, rough, and harsh treatment of his wives and other women in the community.

Even during the Prophet's life, especially after his migration to Madinah, Umar supported men's dominance in family relations and over women. He opposed the Prophet's egalitarian approach to men and women and his belief that Islam represented "the equality of all, including equality of sexes" (Mernissi, 1993: 142) because Umar saw

[8] "O you who have believed, do not enter the houses of the Prophet except when you are permitted for a meal, without awaiting its readiness. But when you are invited, then enter; and when you have eaten, disperse without seeking to remain for conversation. Indeed, that [behavior] was troubling the Prophet, and he is shy of [dismissing] you. But Allah is not shy of the truth. And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And it is not [conceivable or lawful] for you to harm the Messenger of Allah or to marry his wives after him, ever. Indeed, that would be in the sight of Allah an enormity" (Q: 33:53).

that, in Madinah, women defended their rights against their husbands by pointing to the Prophet's actions. It was not easy for Meccan men to see women threaten their authority. In short, regarding women's position in society, one can observe two different personalities and attitudes in the Prophet, who was gentle and egalitarian toward women, and Umar, the second caliph who was willing to use violence against women (Mernissi 1993).

Major differences emerged between Muhammad and his successors due to the work they sought to do in society. The first Islamic society mostly dealt with ethical and social problems, but the Islamic states that followed the Prophet, such as the Umayyad and Abbasid empires, addressed mostly institutional and legal issues. Consequently, gender issues and women's public status were interpreted according to an androcentric view of gender or the practical-legal vision, resulting in disapproval of public displays of women's physicality and sexuality.

In conclusion, women, such as Khadija, had significant roles in the establishment of Islam and considerable political and religious freedom and participation in the time of the Prophet. However, they "lost ground in the name of Umar I and regained some of their losses in the reigns of Uthman and Ali. Aisha's bold act of leadership in the first civil war of Islam won her a place on her own in the annals of the caliphate, but her ultimate defeat was a tremendous setback for women in general" (Abbott,1942b: 367). Afterward, women continued to lose political and public influence, sometimes through seclusion, exclusion, and veiling as the Islamic state expanded into the Middle East and Africa.

Sources for Legalistic[9] Interpretations of Women's Status

Women's role and leadership in politics have been highly controversial, especially from the perspective of religions. Informed understandings of this topic are rare because religion and culture are intertwined. In the case of Islam, understandings of these issues are often based on cultural beliefs, but there is little clear, detailed information about what Islam and the Qur'an actually say on topic. Roded explains that "the early Islamic community was a simple, tribal society, and neither the Qur'an nor the deeds and sayings of the Prophet contain a political theory or detailed rules of public administration appropriate to a large, complex state" (1999:112). The Islamic state was structured and institutionalized only as it grew during the reigns of the Righteous Caliphs[10]. Thus, it can be argued that no specific written rules or institutions addressed women during the time of the Prophet. The interplay of theoretical legal rules and social reality determined women's public roles in traditional Islamic societies then (Roded,1999:115).

The Qur'an and hadith are the most important sources of Islamic law. Regarding women's status and rights, Islamic scholars more frequently consult the hadith than the Qur'an, which "less restrictive towards women" (Walter,1981: 7). Walter explains that the disagreement between the Qur'an and the hadith results from a debate over authenticity. The authority of the hadith and the authentication of its chain of transmission are questionable, so "in traditional Islam, emphasis is placed on the hadith as complementary to the Qur'an, because it helps to explain it" (Osman, 2015: 152).

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[9] By legalistic interpretation, I refer to verses and hadith interpreted in accordance with Islamic jurisprudence.

[10] The coining of this term is adopted from Muslim historians; some western scholars use other phrases such as, leaders of the "High Caliphate."

Although the Qur'an was compiled some time after the Prophet's death from many writings and a 21-year-long oral tradition of its revelation, Islam believes that there is no human falsification in the Qur'an and that it preserves God's original words. The hadith, though, "was written down at least a century later, so its authenticity was challenged from the beginning" (Walter,1981: 7).

Turning to women's leadership in Islam, the Qur'an presents the example of the Queen of Sheba, "the only positive, non-monotheistic model of political leadership" (Q. 27:15–44), since she and her people worshipped the sun. Her prosperous people, her wisdom and power, and her pragmatic, diplomatic, consultative leadership are highlighted (Chaudhry,2011: 263). Other verses in the Qur'an limit women's public roles, including their testimony in court (Q. 2:282), and accord men a higher rank (Q. 2:228); however, the Qur'an also insists on justice among humans and spiritual equality and equal responsibility between men and women. The Qur'an observes gender differences between men and women, but its main principles are piety and righteousness (Q. 49:13). Accordingly, the Qur'an expects moral excellence from and assigns responsibilities to men and women irrespective of sex.

According to the creation story in the Qur'an (4:1), God made men and women from a single self. He formed them ontologically and ethically the same but biologically different. Thus, "in the Qur'an, men and women originate in the same self, at the same time, and in the same way; that is, they are ontologically coeval and coequal" (Barlas, 2002: 136). There is equality, not hierarchy, between the two. Man and woman have represented a unity since creation.

In addition, the Prophet's life contains many examples of women who had independent personalities and played key political roles. For instance, he asked Umm Salama for advice on "how to lead his community after concluding the treaty of Hudaybiyya" (Chaudhry, 2011: 265). Other examples of women's role in Islam recorded by the Qur'an include Aisha's leadership, Fatima's relationship with her father the Prophet and her role in Sunni and Shia Islam, and the formalization of women's inclusion in the religious-political community through an oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) during the Prophet's life (Q. 60:12) (Chaudhry, 2011).

Different interpretations have been proposed for verses in the Qur'an which concern court testimony, inheritance, marriage, divorce, and women's social status in general since the creation of humankind. However, the Qur'an makes clear that God created woman as a full conscious agent. As well, "the human being and the human soul are described in the Qur'an (95: 4-6) in general terms, irrespective of sex, as containing the good and the evil within them" (Osman, 2015: 153). Therefore, it can be argued that the degrading status of woman in public and private spheres justified by references the Qur'an is inconsistent with the text's idea of the full personhood of woman and her responsibility and potential on earth as the caliph of God.

In all Abrahamic faith traditions, it is believed that holy books are God's revelation, and there exist interpretations of holy books which may conflict. Interpretations of holy books and, broadly speaking, historically significant events in any religious belief system may differ, and people with various distinct backgrounds can read the Qur'an in different ways. Interpretation is an open process because of endless cultural and legal rules and social and political prejudices. As Wadud argues, "the text is silent. It

needs interpretation, and has always historically and currently been subjected to interpretation. We make it speak for us by asking of it."[11] (2006:196). Human capacities and goals then determine how the text informs religious practices and traditions. The Qur'an does not specifically dictate how women should position themselves in society or politics, so in seeking answers to women's status in society, one must look beyond religion.

In this dissertation, I consider the Qur'an and men's and women's roles in Islam from a just perspective, which arises from interpretations of the sacred law (Hosseini, 2004). Justice is an essential divine message from God to followers in the Qur'an (Q. 5:8, 49:13, 4:135). Acting justly and working for the good of others are as strongly emphasized as piety in the Qur'an. Therefore, I analyze gender equality in Islam from a Qur'anic perspective to see the full potential of Islam, including gender justice and equality (Badran,2001) and highlight the discrepancies between the holy text and Islamic practices and interpretations. Scholars, such as Moghissi, assert that Islam and gender equality are incompatible and that the Qur'an outlines specific public and private roles for men and women. Whereas other scholars, such as Wadud, Barlas, and Mernissi, contend that gender equality exists in the Qur'an and can be accessed by reinterpreting it and the hadith.

I interpret the relationship between men and women from the perspective of the message of justice in the Qur'an. The Qur'an provides guidelines to build a just, harmonious, moral, and peaceful society because the text is concerned with ethics, not

[11] In the Islamic tradition, the Qur'an is never silent but literally recited out loud. Consequently, few laws and legal texts in the Qur'an are detailed, and general principles, such as justice, are more important (see Haleem,2010). Therefore, the Qur'an must be subjected to interpretation to be understood.

legality, which has allowed Islamic jurisprudence to evolve. Specifically, the Qur'an "challenges the constitutive myths of patriarchy, and it does not inherently or symbolically privilege males, masculinity, fathers, or father-right/rule" (Barlas,2002:93). Therefore, I claim that both women and men should use their agency as free, rational, conscious human beings to build a society that best serves human development. Whether in a religious or secular society, the problem is the privileging of patriarchy over God's knowledge and the construction of specific gender relations in society. God, according to the Qur'an, created men and women from the same soul with no differences, except moral consciousness and piety; therefore, men and women have the same capacity as free agents to exercise moral choice, responsibility, and ethical individuality.

To sum up, many of the female personalities in the Qur'an and the hadith, such as Khadija and the queen of Sheba, acted independently of men in general and their husbands in particular (Osman, 2015). Moreover, Osman claims that "the authoritative texts of Qur'an and sunna tend to describe individual women (despite the androcentric language of the Qur'anic text while acknowledging the patriarchy of the Islamic social structure) in terms of a human *nafs* on its journey" (181). Verses support male authority and superiority even as they praise women (Q 4:34, 3:36, 27), and there are also verses like 4:32, which says whether men or women, everyone gets what they have earned at the end. Ultimately, what is important is what is sought; according to the Qur'an, it is to be righteous, honest, and responsible. In addition to the Qur'an's explanation of gender equality, we should also closely examine the politics of gender inequality, or the hierarchy of the sexes based on theories of sexual differentiation (Barlas, 2002). This, of course, does not deny the potential for patriarchal readings of the Qur'an. We should

keep in mind the Qur'an's historical context of tribal patriarchy and "the historical contexts of its interpretations in order to understand its conservative and patriarchal exegesis" (Barlas 9).

Leading Women in Early Islam

Women were among the influential leaders and members of the elite in early Islam. Most notably, the majority—if not all—of such women were the Prophet's wives. As shown, some women in Islamic society influenced public and private affairs. For an accurate understanding of women in Islam, it is essential to explore this topic more deeply. A significant number of women mentioned in the history of Islam and the Qur'an were empowered and influential leaders (Souaiaia, 2010). The aim of this research is not to describe all the women leaders in Islam's history, so in this section, I discuss only three who had strong personalities and significant influence on the Prophet and the Muslim community: Aisha, Khadija, and Umm Salama. The actions of these key women in early Islam also illustrate some of the themes that I emphasize throughout this study. First, women's families and social backgrounds mattered in early Islam due to their role in social life. Second, the Prophet's wives assumed important leadership roles. Finally, women's role in making the distinction between private and public spheres emerges in at least one example from the Prophet's life. "The historical context becomes a part of the Qur'anic context" (Osman,2015: 83), so the historical events in which these women participated can shed light on the Prophet's treatment of women and women's status in general. As Osman (2015) argues, the wives of the Prophet are mentioned directly for their roles and sacrifices in their community.

Aisha

Understanding women's status in Muslim societies requires considering the significant, controversial legacy of Aisha, the third wife of the Prophet, in Islamic history. Her life shows the connections between gender, female sexuality, political influence, and the transmission of knowledge in the Prophet's tradition of hadith and female conduct. However, one must note that various Islamic sects recount Aisha's life differently. Although she is a very important figure in Islam, her legacy does not have the same meaning for all Muslims. Setting aside such controversies, Aisha's example of leadership and her role in the transmission of the Prophet's sayings justify selecting her as an example of women remembered as the mothers of believers in the history of Islam. Accordingly, I reconstruct Aisha's life story and influence according to Sunni traditions.

Spellberg (1994) argues that portrayals of Aisha vary sharply in different historical contexts, but what cannot be changed is her high profile from her marriage and lineage. She had important connections within the Muslim community through her husband, Muhammad, and her father, the first successor to the Prophet and his close companion, Abu Bakr. A high-profile family through birth or marriage and a forceful personality, such as Aisha's, opened many opportunities for women in politics and society. At the same time, it is important to recall that men decided and wrote Aisha's legacy after her death. Although Sunni Muslims believe she was the "favorite wife of the Prophet," her legacy has "a negative dimension … laden with lessons for all later Muslim women" (Spellberg,1994: 6). Shi'i Muslims accuse Aisha of persecuting Ali, the fourth caliph and the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, but Sunni Muslims are comfortable

with her political decisions. Whereas Sunni Muslims see Aisha as the protector of the past, Shi'i Muslims vilify her for her actions against Ali during the Islamic first civil war.

A historical figure in Islam, Aisha played important roles in the lives of the Prophet, her father Abu Bakr, the second caliph Umar, and third caliph Uthman, who she "refus[ed] to help him when he was besieged by insurgents in his own house" before his assassination (Mernissi,1993: 5). Other scholars have highlighted her legacy because "the remembrance of Aisha charges Islamic historiography with crucial lessons for all Muslims about politics, gender, and the representation of the past as presented exclusively by men" (Spellberg,1994: 6). Unconventionally, if not unthinkably for women in the seventh century (and much later), Aisha, at age 42, organized an army to rebel against the fourth caliph, Ali. She enjoyed important privileges compared to other wives of the Prophet, which she saw as making her different and preferred. Spellberg (1994:31) lists these privileges: (1) She was the only one of the Prophet's wives who was a virgin, (2) her parents were both immigrants, (3) some verses of the Qur'an were revealed to confirm her innocence of adultery, (4) the angel brought the Prophet her likeness, (5) she saw Gabriel the angel, (6) she was with the Prophet when he received revelations, (7) Muhammad prayed in her presence, and (8) he died and was buried in her house.

Aisha, wife of the Prophet and daughter of the first caliph, two men who had religious, political, and military power, is a key historical and political figure in Islam. According to Spellberg, "[t]he political implications of her proximity to the Prophet on his deathbed and, by extension, that of her father is suggestive in the matter of succession" (1994:39). Her closeness to the Prophet in both public and private matters

also shows her interest and involvement in both spheres of his life. One could argue that the Prophet intentionally allowed her to participate in his public and private affairs.

Aisha's role in the first civil war in the Muslim community made clear the nature of women's role in politics. Sunni and Shi'i scholars' opinions on her involvement in the war diverge: Sunni scholars did not condemn her participation, while Shi'i scholars do. Despite her strong personality and determination, "without her primary marital tie to the Prophet, Aisha would have had no foundation for her political involvement" (Spellberg 102). Her political power and control continued after the Prophet's death due to her descent from the first caliph, Abu Bakr.

According to some Muslim scholars, Aisha shows that all Muslim women should avoid public life and politics because, like Aisha, they could cause public and political chaos.[12] Aisha's involvement in politics and her defeat in the first civil war show that women should stay outside politics, according to scholars, such as Said Al-Afgani and Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi. However, explicit restrictions on women's involvement in political life applied only to the wives of the Prophet, and as Spellberg (1994) claims, Aisha sought to challenge these limits. I argue that the importance of Aisha's role in the first civil war is not her defeat by Ali but her leadership and personality capable of gathering men to serve a purpose.

Although she could assemble an army, "Aisha's political legacy was transformed into a convenient component of the medieval cultural construct which defined all women as threats to the maintenance of Islamic political order" (Spellberg 109). Aisha was accused of adultery, took part in the first civil war, and became an authority who

[12] Aisha's participation in the war has been called a *fitna*. Spellberg shows that *fitna* denotes three things: the dangers of female sexuality, morality, and civil war.

preserved the Prophet's tradition. Aisha represents the place of all Muslim women and the power of interpretation because "in defining this controversial woman, medieval Muslim men revealed much about themselves and the importance of interpretation" (Spellberg 191).

Khadija Bint Khuwaylid

Khadija was the first wife of Muhammad and the first convert to Islam. She was a wealthy, forty-year-old widow and a member of the Quraysh tribe when she married Muhammad before he declared his claim to prophethood. She became the mother of Fatima and grandmother of the *imam*s (religious leaders in Shia tradition). Khadija's legacy began with her support of the Prophet Muhammad at the start of his mission. As his first and only wife until her death, Khadija played an important role in his life. According to Osman, "traditions credit Khadija with two main contributions; her assurance for her husband the Prophet upon receiving his first revelation, and her financial assistance in teaching and spreading his monotheistic message" (2015:107). The Qur'an mentions her financial support to the religion (93:8) without giving her name.

Leila Ahmed (1996) argues that, although Khadija was the first wife of the Prophet, she should not be counted as the first woman of Islam because she was a *jahiliyya* (pre-Islamic) woman, whose life reflected pre-Islamic attitudes and practices, including economic and personal independence. Stowasser (1992) writes that Khadija is celebrated as both wife and mother and the Prophet's second in command on his great journey of founding Islam. Until her death, she supported his mission not only financially but also spiritually, morally, and emotionally. She backed the Prophet in his private and

public struggles and, after converting to Islam, exerted her influence as a wealthy, leading woman to convince her tribe to accept the new faith. Therefore, it can be argued that her persuasiveness, both financial and personal, enabled the Prophet to be confident in his message and strong under pressure while introducing Islam. Two particular services Khadija rendered to the Prophet are worth mentioning: "the first one is her positive reassurance to him regarding his sanity when he was in self-doubt. She is portrayed as the voice of calm and reason during his emotional distress. The second one is her financial jihad" (Osman,2015: 108).

Khadija's life reveals the differences in women's control and authority between pre-Islamic and Islamic times. The characteristics of *jahiliyya* women can be seen in Khadija, who was an uncommon woman by her intellect, courage, talented and successful in business, wealthy and socially privileged by her family and her support of the Prophet by mentally and financially, for pre-Islamic and Islamic times. Khadija was "a noble of sound judgment, resolute action, tender emotion, and unswerving faithfulness—Allah's special gift to Mohammed, a companion to steady and strengthen him and one to lighten his burden" (Abbott,1942a: 122). The Prophet was aware of Khadija's influence and support in his public and private lives. With her, he found comfort when he felt doubt amid public derision of his claim to be a prophet and to proclaim a new religion. When Aisha called Khadija a "toothless woman, whom Allah replaced her with a better one" (namely, Aisha), the Prophet reportedly replied: "Nay, indeed, Allah has not replaced for a better. She believed in me when I was rejected; when they called me a liar, she proclaimed me truthful; when I was poor, she shared with me her wealth; and Allah granted me her children though withholding those of other women" (Abbott, 1942a: 123).

In sum, Khadija, who bore the identities of a businesswoman, widow, wife, mother, grandmother, and the first Muslim, provides a great example to show the characteristics of women in the *Jahiliyya* and Islamic periods. According to Osman, "especially significant for women today is that she is the example of financial independence being a necessary step towards forcing social and even religious change" (2015:108).

Hind bint Abi Umayya (Umm Salama)

After migrating to Madinah, the Prophet married Umm Salama, who belonged to the same tribe as him, the Quraysh. She was a member of "the family of al-Mughira of the wealthy and influential Makhzum clan in Mecca, a clan which had fought against the prophet for many years in close alliance with the wealthy and aristocratic Meccan clan of Umayya" (Stowasser, 1992: 11). Umm Salama was a previously married aristocrat famous for her beauty and intellectual capacity. It is well known that the Prophet consulted with her on matters of vital concern to the community. Like Khadija, Umm Salama was "full of initiative in public life as well as private life" (Mernissi,1993: 116). Her influential and leading character, I argue, resulted from belonging to a financially and politically powerful family. Even centuries ago, the possibilities for a woman to be a public figure depended on from which family she came and what education she received. Being a woman marked one as fragile, weak, unclean, and sinful by nature, so strong kinship made a woman stronger and more visible in public (Ortner, 1998).

Umm Salama was interested in politics and aware of developments in society and the public affairs of the Prophet's state. According to one story reported by Mernissi, she

one day asked the Prophet, “Why are men mentioned in the Qur’an, and why are we not?”

> Once one of her questions was asked, she awaited the reply from Heaven. The answer of the Muslim God to Umm Salama was clear: Allah spoke of the two sexes in terms of total equality as believers, that is, as members of the community. It is not sex that determines who earns his grace; it is faith and the desire to serve and obey him. (Mernissi 119)

This answer was recorded in the Qur’an (33:35), providing an example of a woman who demonstrated her concern for women’s place in public and sought an answer from God.

Umm Salama was among the most influential, knowledgeable, and persuasive wives of the Prophet. Personality differences between Aisha and Umm Salama illustrate “the clash of politics and gender in medieval Islamic debate” and the “political divisions rife within the Prophet’s own household after his death” (Spellberg,1994: 132–133). Although Umm Salama said she was willing to fight against Ali in battle, she did not do that because in the Qur’an, Allah forbade the Prophet’s wives from taking such actions. The main area of disagreement between Aisha and Umm Salama was women’s obedience and transgression. According to Sunni and Shi’i traditions (and Umm Salama), Aisha broke the limits established in the Qur’an 33:33. Accordingly, while the major Islamic sects debate the legacy of Aisha, both Sunnis and Shi’a honor Umm Salama for her obedience and political inactivity.

Umm Salama’s reaction to Umar’s interference in the Prophet’s private life is another example of her character and interest in leadership, especially in private manners. Umar approached Umm Salama about Madinan women’s treatment of their husbands and

warned them not to raise their voices in the presence of the Prophet. Umm Salama did not hesitate to order Umar not to involve himself in the private life of the Prophet and to tell him that, if the Prophet wanted to give advice to his wives, he was more than capable of doing so (Mernissi 144).

Another example shows that private life was not the only legitimate domain in which Umm Salama exerted influence. "During the expedition of against the Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayza, Umm Salama intervened in a case involving the liberation of a political prisoner" (Mernissi 162). The source does not say that she sought the liberation of the prisoner but that her intervention influenced decision makers and their actions. Therefore, Umm Salama's influence extended beyond the private and family affairs of herself and the Prophet.

The Prophet's Wives

Leila Ahmed's comparison of the two most beloved and legendary wives of Prophet, Khadija and Aisha, sheds light on the status of women before and after Islam and the Prophet's treatment of Muslim women. It can be argued that one of the important differences between Aisha and Khadija was the time when they married. The Prophet married Khadija in Mecca before his revelations, so there was no state, Muslim community, or leadership then. However, he married Aisha in Madinah after the *hijrah*, and he had a state, community, and political leadership. At that time, "while political power was determined by primarily patrilineal demonstrations, the connective foundations of Islamic political structure were enhanced by distinctly feminine bonds" (Spellberg,1994: 103). Political purposes might have motivated his marriage to Aisha, the

daughter of a highly influential man in the community, but not to Khadija. However, it is well-known that Khadija proposed to the Prophet and supported him spiritually and financially until her death.

Before and after Islam, women participated in battles, so Aisha's role in the battle of the Camel was not unprecedented. Before, she had taken part in public and private affairs. No verse in the Qur'an explicitly bans women from involvement of political affairs. The queen of Sheba, an example of female ruler, is criticized in Qur'an 27:23, not for her sex but for her ignorance of monotheism.

The Qur'an refers to the wives of the Prophet as the mothers of the believers and as examples for other women in carrying out duties and assuming privileges. Controversially, verses 33:33 and 33:35 discuss the wives of the Prophet and their interaction with males in public and restrict the wives' physical and public visibility. However, as Sayeed argues, not all of the wives understood the verses as other members of society did. Aisha and Umm Salama regularly communicated directly with unrelated men and women to pass on religious knowledge (25). Aisha was known for her religious knowledge of the Prophet's traditions and their meanings and legal implications. Unlike Umm Salama, Aisha clearly involved herself in the Prophet's public affairs before and after his death, and her "traditions, taken together, reveal her profound involvement in the daily of her community" (Sayeed, 2013:29).

Women and Leadership in Islam

Historical records suggest that, until the last years of Prophet's life, women had significant visibility and voice in public. Women participated in religious life by

attending prayers and services with men and reciting and memorizing the Qur'an. Abbott argues "it was only in his later years that Muhammad, distracted by his own harem intrigues and influenced by the urging of his male companions, acquiesced in his countrymen's generally unfavorable attitude toward the women" (Abbott, 1942a: 124). Women's presence in public changed significantly after the Prophet's marriage to a woman whom his adopted son had divorced. This event was, according to Abbott, the first step in women's seclusion from society. The isolation of women became harsher under the rule of the second caliph, Umar. First, he banned women from praying at mosques and allowed them to attend religious services only in homes. However, after strong resistance from women, Umar ordered the segregation of the sexes in mosques and appointed an *imam* for women. Second, Umar forbid the Prophet's wives from going on pilgrimages, but Uthman, the third caliph, reversed this decision.

Muslim women, of whom Aisha is most well-known, fought and led armies on the battlefield during and after the time of the Prophet. Therefore, it can be argued that Muhammad "recognized the women as free and participating citizens of the new and militant state" (Abbott, 1942a: 119). In other words, the Prophet was well aware of Muslim women's agency and consciousness and status as members of the society and state. However, that recognition does not mean that women's public and political participation and leadership were fully recognized and exercised.

Mernissi contextualizes the decline in women's status, which she pinpoints as starting under the Umayyads and peaking under the Abbasid dynasty. During the golden age (the eighth and ninth centuries), international conquest brought many women slaves to cities. Whereas female slaves could appear in public, elite and Muslim women were

completely excluded from the public sphere and kept behind locked doors. Mernissi asks, "Why is it the image of the woman of the golden age—a slave who intrigues in the corridors of power when she loses hope of seducing—who symbolizes the Muslim eternal female, while the memory of Umm Salama, Aisha, and Sukayna awakens no response and seems strangely distant and unreal?" (1993:195).

Other religious traditions present similar accounts of women's participation. Religious texts recount vigorous participation by women during the introduction of Abrahamic religions. For instance, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna are mentioned as Jewish female disciples in Luke 8:1–3, and Eudia's and Syntyche's active roles and work in spreading the Christian message are acknowledged. Nevertheless, with the institutionalization of religious authority and practice, the canonization of texts unfavorable to women's interests, and male domination of religious authority, all religions have adapted to evolving circumstances and excluded women from public activities (Sayeed,2013).

In the first half-century of Islamic history, one finds significant female participation in both public and private affairs. However, "the roles and the participation of women shifted considerably after the Companions-Caliphs, from the time of the successors up to the compilers of the major Sunni collections (i.e. from the quarter of the first/seven century to the beginning of the fourth/tenth century)" (Sayeed 187). The quantity and quality of women's participation diminished dramatically, especially in the transmission of religious knowledge. Limitations based on gender, culture, and religious interpretations have constrained women's participation in public affairs.

During in the medieval period, women's public and political roles were limited and controlled by scholars and patriarchal systems. The political understanding that "men cannot survive in chaos without a leader, [and] no ruler will be there if the ignorant take command" (al-Mawardi,1996: 3) referred specifically to women. Reminiscent of the Aristotelian understanding of gender, women were considered unfit to hold public and political positions due to their physical and intellectual deficiencies. According to al-Mawardi, a man had to meet seven criteria to be a leader: notable Qurayshite descent, sound hearing, prudence, justice and probity, knowledge conducive to the exercise of independent judgment in crises or decision-making, physical fitness and freedom from handicaps to movement or agility, and dauntless courage in defense of the homeland and repulsion of its enemies. Women, according to al-Mawardi, were believed to lack these essential capabilities for leadership.

Khadija, the Prophet's first and only wife until her death, is one of the most important figures in Muhammad's life and Islam because "by her, God lightened the burden of his Prophet. She strengthened him, lightened his burden, proclaimed his truth, and belittled men's opposition" (Ibn Hisham,1955: 155). Women also protected the Prophet in all areas. From the story of Khadija, it can be argued that women's role in Islam and the Prophet's life was determined and supported by the Prophet himself.

Prominent Muslim women were not only the daughters and wives of powerful men. Since pre-Islamic times, women have sought to exercise their potential in public and private spheres. It has not been easy. Whether Muslim women may exercise political power or even appear in public has been debated for centuries. After the criticized role of Aisha in the battle of the Camel against Ali, the use of political power by Muslim women

has been controversial. Though Aisha is considered a role model for Muslim women in Sunni Islam, both Sunni and Shia scholars see her role in the battle as cause for women to stay out of politics and public affairs. However, as Mernissi argues, “Muslim women’s passivity in political, economic, and cultural spheres cannot be explained by the influence of fundamentalism alone” (1996:4).

Despite claims that women never participated in politics or public affairs during the Prophet’s lifetime, the discussion in this chapter makes it clear that women had crucial influences on the Prophet’s public and private lives. As in the example of Khadija, who supported the Prophet emotionally, financially, and intellectually and convinced him that he received revelations from God, women helped strengthen the religion as they themselves became influential too. Therefore, improving the image of Muslim women could be easier if the history of Islam is read in its full details and from all perspectives. To put it differently, “it is no wonder then that contemporary women intellectuals of both sexes have no difficulty proving, through the historical scholarship, that women’s passivity, seclusion and their marginal place in Muslim society has nothing to do with Muslim tradition and is, on the contrary, a contemporary ideological production” since the Prophet’s death (Mernissi,1996: 9).

As Goldziher (1973) argues, the Qur’an’s emphasis on equal religious rights and responsibilities confirms that women should not be prevented from being leaders or being accorded the same importance as men in religious life. These limitations are theoretical interpretations of theoretical restrictions, according to Goldziher. Most important, Goldziher adds, is understanding women’s capacity to serve as leaders. If this is not the will of God, then understanding of women’s capacity can change. The crucial question is

whether the women named as powerful and influential in the history of Islam were exceptional. In other words, was there broad demand from women to participate in political, religious, or social activities, or were these not open to women?

To answer this question, it is important to look at the Qur'an, a holy book for Muslims who believe that it governs every aspect of life. Therefore, it is imperative that I consider whether the Qur'an permits or encourages women's liberation. The question of the Qur'an's position on women's status goes beyond a mere reading of the religious text because culture frames reading(s) of religious texts and influences women's role in society. Their status and roles under patriarchal structures differ among societies. Therefore, I argue that it is crucial to read the Qur'an in light of societies' norms and values to understand women's status of women. As Barlas argues, the Qur'an has been interpreted in different patriarchal modes, so "we cannot therefore look to a text alone to explain why people have read it in a particular mode or why they tend to favor one reading of it over another" (2002:5).

According to Barlas, the historical and intra- and extra-textual contexts of the Qur'an, which includes customary and state law and legal and customary traditions, are central to understanding the historical interpretations of Islam's holy text. This process, for Barlas, consists of "collapsing God's words with our interpretation of those words" (2002:10). Therefore, to grasp the whole meaning of the Qur'an, one must read it holistically because the Qur'an is a document that addresses historical, legal, and ethical issues, but if one reads it out of the historical context and interprets it literally verse by verse, it does not reflect the whole meaning of the word of God.

Turkish Modernization as a Conflict among the State, Religion, and Women

The case of Turkey offers a natural field for tracing historical dynamics similar to those discussed in this chapter. Modern-day Turkey emerged from a centuries-old religious rule under the Ottoman Empire and is a predominantly Muslim society where women are equally present in and absent from social life. Women's political participation dates to the early republican years of Turkey, when they played roles in the independence movement and then politics after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Arguably, the background of Ottoman politics makes modern Turkey an even more intriguing case of women's status in a Muslim society. For women's social status and political involvement, Turkey's transition from Ottoman rule to a secular regime can be appropriately compared to Arabia's transition from *jahilliya* to Islam. In this context, one finds women at the center of political conflict in Turkey.

Considering Turkish women's role in politics from a religious perspective and interpreting their position according to Islam is difficult. However, by locating women in historical, political, and socio-economic transformations, one can trace their places in the public sphere. This study presumes that how Turkish female parliamentarians acknowledge religion and where they place Islam in their public and private lives aid in understanding this debate.

The relationships among state, religion, and gender are complex and made further problematic and intricate by social transformations from simple to complex structures, face-to-face relations to larger and more impersonal relations, rural to urban, and finally sacred to secular. Despite the numerous differences within and between societies and cultural perspectives and ever-new understandings of agency and subjectivity, women,

unlike men, have consistently been identified with the private, emotional, and even the irrational and, consequently, excluded from or assigned to newly formed social spaces and sources of power. The state, religion, and gender are also related and co-constitute each other in time, place, and changing historical and cultural circumstances. Moreover, both women and men are products of gendered regimes in religious and political structures that influence their experiences and roles in society. As Collier claims, "women may never achieve political offices or hold recognized authority, but their actions constrain the choices open to politically active men. The model woman of my argument, therefore, is not the affectionate daughter, hard-working wife, or loving mother who gets into trouble while trying to make the best of a difficult situation, but the cold, calculating female who uses all available resources to control the world around her. My model woman seeks power: the capacity to determine her own and other's actions" (1974, 90). With this understanding, I explore how Turkish women's attempts and decisions shape national politics and religion.

The modernization process in Turkey has been in tension with Islam because "controlling Islam and its role in people's lives was pursued not merely at the formal or legal level but also at the popular level" (Arat,2005: 4). Put differently, "although Turkey is a national and secular state, religion lies at the core of its political landscape and identity" (Yavuz,2000: 21). Other scholars add that Turkish modernization abandoned the ideal of individualism by regulating Islam even when the religion supposedly belonged to the private sphere. Arat (2005) describes this as the transition from communitarian Islam to communitarian Turkish nationalism because the ideologies of Islam and the secular

Turkish state both have a strong connection with community, and in both, the sense of individuality is weak and inarticulate.

Among predominantly Muslim societies, Turkey offers a suitable context to study women's status in society and in politics due to its historical context, regime type, and long history of women's political rights.[13] Despite secular underpinnings, contemporary Turkish politics cannot be understood independent of their Ottoman origins because the Turkish experiment with parliamentarism and elections started in the late 19th-century Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman claim to a leadership role in the Islamic (i.e. Sunni) world was based on the Ottoman sultans' caliphate from 1517 until its abolition by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1928 in the early years of the Turkish Republic. Notably, Ataturk did not immediately denounce the institution of the caliphacy: the founder of modern Turkey and his compatriots eliminated the Ottoman reign but waited to abolish the caliphacy. Moreover, although "the creation of a modern, secular, western-type of nation-state was the goal of Mustafa Kemal; ironically, as will become clear shortly, something of the power of religion gets built into the structure by means of those very things felt to be most natural, namely reproduction and gender" (Delaney: 1995, 182). Modern Turkey has aimed to control religion under the state's strict guidelines, so the secular regime established the Directorate of Religious Affairs, funded by and under the complete authority of the government. With these actions, Ataturk and his successors have defined the role of religion in Turkish society.

Like most other national movements in the region during the first half of the 20th century, Turkish modernization addressed women as mothers and patriots. In addition to these roles, working as midwives and teachers kept women in the private sphere.

[13] See Bilgili (113) for a summary.

Moreover, all the regime's achievements through the modernization process exclusively served a privileged, elite minority. Although the Turkish modernization process dramatically changed women's status in the 1926 civil code, there were no accompanying changes in cultural roles, religious or moral values, or mentality. Despite advances, the Turkish Civil Code showcased major shortcomings in legal interpretations of men's and women's roles in marriage: the husband was the representative of the marriage, where the couple lived was the husband's prerogative, the husband decided guardianship of children in the case of divorce, and the wife needed the husband's permission to earn a living (Abadan-Unat, 1978; Arat, 1989). As in the example of the founder of Turkey, Ataturk, as the father of Turks, believed that Turkish women should be educated, empowered, and modern and westernized in all terms. However, Ataturk also believed that women's highest duty "is to bring up and educate a strong new generation of people who will defend the country with determination and courage and pass on the spirit if our nation to future generations" (Taskitan, 1976: 62-63).

From the early 1930s, Turkish women could become active participants, at least legally, in politics. Ataturk's republican state passed legislation based on Western European laws allowing women to vote in all elections in 1930 and to run for office in 1934. As during nationalist movements in other countries (i.e. Egypt and Iran), Turkey, too, exploited women in nation building.[14] In other words, as Delaney (1995) argues, "in many countries, not just in Turkey, women may symbolize the nation, but men represent it" (190).

In the conflict between the secular state and Islam, Turkish women have been at the center. This work focuses on women politicians, specifically parliamentarians with an

[14] For a comparative discussion, see Pollard (2013) and Taraki (2008).

Islamist political party affiliation, because they exist at the intersections where the secular state and religion express and practice their ideologies “over the roles and status ascribed to women” (Arat,2005: 8).

Ultimately, “the disintegration of a traditional society does not assure modernity” because modernization “occurs in an unequal, uneven way and affects some groups more than others” (Abadan-Unat, 1978: 303). Turkey created paradoxical public and private spheres of life by othering Islam (Yavuz, 2000) and various groups, removing them from the public sphere, and constructing a state-oriented sphere with no toleration for different identities and lifestyles. In this environment, Turkish women have created counter public spheres for themselves.

Finding a fair share in the Turkish public sphere, nonetheless, has been difficult and tumultuous for Turkish women. As Bilgili aptly puts it, theirs is “a story that started gloriously but could not have continued as such. … A proportion [the percentage of women in the parliament] similar to one in 1935 was observed only in 1999 with 4,2%” (2001:112). Indeed, the representation of Turkish women in the national parliament has not changed much. The most notable change in parliament occurred in the 2007 election, when women claimed 9.1% of seats. After the 2011 elections, women accounted for 14% of parliamentary representatives.

Modern Turkey has experienced several major transformations. Multiparty elections were first held in 1946, and a change in government in 1950 lead to two decades of political and social turmoil until the military intervened in the 1980s. The 1980s and 1990s also saw major socio-political and cultural transformations as the military regime ended and Turkey attempted to strengthen its ties with the European

community. This research is limited to the last decade of the republic between 2004-2015, when the Turkish parliament included the highest number of women from different backgrounds and political orientations.

The ratio of women among political representatives has political, ideological, and religious implications. As Ayata and Tutuncu (2008) argue, the representation of women in Turkey is crucially affected not only by the number of women in parliament but also women's expectations, tendencies, and willingness or reluctance to adapt to political party programs and political parties embrace or rejection of women's issues. "Even though there has been an increased visibility of women in the AKP [JDP] politics, this has not lead to an increased representation of women, or any other kind of structural change. Gender issues have been subsumed under ideological debates on Islam, secularism and westernization" (Ayata and Tutuncu 366). Interpreting gender issues from the perspectives of Islam, secularism, and modernism shows that gender has the power to shape political debates, social and cultural transformations, and women's place in public and private spheres. Moreover, this interpretation answers the question of how political parties construct women's social and political roles by putting more emphasis on the definitions of gender and public and private spheres.

Here, I argue that women parliamentarians have bridged the private and public spheres. In other words, they have given a new understanding and shape to the private sphere through their actions and service in public sphere and their move from the private sphere to the public sphere. As Arat writes, "the woman's sphere of the private realm can be a source of strength and identity (for women) as opposed to the man's sphere of the public realm. Women exercise their power differently from men" (1989:15). As states

and governments have among the most important effects on constructing and controlling limits of the public and private spheres, it is clear that certain cultural, political, and economic factors demarcate the relationship between the public and private. Religion is among the most outstanding cultural factors because it deals with individuals and private life on an intimate level (Kadivar, 2003: 659). Therefore, I argue that, by controlling the private sphere, creating counter public spheres, and redefining the public sphere, women have protected their own identities and individuality within the Turkish parliament.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented examples of Islamic views of women in leadership in the early Islamic era, Qur'an, and Hadith. This chapter is key to establishing the historical context of women's profile in Islam. The Prophet's life was the only time in which the interpretations of men had not changed the religion, and the state of Muslim society was still emerging. Therefore, I argue that this era offers an appropriate, objective channel to understand the cultural and social differences in women's position within Islamic societies. Put succinctly, the key argument is that studying discourses on women in Islam throughout history is crucial to understanding women in Muslim societies.

Looking at major women figures in early Islam at the time of the Prophet, I argue that women's leadership in Islamic societies is neither new nor impossible. To the contrary, women leaders in early Islam, such as Aisha, Khadija, and Umm Salama, stand as powerful examples of how women could become leaders during the foundational years of Islam. Indeed, as the historical accounts highlight, these three women exhibited agency and leadership publicly and privately.

In this chapter, I also provide a brief background of the contemporary Turkish case. I argue that women are at the center of political conflict in Turkey between men and women and between the state and religion. The Turkish case of women's status in a Muslim society is the outcome of decades-old political and religious conflicts and gender hierarchies in modern Turkey.

The conclusion in this chapter is that, despite claims that the Qur'an 'degrades' the status of women in public and private spheres, the Islamic holy book attributes to women full conscious human agency and frames their responsibility and potential on earth as the caliph of God. Specifically, I claim that the absence of women in the public sphere of predominantly Muslim societies is not attributable only to religion or Islam.

In the following chapter, I explain and discuss the distinction between public and private spheres, first from an historical perspective and then from the gendered perspective of Islam and Islamic law. The gendered relationships and separation of spaces are cumulative, changing, and transformative events in history, so the historical female figures named in this chapter can serve as examples of the visibility or invisibility of women in the public sphere.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

WOMEN'S PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES IN ISLAM

Building upon the historical context that I established earlier, in this chapter, I apply the public versus private spheres of life framework in order to understand the status of women in Muslim societies. Here, I propose that this framework can be used to help explain how women, as members of a society and religion, define their roles in the public sphere, how they perceive the limits of the public sphere, and how they are able to create their definitions of publicity and visibility by using their private roles and spheres. I claim that the dichotomy between public and private is highly relevant to this discussion, because the separation is directly related to state regulations. In Islam, state regulations, and a distinction between public and private, began to emerge after the establishment of the Islamic state (after the *hijrah* (migration) in 622) under Muhammad's leadership. Therefore, conceptualizations of public and private gender roles under Islam are crucial to fully understanding women's status in modern society and politics. In this chapter, I also aim to show that the intersectionality[15] of public and private identities aids us in our understanding of the behavior of religious women in the context of power relations.

The separation of life into public and private spheres is a useful framework for unpacking the gendered aspects of women's political leadership. As Orakzai argues, women's empowerment has been seriously influenced by the separation of society into

[15] According to Shields' definition, intersectionality refers to "the mutual constitutive relations among social identities" (Shields, 2008: 301).

these distinct arenas. This separation "impacts their ability to participate in decision-making processes, to influence policy making discrimination against them and to control the state institutions making decisions about their role and life in the society" (Orakzai, 2014: 43). Hence, to situate this division within a cultural understanding and context, I argue that it helps to understand women's positions in different societies, because "gender equality is not about a battle of the sexes rather [it is] about changing the social order that breeds domination, exploitation and violence that have consequences for women as well as for men" (Erturk, 2004: 14). Moreover, since cultural understanding and context attribute different identities to women in society, intersecting identities simultaneously create oppression and opportunity because "we are not passive 'recipients' of an identity position, but 'practice' each aspect of identity as informed by other identities we claim" (Shields, 2008: 302).

To put it succinctly, explicit and implicit notions of what is public and what is private dictate where women belong and they limit woman's existence. As Rosaldo and Lamphere argue, although in all around the world women are excluded from public and domestic domains of life socially and economically and associated with fewer powerful roles than men as wives and mothers, "the degree and expression of female subordination vary greatly, sexual asymmetry is presently a universal fact of human social life" (1974: 3). To a skeptic, placing religion, i.e. Islam, at the center of this separation would effectively exaggerate its role. However, ignoring religion entirely would also prevent us from fully understanding the separation of the public and private spheres, since religion is one of the main reasons for this separation. Therefore, "in order to understand the social implications of Islam, it is necessary to look at, on the one hand, religion as a system of

identity [since religion shapes social processes and religious identification gives people a feeling of belonging to a group], and on the other, the broader socio-political order within which it is exercised" (Erturk, 1991: 308). By doing so, it becomes clear how women experience different types of political, social, economic, and religious segregation and seclusion in the public and private spheres. Consequently, understanding the 'religious' aspect of the separation of the public from the private is critical to offering an explanation for the current status of Muslim women.

Gendered relations and identities in public and private spheres are products of historical inequalities and political and social hierarchal relationships between men and women. Gendered relationships and statuses are reflective of certain historical events, however they continuously change and transform. Therefore, as Erturk describes, the situation and status of women in society is a multidimensional consequence of social, cultural, political, and economic inequalities (2004). Rosaldo argues, "women may be important, powerful, and influential, but it seems that, relative to men of their age and social status, women everywhere lack generally recognized and culturally valued authority" (1974: 17). As Rosaldo believes, everywhere in the world, there are distinctive tasks, manners, and responsibilities coupled with women or with men. In this dissertation, against the claim that Islam, as a scripture, gives a subordinate status to women in public and private spheres, I argue, as Rosaldo claims, whether in public or domestic, responsibilities and activities of men are predominantly important, powerful, and authoritative. In other words, no matter which society you live in, as a female, there is an asymmetrical cultural evaluation against you.

Regardless of whether they are religious or not, if (ideologically and structurally speaking) identities and statuses are defined according to femininity and masculinity, a society is referred to as being gendered. In such an environment, men relegate women to the private sphere because they are the primary actors in the public sphere and are in a position to determine the limits between the two. Also, roles and responsibilities of male and female in public and private vary from culture to culture. One thing is sure, however, that "in the majority of cases, males clearly have higher public status" (Sanday, 1974: 204) because male success and achievement are defined by socially structured institutions whereas female status is described by their biological or sexual ties to men and in life. Although patriarchal rules and norms continue to dominate social structures, "changes in women's status have come about through a combination of long-term macro level change processes (industrialization, urbanization, proletarianization, education, and employment) and collective action (social movements and revolutions)" (Moghadam, 2003: 79).

Discussions of gender and public and private spheres primarily focus on issues of visibility, mobility, and the voices of women. In other words, conceptualizations of women's roles and places are related to understandings of public and private spheres according to state and religious ideologies. Not only do the state and religion redefine and change the frameworks of public and private, but women do as well. Women, by creating their own visibility and publicity, change the meaning of private by capitalizing on their role in the public sphere.

Women, by using their domestic power and influence on their families and society, create authority in order to challenge men's authority. In societies, where public and private spheres are defined firmly, women may gain power and be able to transcend

limits either by entering the men’s arena or creating sub-counter public spheres for themselves (see Rosaldo, 1974).

Due to the various interpretations of different religions and state ideologies, the definitions and meanings of public and private can change considerably over time. For example, states impose legal, formal and informal restrictions and rules on people in order to draw fault-lines that separate the public and private spheres. The question here is not whether a state is religious or secular in character, but whether and how a state makes a separation between the spheres for men and women according to either formal rules or discursive structures. As Moghadam argues, “laws and discourses pertaining to gender are central to the self-definition of political groups and, indeed, signal the political and cultural projects of movements and regimes” (1994: 2).

Gender divisions and gendered structures are indeed at the center of the public and private dichotomy. Gendered rights, responsibilities, and roles draw the lines of this separation. Since the two spheres of public and private are separated into men’s and women’s areas of influence, the words that define these worlds are also diametrically opposed, such as freedom v. obedience, hierarchy v. equality, autonomy v. dependence, and self-determination v. self-consciousness. This is the vocabulary that is used to justify the separation of these spaces. While there is ongoing discussion concerning “the association of masculinity with public life” (Arnot, 2000:153) and the role of “the centrality of gender in the making of the public sphere” (Gole, 2002: 177), in the modern world, the centrality of gender reveals itself “through female role models and repetitive performances, including language styles, dress codes, modes of habitation and modes of address” (Gole, 2002:177). In other words, “in relation to public life, female physical

attractiveness, clothes and hairstyles were legitimate targets of attention and public comment in a way that men's were not" (Arnot, 2000:156). This reality effectively reinforces the argument that gender is of central importance in the public sphere.

Habermas (1989), however, claims that this dichotomy is superficial and a construct because the private belongs to the public. In other words, the public creates the private and vice versa – they define each other. Also according to Habermas (1989), the public sphere is separate from the state since it represents the idea of private people coming together in order to discuss a 'public concern' or a 'common interest.' Patriarchal societies consider all private and personal domains of life to constitute the women's sphere and fall under the domain of moral theory; therefore, the private and personal are understood to occupy the same sphere as morality and religion, or the intimate sphere (Benhabib, 1992: 90-91).

In Islam, women have always been at the center of discussion. Women's education, leadership, and dress are just some of the often contested topics that are associated with the debates over the status of women in Muslim societies. For instance, wearing a headscarf to attract visibility in the public sphere is one of the ways that Muslim women can be empowered. In Islam, Muslim women use headscarves as a means of actively participating in and contributing to the public sphere. To put it differently, "religion can be oppressed, but the content of religious identity also surely exceeds the condition of oppression" (Singh, 2015: 664).

Here, I posit that understanding the public and private aspects of life and women's roles within them will give us a better understanding of women's empowerment in Islam from a cultural perspective. As Orakzai argues, cultural relativism and hermeneutic

understanding of the Qur'an (which is an interpretation of the Qur'an according to cultural understanding and the social context of different Muslim societies) are critical since the emergence of women's rights in Islam and the verses revealed in this regard have been influenced by the cultural understanding of 7th-century Arabia (2014: 43). Therefore, in terms of Islam, it is crucial to understand the cultural context of medieval Arabia in order to capture essence of the status of women in Islam over time.

Before I concentrate on a discussion of the public and private spheres, first I will describe the existing literature on women's representation in national legislatures. This reveals the gap in the current scholarly work on Muslim women's status in politics, for many of the studies either offer a mere quantitative analysis or are contradictory in their conclusions or they focus on Western democracies. In my brief review of the literature, I also aim to situate this dissertation and its theoretical framework within the context of the most up to date research in this area.

The theoretical benchmark for this study is based on the literature on the public and private spheres of life; it is on those grounds that I examine the interrelations between Islamic public and private spheres and women's roles in both. Moreover, in this chapter, I highlight how important it is to understand their coexistence in political and religious life. Here, I elaborate on the public and private spheres of life as a means to further problematize the roles of religion, culture, and the state in dictating the place of women. Moreover, I discuss the issue of gender equality in these two spheres from spiritual and social points of view. Grounded in the literature on the public and private spheres, in this chapter I apply this framework to the status of women by considering Muslim societies in particular. My objective in this chapter is to situate female politicians

within formal state structures and dominant religious belief(s) in order to assess the ways in which female politicians interpret these contexts.

Religion, Politics, and Gender: Why Is a Public and Private Spheres Perspective Necessary to Understanding Women's Agency[16]?

The literature on women and politics (primarily found in the fields of political science and sociology) identifies three key variables to explain women in politics: (a) socioeconomic; (b) institutional; and (c) cultural and ideological factors (see Paxton, 1997). The first set of indicators includes such variables that could be classified as women's status (literacy, participation in labor force, etc.) and national development measures (gross domestic production per capita, etc.). Institutional variables, on the other hand, concern variables of the political system (for instance, electoral rules and gender quotas). Finally, cultural and ideological variables concentrate on religion and attitudes towards women in leadership positions.

The majority of the literature on women in politics focuses on a "supply and demand" framework to understand women's representation in politics and in legislatures (for a review, see Fallon, Swiss, and Viterna, 2012; Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes, 2007). According to this framework (see, generally, Austen and Mavisakalyan, 2016; Paxton, 1997), socio-economic variables represent the "supply side" and can influence the pool of potential candidates. Then, institutional variables lead to differences in the "demand side," for they indicate the openness of the political system to women's

[16] Agency is the capacity of a person to realize his/her own interests within structural and cultural limitations by intentional actions of conformity and/or resistance. A more in-depth discussion of agency follows.

participation. Cultural and ideological factors can operate on both the supply and demand sides. The evidence for all three types of variables in explaining women in politics is mixed, or the results are inconclusive. Paxton (1997) argues that the impact of each must be understood to fully explain the role of women in politics.

Research points to evidence that geographical location and religious beliefs affect women's representation. Austen and Mavisakalyan (2016) mark the contradictory results as to women's representation in parliaments of predominantly Muslim countries; while some find support for negative correlation (Kenworthy and Malami, 1999; Reynolds, 1999), others (Paxton, 1997; Ross, 2008) do not. In the meantime, one must note that religion by itself may not dictate women's status in politics and society. It is a plausible argument that instead of seeking a religion, one may be better served in seeking "varying interpretations" and practices of it (Sbaity Kassem, 2013: 19).

Others argue that "culture remains the most influential factor" in the research on gender inequality in political representation (e.g. Halder, 2004). According to Hall, "women's roles in most religious settings are to obey and be devoted to the tradition of the religion and the family" (1992: 102); furthermore, women face major challenges in the most traditional patriarchal societies. Indeed, such social contexts also create norms that enable some actors to dictate entry into, and exit out of, politics. For example, political parties are perceived as important gatekeepers (Norris, 1997: 218) and maintain patriarchal and conservative restrictions on women's statuses in politics and in society, for "[p]olitical parties are strongly influenced by cultural and religious barriers" (Jahan and Kabir, 2012: 42). The role of the political party and its leadership are further strengthened by the male-dominated political system in which parties and their leaders

decide on the recruitment, selection, and nomination of candidates, among many other things. As Hague et al. argue, “women still face the high hurdle of discrimination from sexist male politicians” (1998: 82). Nonetheless, political parties are also the main vehicles for women’s political advancement (Sbaity Kassem, 2013: 21). For example, political parties may very well support women’s presence in the party for the party’s own interests; indeed, recent research claims (see, Clark and Schwedler, 2003; Sbaity Kassem, 2013).

One of the influences of culture on politics is the importance of ancestry to politics. The literature suggests that this is especially evident in Asia and South America (Jalalzai, 2004). According to Paxton (1997), in non-democratic systems, nepotism is a common path to power for women in politics. Jalalzai notes that looking into familial ties is important, for this could explain “why women in relatively less egalitarian cultures and political systems gain office” (2004: 101). In such instances, an important question to pose is: How do women, by having and using agency, undermine predominant patriarchal principles in religion and politics?

In pursuing an answer to this question, along with many others that relate to women’s political representation in Muslim societies, I propose to use the public and private spheres of life framework as a means of contextualizing these debates by focusing on religion, politics, and gender. Whereas the many variables of interest here are derived from the associated literature on women’s representation in politics (in legislatures, specifically), this study does not follow the supply-demand structure but rather promises to orient the discussion toward its emphasis on the public and private spheres as they influence these variables.

Identities are historically and socially produced. As Benedict Anderson (1991) argues, national identities are imaginary products of imagined histories. Nationalism is recognized as modern political hegemony. Hall explains that “identities are constructed through difference-through the relation to what is not, to what is lacking, to what has been called "the other" or the "constitutive outside" and can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside,’ objected” (1994a: 5), (see also Laclau, 1990; Butler, 1993). Therefore, there is a high correlation between nationalism, religion and identity construction since nationalism and religion create a sense of ‘other’ness.

Religious, political and social boundaries result in exclusion, and women have experienced this type of exclusion for every society. Women are seen as symbols of purity and honor because of their reproductive and nurturing roles in society. They are called “mothers of the fatherland” (Koonz, 1987) and such designations end up guiding states’ social policies. Since the public sphere is defined, in part, by gendered characteristics, women have generally been identified as patriots’ wives or mothers (also see Delaney, 1994).

Different state regimes impose different legal, formal and informal restrictions and rules on people to draw fault-lines that separate the public and private spheres. Democracy, as a way of governing people, has its own rules. According to Wilford:

> The effect of democratization upon women, the extension of franchise rights does not in itself automatically lead to an improvement in women’s position; indeed it may have the contrary. Politically and socially, even when women enter the public sphere, they perform in familial-type roles

such as social welfare- health care, childcare, and literacy programs (1998: 168).

The question here is not whether a state is religious or secular in character, but whether and how a state makes a separation between spheres for men and women by its visible or invisible rules. As Moghadam (1994) argues, definitions of gender within a state's political and cultural projects signal the regime's intentions. Moghadam adds, "within some political projects women are linked to modernization and progress. In other cases, women are regarded as central to cultural rejuvenation and religious orthodoxy" (1994: 2).

The public sphere is a place where differences, be they political, gender, ethnic, racial, or religious, are experienced by citizens. Since modern nation states have been trying to control the public and private spheres and create identities and roles for their citizens, "the private/public dichotomy, the nature/civilization divide can be some explanations of women's role in nationalist ideologies" (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 6). Moghissi (1999) contends that modernization and fundamentalism have helped in the exclusion of women from the public sphere in many ways. In other words, women are oppressed and locked in the private sphere. The reason "for it was [that it was] only the male who became individuated outside the family, and thus it was males, and male activity, that constituted the public sphere of society. Thus modernity was emancipator to men but oppressive to women. It was empowering the man but overpowering to women" (Moghissi, 1999: 78). To put it differently, as Rosaldo and Delaney (1974) claim, although it is easier to think biology of women and men and their roles and responsibilities in public and domestic domains are natural, they are constructed and

interpreted according to specific cultural frameworks and religious systems. Therefore, "our understanding of "nature" is neither natural nor universal" (Delaney, 1974: 183). New forms of governance have emerged but they have not abolished the tools of patriarchy/male dominance, rather they have modernized the tools in order "to keep women's productive and reproductive capacities under control" (Moghissi, 1999: 79).

The agency of women and structures within which women live are a significant focus of this dissertation. State and religion, as institutions of social control, have the capacity and power to construct identities for women; however, women, too, produce identities and challenge the institutional processes. As Collier argues, "because almost every woman is perceived to be under the authority of some man who sponsors her participation in social and political life, women's efforts to control their own and others' actions necessarily disrupt men's efforts to exercise their socially legitimated authority. Men thus have every reason to discount women's role in political life and to attribute women's disruptive behavior to personal idiosyncrasies or to the general inferiority of the female sex" (1974: 91). Moreover, state and religion have been transforming over several centuries. The building of the agency of women is a dynamic, not static, process. Building women's agency is one of the missions of the state since "the state itself is a structure but a differentiated set of institutions, agencies and discourses, and the product of a particular historical and political conjuncture" (Waylen, 2013: 7). Saba Mahmood argues that agency is not equal to resistance to domination; rather, it is "a conscious capacity for action" (2011:18). To paraphrase Leila Ahmed (1992), throughout history, societies have articulated gender socially, institutionally, and verbally. The androcentric voice of religion, especially that of Islam, rather than an ethical vision, has shaped

society's understanding of gender. This research stresses the need for transforming knowledge by showing the connection between religion, women, and the state since "the relationship between knowledge and public policy has become so subtle that only a few scholars seem to have discussed it with regard to Muslims and to Muslim women" (Barazangi, 2004:14). By examining it through the prism of political action (through the state) and religion as they impact on women, in this research I offer answers to some key questions including: Who does construct gender identity? How do women identify their place in religion and politics?

Since politics (as represented by the state) constructs gender, gender constructs politics, and religion is an inseparable part of politics, visibly or not, gender construction is highly rooted in religious views. Therefore, more research on the relationship between gender, state, and religion is needed. Indeed, in the case of Turkey, on which I will elaborate later, the state has historically regulated religion and used it to create a national identity; the Turkish example demands an examination of the kind of relations that exist among the state, religion, and women.

In this dissertation, I focus on Turkish female politicians and on their role in shaping Turkish politics and society. Women politicians have used the existing political and religious structures to change patriarchal political attitudes for centuries. Randall contends that "women can seize opportunities presented but their intervention will simultaneously be constrained and even shaped by the character of these political openings. Through such participation, women may be able in turn to modify the political opportunity structure itself, so redefining their terms of engagement" (1998: 203). Therefore, by recognizing the role of female subject and agency, women representatives

in Turkey can exploit the opportunity to engage in the legislative process and transform the political and societal perceptions of women's roles and functions in Islamic societies.

The Public and Private Spheres of Life

From a gender perspective, the division of public and private[17] is arguably the starting point of the exclusion of women. According to Nelson, the universe is separated into two social worlds that can be defined as the men's world and the women's world (1974: 552). These two social worlds are defined as private (the women's) and public (the men's). The women's world is domestic, narrow and restricted, whereas the men's world is political, broad and expansive. The dichotomy between these two worlds or spheres is based on power, both natural and social. The definitions of public and private have been modified over the years, but the state has always had the legal power to define public and private politically. However, other definitions by other actors, such as religion, can shape the definition of the state. Therefore, it can be argued that being female and male has been defined legally, religiously, and socially.

Before going into detail about the Islamic public sphere, I will first describe some of the features of Habermas' definition of the public sphere and will then apply this to the Islamic public sphere. According to Habermas, the public sphere is the territory where public opinion is formed. It is open to all citizens. Since citizens are elements of the public body, there is "the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the

[17] "The domestic (public) domain includes activities performed within the realm of the localized family unit. The public domain includes political and economic activities that takes place or have impact beyond the localized family unit and that relate to control of persons or control of beings" (Sanday, 1974: 190). There is also a place between public and private/domestic, as Rosaldo (1974) argues, that helps to create and/or redefine limits of the spheres.

freedom to express and publish their opinions" (1974: 49). However, there is also a distinction between the public sphere and the political public sphere. Since the political public sphere is connected to the activities of the state, the public sphere is a mediator between society and the state; most importantly, the public sphere provides a democratic control over the state's actions. Therefore, the existence of the public sphere is independent from that of the state.

Until the 18th century, there was no separation between the public and private spheres. The difference may have instituted itself as some sort of power in state or religion, but after the 18th century, there was a clear split between private and public spheres. At that time, religion became a private preoccupation, whereas "the institutions of public authority, along with bureaucracy and the military and in part also with the legal institutions, asserted their independence from the privatized sphere" (Habermas, 1974: 51). As time has passed, there have been changes made to the nature of the public and private spheres, since the state has sought more power and 'supervision,' which "is a means of transforming the nature of power" by using the separation of the public from the private (Habermas, 1974: 52).

The state, as an institution and a place to contest power, has also made decisions impacting gender. Religion, as one of the key actors in power relations, has added a new perspective to this contest. Both the state and religion have the capacity to enforce a particular type of lifestyle. In other words, while the state engages in constructing legal divisions between gender and sex, religion limits its interest when it comes to how gender applies to morality. As a result, the main discussion regarding the public/private dichotomy and gender should focus on the forms, meaning and effectiveness of women's

participation in public life. Or, it should consider the extent to which the state and religion have made this participation possible. However, it should also be remembered that women live in a given cultural and political context. As Randall argues, we have to look at "the context of women's participation and the opportunities and constraints this presents. The character of women's self-representation and the political opportunity structure do not exist completely independently from each other" (1998: 193).

Within that context, ideology and politics (among others) define the meaning and scope of gender relations in the public and private spheres. Moreover, political and religious ideologies influence the gender system by their manifestations in social construction, social stratification, and all other social institutions. Habermas' public sphere is all about bourgeois society and excludes the family and economy. Furthermore, "from the beginning there were tensions between continuing patriarchal authority of the father in the bourgeois family and developing conceptions of equality and consent in the political world" (Benhabib, 1992: 91). While the father was dealing with the state, he did not want to lose his authority at home; therefore, the idea of justice and equality was not implemented in the private sphere. In other words, "patriarchy, a system of male dominance over women, historically has coexisted with the modes of production, and that women's status has been affected by both the sexual division of labor and class divisions corresponding to modes of production," as Moghadam claims (2003: 15).

In addition to these factors, by getting rid of all the traditional restrictions on the private and intimate sphere, one can extend the limits of the public sphere into the private sphere. Only then, I argue, will definitions of public and private cease to exclude women or gender in general. As Fraser claims, the public sphere in Habermas' usage emphasizes

feminine domesticity and the rules of private interests for the sake of the common good, since private interests construct the common good (according to Habermas) with a sharp separation between public and private spheres (1990: 114). However, in any given society, there are always competing publics and a corresponding number of ways to access the public sphere. Women have invented and circulated 'subaltern counterpublics' as a way of accessing the public sphere, engaging in political participation, and "formulat[ing] oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1990: 123). By doing this, "confined to the home and defined as legal minors, women must work in concealed ways to gain their ends. In such systems women's efforts to achieve power are regarded as most disrupted, and overtly ideology most consistently denied the wider implications of domestic disturbances" (Collier, 1974: 92). As a critique of Habermas' definition of public and private, Fraser and Collier argue that women are naturally able to be creative and productive, and state that they use these abilities to transform their creativity and productivity into public activity.

Habermas (1989) defined the public sphere as an arena in which people make rational choices in order to create a public identity. Politics is one part of his definition, but it is not limited to politics. The public sphere and discussions surrounding it feed into politics, and vice versa. However, when one discusses the public sphere, there is a possibility that the word "public" may be defined differently in different places. For instance, in contemporary Turkey, the public sphere does not mean a common space or place. Instead, the public sphere ('*kamusal alan*') in Turkey means a place that belongs to the state (Hazama, 2014). Since the state is one of the key actors that determines and defines what constitutes the 'other', women is one of the social groups to which this term

applies. The state determines the status and roles of women both ideologically and politically. Historically, the state has determined the degree of male dominance over women in the public and private spheres; notably, through sex segregation by using modes of production. In this regard, the modern Turkish state defines and uses the official public sphere as a new hegemonic mode of domination over women (Fraser, 1990).

Religion itself does not create types of segregation and/or separation, but the state uses religion to justify its policies on the modes of production and the separation of the spheres (Badran, 1982). That is why it is necessary to consider the dichotomy between the public and private spheres both religiously and politically since they work in tandem to create social policies through distinct institutions. This is how the state in Turkey has determined the roles of genders in public and in private: it has used religion to justify its political regime and state ideology. However, it is crucial to remind ourselves that gendered identities and public and private differences are consequences of state policies that use culture and religion as reference points in order to make laws legitimate in society.

The public sphere is a place where actors and roles change throughout history. Since the beginning of recorded human experience, the human universe has been segregated into two social worlds according to two different sexes; these have been characterized as private (the women's space) and public (the men's space) (Nelson, 1974). The emergence of the public sphere primarily concerns the representation of all the individuals in a common place in order to create a sense of commonality. Moreover, the emergence of the two separate spheres concerns power over external and internal

social affairs and in relationships. However, again in the case of Turkey, the term has been used to legitimize the state's power over society.

The public sphere is the Turkish state's sphere, which is different from civility but still represents state power and authority. The Turkish public sphere "is generally interpreted as an area directly or indirectly related to the state" but it is not directly derived from the Turkish state system (Hazama, 2014: 163). Mostly, the Turkish public sphere can be seen as a political competition between secularists and Islamists since the public sphere debate in Turkey focuses "on the types of places in which women should be allowed to wear headscarves. The discourse [the public discourse regarding *kamusal alan*] thus failed to realize the potential benefits of promoting freedom of thought and democratization among diverse social groups" (Hazama, 2014: 168). As in Habermas' definition of the public sphere, where the impetus behind the public sphere is to create a space for all in order to create open-mindedness and acceptance of differences, the state has the power to control religion in Turkey and religion is in turn an actor that controls gender relations in society. The state and religion assume all the power to define the roles for its people in both public and private. Therefore, in Turkey, the public sphere has deepened society's gender differences.

As Habermas (1989) argues, the public sphere has traditionally been something that belonged to the bourgeoisie. It has since been transformed, but at the beginning, it was an exclusive domain to a specific class that was educated and privileged; consequently, the public sphere was a reflection of bourgeois beliefs. In this regard, if we look at the establishment and development of the Turkish state, one can claim that the

Turkish public sphere has yet to be ‘liberated’ from the mindset of the Turkish bourgeoisie.

The public and the private define each other. In Habermas’ definition of the public sphere, woman is one of the ‘others’ that are intentionally excluded from public sphere. The reason behind this exclusion is related to the private sphere and gender relations in the family unit, according to Habermas. The gendered and hierarchical relationships within the family have made women’s segregation from the political public sphere possible as well.

The emergence of the public sphere can be attributed to the change in the social and communicational structures of society, according to Habermas. The borders of the public sphere can be extended even to concert halls, theatres, and coffee shops. Therefore, it can be argued that there are multiple public spaces in society that are built by people who differ from one another according to race, religion, ethnicity, class, and duty. To put it differently, there are *private* public spaces built by private people and public spaces built by the state. This classification—public vs. private—is linked to the construction of other classifications: mainly, femininity and masculinity, or women and men (Davidoff and Hall, 2003: 164). Davidoff and Hall point to this connection: “despite their instability and mutability, public and private concepts […] also have had powerful material and experiential consequences in terms of formal institutions, organizational forms, financial systems, familial and kinship patterns, as well as […] language” (2003: 165).

The public sphere is “the space of general communication and information that mediates between the overarching state and the many restricted spaces of daily life”

(Asad, 2005: 1). Moreover, this need for communication was the result of the bourgeoisie's quest to accumulate more power. Therefore, it can be argued that using the public sphere effectively provides greater power in society. However, since the public sphere has its own power to affect all of society by exchanging ideas and information, states have wanted to control its limits. In other words, as Asad (2005) claims, if the interest and ideas of citizens do not overlap and coincide with national boundaries and state interests, the state can perceive this as a threat to its own existence and react accordingly.

Consequently, a separation between the public and private depends on the interactions of different elements such as culture, politics, and economics. However, "from among the cultural factors, religion stands out as one of the most decisive components in delimiting the two spheres. Religions distinctly recognize and sanction a sphere of private action for individuals" (Kadivar, 2003: 659). That is, by acknowledging and approving the distinction between public and private, religion separates private actions for individuals/believers.

The transformation of the public and private spheres can be linked to the transformation of the state and religion. Rights that are not guaranteed in the public sphere cannot be guaranteed in the private sphere because the public sphere is the arena in which private individuals gather together in order to gain more rights and freedom and express their public opinion. If the public sphere does not evolve to include more rights and freedoms, then there is a possibility that a different public sphere will develop which limits people's expressions both ideologically and practically. Moreover, since there are

different classes and ethnic, gender and social inequalities among them, it is likely that the result would go against marginalized groups, such as women.

In conclusion, legal gendering practices, gender rights and obligations under the dichotomy of public and private have been evolving in history since the time of ancient Greece. While there has been a drive in the Western world to create clear-cut definitions and boundaries for public and private spheres, in Islamic law, this separation has evolved naturally.[18] Also, by using socially constructed gendered hierarchies in society, women have transformed the boundaries of the private sphere in order to create counter public spheres and become more visible in public. As Kerber states, "to continue to use the language of separate spheres is to deny the reciprocity between gender and society, and to impose a static model on dynamic relationships. The concept of separate spheres is something between politics and ideology" (1988: 39).

Many scholars have discussed the presence of religion in the public sphere. Although Habermas (2006) neglected the role of religion in the public sphere initially, he then discussed how the public sphere has to be open to everyone – even to religious people. Habermas adds that religious differences in the public sphere create a more democratic society than democratic state institutions themselves would be able to create. "Both see excluding religion from the public sphere as undermining the solidarity and creativity they seek. Citizens need to find ways to treat each other's basic commitments with respect; fortunately, they are also likely to find considerable overlaps in what they value" (Calhoun, 2011: 128). Therefore, it can be argued that Muslims have to find a way

[18] In Islamic law, there are two kinds of rights: the rights of man (*Huquq an-nas*) and the rights of God (*Huquq Allah*). Since the rights of man are private, in order to protect the human race and maintain harmony and justice in society, the transition from private to public has evolved naturally (see Hacak, 2013).

to include Islam in the public sphere in order to justify its existence. Lafont, for instance, finds that "an overlap between religiously and secularly grounded obligations is possible to the extent that we are able to arrive at the same results by different epistemic paths" (2007: 240).

Religious individuals exist in secular societies. The interaction between the religious and the secular is governed by political discourse, and that needs to be further examined. Habermas, for instance, highlights the integral role of religion in the life of a religious person. He contends "many religious citizens would not be able to undertake such an artificial division [religious and secular] within their own minds without jeopardizing their existence as pious persons" (Habermas, 2006: 8). On the other hand, Asad suggests that the public sphere is about power. Since it is equated with power, the public sphere excludes various kinds as constituting the 'other.' Asad further explains that, "from the beginning the liberal public sphere excluded certain kinds of people: women, subjects without property and members of religious minorities […] everyone who enters it must address power's disposition of people and things" (1999: 180). Later, I will illustrate the exclusion of women from the Turkish public sphere; more specifically, I will discuss how religious women in Turkey felt their otherness due to this exclusion and yet were still able to advance in politics. First, a discussion about Islamic public and private spheres is in order.

'Islamic' Public and Private Spheres

The demarcation of, and interactions between, the public and private spheres depend on political, cultural, and economic factors. Interactions of all these different

factors change and transform over time. As Kadivar (2003) argues, as in all the monolithic or Abrahamic religions, Islam emphasizes human identity and individuality. Therefore, in Abrahamic religions, specifically in Islam, the private sphere and privacy are important in terms of faith.

However, the terms public and private do not literally exist in the Qur'an, in collections of hadith, traditions from the prophet or caliphs, or in Islamic law (see Hacak, 2013) as they exist in Western literature. However, regulations and rules according to Islamic law can shed light on what it considers the public and private to be. According to Tucker, "jurists, and many Muslim societies, did hold some definite ideas about gendering of social space, dress requirements, and the gravity of sexual transgressions, but by and large these are ideas developed on the margins of the legal discourse and judges and courts do not seem particularly active in their enforcement" (2008: 175). In Islamic law, "ordaining good and forbidding evil" is the rule that regulates both the public and the private (Kadivar, 2003). According to Islamic tradition, harmony and justice in society could exist only if there were harmony and justice in the public and private spheres. Although interfering in the affairs of others, guaranteeing the privacy of personal information, and property rights are all within an individual's private sphere, when it comes to those who have full capacity to make decisions about his/her own life, a Muslim has to regulate his/her life according to the rule- ordaining good and forbidding evil. Both in public and private, a Muslim is supposed to ordain good and forbid evil. Therefore, if a sin is committed in the private sphere and the sin could cause no harm to the public order, no one has the authority and capacity to punish the sinner according to Islamic law.

In the Qur'an, there is no clear distinction or definition of public and private spaces that belong specifically to men and women. Laws and rules are in accordance with the protection of social harmony and stability and public morality, as are all other jurisprudential rules and regulations. According to Tucker, there is no separation of the public and private in terms of physical spaces that are designated to men and women; "rather, we find that the jurists focused on space as a fluid site for interaction between men and women. It was thoughts, attitudes, and illicit acts that were at issue, not to fixing of rigid boundaries of public and private and the assigning of tasks based on gender" (2008: 184). Although there are no rigid and fixed definitions of public and private in Islam, in general, when a person enters the public sphere, there are limitations placed on his/her behavior. Historically, in all, "individuals in the public domain are limited with regard to clothing, sexual behavior, and certain forms of social conduct that may vary from one culture to another" (Kadivar, 2003: 670). Similarly, in Islamic jurisprudence, the limit is set as it pertains to ordaining good and forbidding evil and it is equally applicable to every member of society.

Women's roles and responsibilities in public and private have been assigned according to men's degree of control over women in society. In other words, since men often make and interpret laws, gendered hierarchy determines women's roles. To receive an education, to own property, and to work or to be in public in a free capacity are all rights that are granted to women in the Qur'an (Q. 4:1, 7: 189, 42: 11, 49:13, 3:195, 4:32); however, I argue that a gendered hierarchy has reinterpreted these rights in Islam. Therefore, the problem is not whether women could be and should be in public, since the Qur'an already suggests a definitive answer to those questions: *she could, and she should*

as a righteous, pious, and just human being. The essence of the problem relates to the legal, religious, and cultural restrictions that limit women's participation in public, and even in private, in Islamic societies. Moreover, in order to be empowered in their public and private lives, women have to be motivated and conscious and demand more on both a social and political level.

In the life of the Prophet, there was no distinction between public and private life in accordance with today's definitions. Since Islam is a religion that covers all aspects of life, from politics to the domestic husband-wife relationship, the Prophet did not separate his affairs into different spheres. This made it possible for his wives to be involved in the public affairs of the Muslim community. Only after verbal and physical attacks by the Prophet's enemies on his wives did he set some boundaries between public and private. One such example can be found in the hijab.

Some argue that the hijab is the tool that is used to separate women from the public sphere, but this can also be contradicted. Since the wives of the Prophet had freedom to access the public sphere, when the hijab became necessary for them, it actually restored their freedom to engage in public affairs and be visible in the public sphere. While explaining the relationship between the Prophet and women, Mernissi argues that:

> his determination to live his relationship with women as a constant and privileged experience was used by his political enemies to attack him, to wound him, to humiliate him, and finally to make him give up his aims for equality of the sexes. They sexualized their political attacks aimed at weakening the prophet at a time of uncertainty in his military career and physical decline due to increasing years

(1993:163).

Attacks from his political rivals included physical and verbal attacks on the Prophet's wives and spreading rumors about them; for example, Aisha was accused of adultery but was acquitted by a revelation.

In an Islamic society, the rule or the principle of "ordaining good and forbidding evil helps to control of the public sphere away from the influence of irresponsible and undisciplined individuals" (Kadivar, 2003: 672). Here, I should add that the distinction between the public and private spheres in Islamic law in relation to gender and the visibility of women in public usually go along with sexuality, therefore it is understood as the segregation or separation of women. In other words, "such segregation was directly and consciously linked, not to a philosophy of separate spheres, but rather to the problem of human sexuality and the power of sexual attraction to disrupt society and threaten the unity and stability of Muslim communities" (Tucker, 2003: 177). I should also add that the application of the 'commanding good, forbidding evil' principle could be used and abused inappropriately by states and governments and cause an erosion to individual rights and freedoms.

While the Qur'anic verses may also create gender hierarchies within the family, it is important to remember that there are also other verses in the Qur'an that address property rights and the full human capacity of women (Q. 4:32, 3:195, 4: 124). Also, in Islamic law, following to the rule/discipline, one can argue that the wellbeing of a family and community is more important than the privacy of an individual. Put it differently, Islamic law gives both men and women different roles and responsibilities in family

relations and society and none of them intend to make women invisible or segregated. The intention is basically to create community harmony.

Muslim jurists believe that some private interventions may have public implications. As mentioned before, in Muslim societies, individuals have a responsibility to protect social harmony and enforce regulations. Therefore, “space was gendered in the sense that they thought some social boundaries between men and women should be maintained and male-female interaction should be carefully regulated” (Tucker, 2008: 177) for the sake of community and society.

Although the Qur’an and the hadith (traditions of Muhammad) are the two main sources of Islamic law, human beings are the ones who interpret and apply rules according to socioeconomic conditions. In other words, “while Islamic law did provide the parameters for behavior regarding marriage, divorce, and inheritance, the actual rules in practice were the result of local conditions and social class, which often differed from urban to rural settings and from one country or region to another” (Esposito, 1998: xiii). From a religious perspective, it means that laws on religious duties are eternally valid whereas laws on social life and regulations can change according to socio-historical contexts.

To put it differently, as Abduh says, “religion was revealed for the benefit of its people; if one of its provisions begins to harm rather than benefit the community, the application of that provision has to be changed according to the changed needs of the group” (1998: 34). Therefore, if the Qur’an is universal and is for every generation and society, its meanings cannot be limited to the time of the Prophet. That is why this study

is promising, insofar as it elucidates matters relating to Islam and women in the case of Turkish women.

Women's Public and Private Spheres in Islam

A woman's virtuous nature, which is a by-product of women's domestication, and the restriction of a woman's role in society to her maternal functions have been discussed for centuries. However, discussions about the biological or natural hierarchy and differences between men and women in public and private domains are not enough to determine women's roles in society. Because "for humans, biology becomes important largely as it is interpreted by the norms and expectations of human culture and society. What is male and what is female will depend upon interpretations of biology that are associated with any culture's mode of life" (Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974: 5). Also, it is important to remember that women have also realized their potential and capacity within a 'male-defined' private sphere. Being private, domestic, narrow, and restricted versus being public, political, broad, and expansive is related to the meaning of power and the political…or is it? Should it be? (Nelson, 1973). "What is open and accessible versus the concealed and hidden; and what is collective, and what relates to the individual" (Rendall, 1999: 478) are determined by those who have access to the public sphere, typically men. It is also important to remember that women's access to the public sphere is not only political but it is also economic and social. Rendall argues, "a single version of the public sphere is insufficient to allow us to understand the complicated variety of ways in which women might identify with communities which stretch far beyond the borders of home and family" (1999: 482). That is why one needs to include religion in

the equation of public and private, in the shaping of the public and private. Moreover, "what becomes defined as the public and private spheres, however, are less the categorizations of the world by the actors living in these societies than they are the metaphors of the observers who are recording the actions of men and women in these societies" (Nelson, 1973: 560).

It is also crucial to consider the idea that there are interactive and negotiated roles and situations that define and differentiate the relationship between public and private, and between men and women. Effectively, in every society there is an order negotiated, or socially constructed, between men and women, and "despite the existence of segregated social worlds and the implication that there exists a differential distribution of social knowledge-the man's and the woman's- this knowledge is structured in terms of relevance, and women's relevance structures intersect with those of men at many points" (Nelson, 1973: 553).

Therefore, one can claim that every society has its own negotiated order in terms of the public and private and their relationship with power and politics. This order is subject to change according to culture, religion, and knowledge of society and historical change. As Nelson argues, that is why "we must re-evaluate the metaphors of private and public in terms of domestic and political. Women do approach public affairs but they do so from private positions. The segregation of women can alternatively be seen as an exclusion of men from a range of contacts which women have among themselves" (1973: 558). Nelson further argues that although men are in public and separated from women, women can access a larger number of smaller public groups more easily than men and that demonstrates women's greater reach. Also, "women gain power and a sense of value

when they are able transcend domestic limits, either by entering the men's world or by creating a society unto themselves" (Rosaldo, 1974: 41).

Since every society has its own special order negotiated with the public and private and with politics, women's relationships with Islam have been different than they have been with Islamism or Islamicism.[19] In other words, like every other society, Islamic societies are products of their history, which means that they and their interpretations change over time; consequently, not all aspects of the religion are reflected the same way in all eras. Therefore, the relationship between women and Islam modifies over time.[20]

The hadith, "Never shall a folk prosper who appoint a woman to rule them,"[21] is often used to justify the exclusion of women from political participation or even public office. There were scarce educational opportunities for both men and women in pre-modern times and as a result, there were very few, if any, educated women who served in public office. However, today many women are ably serving as politicians, public servants, judges, etc., thus demonstrating that a woman's capacity is unrelated to her gender. Moreover, as Fadel argues, "some women may be more capable than some or even many men. Therefore, when it comes to assessing the capacity of a woman to be a judge, the only issue is whether her decisions are in accordance with the law, not whether she is qualified on account of her gender" (2011: 164). So, competence to do a job is not an issue of gender, but it is rather related to capacity and merit. In the Qur'an, there is the

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[19] In common usage, Islamism, also Islamicism, means a social, political program that is shaped by Islamic teachings; a political and religious worldview (see Tibi, 2012). It is also important to point out that very few would use these two terms interchangeably; the convention is to use Islamicist to refer to an academic who specializes in the study of the Islamic civilization.

[20] According to Nyazee, Islamic law is a growing tree: "Its evolution and growth never stops. Like the branches of the tree, the flexible parts of the law have been changing with times, sometimes yielding abundant fruits, sometimes less" (2003, 129).

[21] According to another version, "No people has prospered who has appointed a woman to lead them."

story of Bilqis, who "is a model ruler who relies on deliberation and reason and justice in her political decision-making, not arbitrary and autocratic opinion, therefore weakening the force of this hadith as justification for the exclusion of women from public office" (Fadel, 2011: 166). Moreover, since the hadith cannot be contrasted with the Qur'an and the Qur'an is the quintessential and primary source of Islam as the word of God, it is logical to follow the Qur'an's interpretation. Therefore, the problem is not religion; it is the interpretation of the Qur'an through the lens of culture and society.

Moghadam and Mitra argue "in order to understand Islam's social implications for the status of women, it is necessary to look at the broader sociopolitical and economic order within which these are realized" (2014: 153). According to Tayob (2014), all these implications can be referred to as public Islam. For Tayob, public Islam is a very complex and multifaceted term which refers to examining the ideas and practices of religious and secular authorities, men, women, students, workers, intellectuals, and many others in the public sphere in order to find and create new ways and possibilities to understand the meaning and symbolic and physical expressions of Islam. In other words, Islam and its public expressions are parts of the public sphere. Therefore, I argue that if women are involved in this public debate in the public sphere, if women mainly represent the private sphere, and if Islam is in the public sphere, then women are an important part of the debate and the movement since they are in a position to shape and construct new meanings and understandings of gender and identity.

An individual's or a society's identity has no fixed definition. It is constructed according to differences such as gender, language, and religion that could be as a result of birth or law. Being a woman, being a Muslim woman, and being a Muslim woman who is

a public figure means that one person might encapsulate many different identities. Despite their differences, all these women choose to be involved in public affairs as Muslim women. They strengthen and empower their position and dignity in public and private by imitating famous examples taken from Islamic history, such as Aisha, Khadijah, and Umm Salama. In other words, Muslim women try to create another identity that nobody else has constructed for them. This identity strategically determines their position in their faith and in public and private. It contains many identities that are different from each other; it is complex, but it allows women to have an active involvement in the public and private spheres.[22] All these identities can be seen as an expansion of the faith and as an attitude and intention to seek justice for Muslim women (cooke, 2001). However, creating that type of self-image is challenging and creates a lot of doubts because, as cooke (2001) states, even Aisha is remembered for her shame not her pain, for her losses not her leadership. Thus, the new identity that has been constructed by Muslim women "disturbs the calculations of power and knowledge" by "creating the possibilities for the construction of a society founded on a transformed sense of justice for all" (cooke, 2001: 155).

Everywhere in the world, women have to overcome barriers in order to claim political rights and powers in the public sphere. "When the category of woman is inserted into a masculinist discourse on politics and public life," women and women's status are denied as a political subject (Landes, 1984: 20). The paradox between the public and private has been extended and transformed, as Landes argues, as "a binary structure of

[22] This argument is also explained by the intersectionality theory (see Crenshaw, 1989). According to the intersectionality theory, "there is no single identity category that satisfactorily describes how we respond to our social environment or are responded to by others. Identities are fluid in that they can change over time…" (Shields, 2008: 304).

oppositions: between state and family, temporal and unchanging, discourse and silence, universal and particular, culture and nature, rational and irrational, order and chaos, power and morality, justice and love, knowledge and superstition, city and countryside" (1984: 20). This reveals the uneasy relationship between, and involvement of, women and politics. A country's political language, sexual metaphors and gendered constructions are formed socially and religion is one of the tools used by society to create and impose a variety of different roles on the genders. As a result of these social constructions, in politics women have been rejected as political actors because of their perceived passive, traditional, irrational, moral, and reproductive nature. In other words, the political significance of women in society has been limited because of their domestic responsibilities.

In many cases, women are excluded from the public sphere and almost invisible in politics, but in the example of Turkey, the case has been rather different in terms of women in politics. Since it is necessary to note "the fatal intersection of time and space" (Foucault, 1986: 22), one must remember that a variety of periods, socio-historical contexts, and myriad distinct cultures have shaped the actual condition of Muslim women in this regard.

The other argument that needs further attention pertains to gender and political participation; that is, how women and men are different. According to this proposition, men and women are different in term of their leadership styles, political interests, and attitudes toward issues such as conflict. However, different does not mean unequal. In reality, gender relations are complex and enigmatic.

Women's Agency, and the Notion of *Insan* in the Qur'an

Gender equality manifests itself ideologically, socially, and physically through the social construction of male and female bodies (Marchand and Runyan, 2011: 11). As Marchand and Runyan (2011) argue, there has to be a relational thinking of the revelation of gender, race, nation, class and sexuality in identity construction in socio-cultural processes and institutional structures. Humans decide and shape the structures of society. Therefore, intentionally or not, people's choices and understanding give shape to every social institution. Effectively, social structures and people's choices form a society's ideologies and institutions. Therefore, patriarchy is one of those structures that has been shaped and changed by people and structures.

The status of women in public and private spheres is related to many issues, such as education, urbanization, income level, family structure, etc. However, men's relationships to women in society and society's understanding of gender form the crux of the problem. Abadan-Unat describes this relationship as "the universe of men is related to the universe of religion and power and the universe of women to the domestic universe of sexuality and the family" (1978: 296). Therefore, as a result of the strong hold of social conservatism, a woman's status has not changed dramatically, especially in the public sphere. Even in secular societies, where women may have greater opportunities and higher status in society, "women were marginalized in political life and in party politics. On the other hand, even though most common understandings of Islam recognize various restrictions and impediments to women's claim to 'power,' including seclusion and priority given to maternal roles, women's return to Islam seems to have been an important catalyst for their increased political participation" (Arat, 2005: 8).

In Islamic discourse, there are multiple readings of the different religious texts. Societies that have different social, cultural and institutional backgrounds diverge in their interpretation of the Qur'anic verses. As a result, "women's inferior status that has been written into Islamic law is a result of social conditions rather than the moral teachings of the Qur'an" (Arat, 2005: 91). Here, we are discussing how over fifteen centuries, different social, cultural, and geographical settings have resulted in different readings and interpretations of the Qur'an because "the founding materials of Islam thus reflect the situation of women in a seventh-century Middle Eastern society" (Rodden, 1999: 26).

As in every social institution, "the patriarchal ideology generated by the underlying patriarchal structure helps to perpetuate this system of male supremacy through the mass media and through religions and educational, as well as economic and political institutions" (Arat, 1989: 18). Since religion and politics are two significant constituent parts of the public sphere, it is not surprising to see men attempt to define both the public and private spheres for women.

Barlas (2002) divides patriarchy into two categories: narrow or specific, and broad or universal. She applies the former to the Qur'an because it promotes a kind of traditional patriarchy. According to this view, God is seen as a Father/man and represents the continuation of tradition. However, the latter, broad/universal patriarchy, is all about politics of gender and making women 'other.' Thus, this form of patriarchy creates political, biological, moral, and ideological differences and inequalities.

If *insan*[23] is at the center of the Qur'an and justice is its main aim, "both the public and private domains of human existence" should be analyzed from an *insan* perspective (Wadud, 2006: 7). In this sense, it is important to look at the Qur'an from the

[23] Human being, human; Q. 76.

perspective that places *insan* and justice at the center, and focus on what it says about women as people with full human agency. Is Islam (as a religion, not as what Muslims do and practice) the cause of women's inequality?

Although the public and private spheres seem separate from each other, what and where the public is defines what and where the private is. Since male authority creates almost all interpretations of all religions, it is clear that "interpretations of textual sources, and applications of those interpretations when constructing laws to govern personal and private Islamic affairs and to construct public policies and institutions to control Islamic policies and authority, are based upon male interpretive privilege" (Wadud, 2006: 22).

While searching for women's human agency in the Qur'an, it is important to look at how we define Islam as a religion. Our definitions of Islam, as Wadud says, provide the outline of our understanding of human agency. Wadud defines Islam as "engaged surrender," since it reflects a "conscious recognition of choice and exercising that choice as an agent" (2006: 23). God gives humans the conscious choice to be good or bad. Moreover, it is stated in the Qur'an that both males and females are equal moral beings and that the only difference between them comes down to their moral consciousness. To think otherwise, and to believe that God did not create men and women equally, then how could God judge them on their moral consciousness and piety? Likewise, if the main theme of the Qur'an is justice, how could men and women be both unequal and yet expected to act as moral agents?

The construction of women's agency and subjectivity is a very important component of understanding the impact of the public and private spheres of society. According to Wadud, agency means to be responsible for establishing social justice.

Wadud believes that acting as an agent is a divine responsibility for women within their social and cultural restrictions. On the other hand, for Mahmood, agency is an act of resistance constructed by the consequences of a woman's own will rather than custom, tradition or social coercion. At the end of this process, a woman becomes a "self-conscious identity and agent. Such an understanding of power and subject formation encourages us to conceptualize agency not simply as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable" (Mahmood, 2011: 17). Although these two definitions of agency seem contradictory with each other, both espouse the idea of individual responsibility, will, and action, because, as Asad explains, "individuals are agents because they are responsible for their own souls" (1996: 271).

By establishing justice in society, humans are empowered. In order to be empowered, agents should be both conscious of, and take responsibility for, their private/personal actions. In other words, in the Qur'an, both men and women, as human beings, have the responsibility of being present and visible in public in order to maintain social justice; however, their personal actions are what determine their public responsibilities. Private responsibilities and consciousness are prerequisites to assume public responsibilities and consciousness, such as piety, which is measured by a person's public and private actions. Since men and women are equal in all manners but piety, men and women should both be present in the public sphere in order to create justice. Therefore, acknowledging a woman's power and recognizing her contribution to society demonstrates an understanding of the role of women in the Qur'an as agents (Wadud, 2006).

In practice, veiling has been used as a way to exclude and oppress women from the public sphere in some Muslim societies such as Turkey. Despite this, exclusion was not the original intention of the verses; instead, veiling was intended to protect women from the view of non-Muslim men and, perhaps more importantly, it should be recognized that the verses do not talk about veiling as a means of covering a woman's body or hiding her sexuality (Barlas, 2002: 56). The verses on veiling in the Qur'an (Q. 33:59-60, 24:30-31) are often presented as evidence that Islam seeks to reduce the visibility of women in the public sphere. However, if the Qur'anic verses are analyzed and situated in their historical context by examining their 'intertextuality,' it becomes clear that they are indicative of "the social structure of a slave-owning society in which sexual abuse, especially of slaves, [was] rampant" (Barlas, 2002: 55). Moreover, there was no legal protection of women against sexual abuse at the time of the revelation and veiling was the only safe way for non-slave women to appear in public. Therefore, it can be argued that in the Qur'an, women, as people with fully conscious human agency, are expected to be in the public eye and completely visible, but, at that time and in that social and cultural context, veiling was the only way for women to be secure in public. By applying the *Jahiliyya*[24] context to today, some interpretations of the verses appear to focus on female immorality, inferiority, and sexuality. As a result, the initial intention of the veil as a means of protecting women by making them publicly invisible has been used against Muslim women in order to exclude them from the public sphere.

The relationship between the public and private spheres and the Qur'an can be viewed through the relationship between the rights of God and the rights of humans. It is

[24] The word literally means 'state of ignorance' and is used to define characteristics of pre-Islamic society in Arab peninsula.

clear in the Qur'an that men and women are socially and individually responsible for ensuring justice in society. Consequently, alongside their private/personal responsibilities, both men and women should be in the public sphere in order to build a just society. In this dissertation, I argue that being in public creates opportunities for men and women to protect their privacy while helping to construct more egalitarian private and public spheres on both a religious and social level.

The debate over public and private spheres has largely been associated with concepts of freedom and an "individual's right to privacy against interference by other persons and the state and privacy linked to the body and its needs, things that ought to be hidden from the view" (Landes, 1998: 2). However, this issue is far more complex since it is complicated by the many different understandings of the public and private spheres in religion, particularly in Islamic theology.

Generally speaking, the argument for excluding and secluding women from the public sphere is more natural than cultural (Burke, 2012). I suggest that in almost all religions, the presumed nature of a woman or the characteristics of women by virtue of their creation have been used as the reason to justify her exclusion from the public sphere. As Ortner argues, a woman's body and its functions make her closer to nature; consequently, these functions determine her social roles, and finally her traditional and social roles give her a specific psychic structure, which is also closer to nature than is man (1974).

Since the productivity of women comes naturally by birth-her ability to carry children is what makes her productive, men exercise their productivity through power in state, society, and family arenas. Whereas women give birth to human beings and have a

capacity to be in society as free and conscious citizens, the extension and usage of this capacity depend on the culture in which they live. While men mostly define culture, men define women's place in society too. That is why in public and "in the area of socialization-women perform lower level conversions from nature to culture, but when the culture distinguishes a higher level of the same functions, the higher level is restricted to men" (Ortner, 1974: 80).

Women can be seen as a link between nature and culture. Being a woman can mean being restricted naturally, socially, culturally, and religiously. The role of women in public is constrained by natural and cultural causes. As Ortner claims, the socialization of women has a narrower and more conservative set of attitudes and views than that of men, because of women's limited social environments. However, it is crucial to understand that religiously, there is no difference between men and women in terms of creation. The only difference, according to the Qur'an, comes down to their piety and morality (Q. 49:13). That is, irrespective of gender, human beings differ only according to these two qualities and none other. The same can be argued for both social and cultural differences too, because "a different cultural view can only grow out of a different social actuality; a different actuality can only grow out of a different cultural view" (Ortner, 1974: 87).

Leadership, politics, and gender are intricately intertwined. Since gender is one of the basics of social and power relations and being a leader is all about power, the one cannot be discussed without the other. Moreover, if we add the word religion to this equation, the relationship becomes even more complicated. Since I am looking at the role of women and their impact on Turkish politics and the state by considered how this role has been shaped by religion, it is important to underscore the importance of the

relationship between religion and the public and private spheres. Generally, the idea is that “the state is a homogenous entity and a given which lies almost outside of society rather than being something which is created in part as a result of interaction with different groups” (Waylen, 1998: 4). More specifically, it is a rule that the state is external to women’s lives and that women should exist outside of the state as much as they can because of their nature and social relations. Consequently, the state is traditionally considered to be something that has been constructed, especially by men, and because men describe what culture is and the place of women within that definition, men exercise state power over women.

As Turkey’s female politicians advocate and exemplify, “women should develop alternative ways of organizing instead of trying to change the ways in which bureaucratic structures operate” (Waylen, 2013: 9). The state, with its bureaucratic structures and institutions, makes and implements policies. In these policies, the state is mostly gender focused. In other words, policies that are related to women are usually connected to the private sphere and social reproduction and are created by assuming “particular patterns of gender relations or with the effect of creating or maintaining particular gender roles and emphasizing issues of control and empowerment for women” (Waylen, 2013: 11).

The Qur’an was revealed in the 7th century to what was then a largely tribal society; it inspired revolutionary changes in social dynamics, such as the institution of slavery and the change in the status of women in the public and private spheres. “However, the history of Muslim conquest and the turn towards excessive materialisms led to the stagnation of rights of women, slaves and minorities within the Muslim schema of rights. Muslim scholars have lost touch with the universal dimensions of the Qur’anic

ethics and have somehow limited the entire message to hairsplitting jurisprudence" (Orakzai, 2014: 51).

Since the terms private and public are not explicitly defined in the Islamic literature and law, there are also no definitions in either the Qur'an or *sunnah* of the Prophet. Despite this, it does not mean that we cannot sense the presence of an idea of what is meant by a separation between the public and private spheres. To Kadivar, private means "kept hidden from and inaccessible to others, and when it falls exclusively within the decision-making authority of an individual, then that issue is 'private'" (2003: 661). According to Fraser (1990), however, private property in a market economy and a domestic and personal life, including a sex life, can be considered private. Therefore, private is nothing more than an ability to exercise complete authority, intention, and power over an individual's own decisions. In contrast to private, the public or the public sphere is a space that is owned by people and open to all. However, by creating an awareness of private issues, such as family violence or homosexuality, these issues can be transposed from the private sphere on to the public sphere. Therefore, as Fraser (1990) and Landes (2003) claim, the terms public and private are not static and straightforward designations; instead, they are cultural classifications and fluid labels and are always inflected by local and temporal circumstances.

In Islamic law, "no one has the right to interfere in the affairs of an individual without specific divine permission to do so. Any inquiry into such matters should be based on legitimate reasoning in accordance with religious law" (Kadivar, 2003: 663). However, the boundaries of government intervention are not clear, nor is it clear who draws the boundaries. In other words, although the involvement of the government can be

called divine, when it comes to the national or public interest this might as well be arbitrary. As Kadivar states, "government authority and the radius of the private sphere and individual liberties are inversely proportional. Where the government wields absolute power and it is not harnessed from violating the private sphere of citizens, private life and individual liberties remain rather insignificant" (2003: 675).

In Islamic tradition, communal identity is more important than individual identity, because "traditional society produced Muslims who were literally submissive to the will of the group" (Mernissi, 1993: 22). In a traditional society, individuality is deemed a threat to group harmony and authority in society, therefore individual initiatives are errant and sinful behaviors. Since Aisha, the third wife of the Prophet, initiated a counter attack against Ali and was defeated, scholars have been negative in their references to Aisha's public initiative, leadership, and political reputation (Abisaab, 2004; Abou El Fadl, 2001). Moreover, by using Aisha as an example, the possibility of a female leader has ceased to be a valid alternative.

Abu Bakr, who lived during the time of the Prophet and who spent time in his company in order to be able to report the hadith, transmitted a hadith that has been used to 'prove' that women cannot be leaders. The hadith says: "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity." By using this hadith, men have effectively excluded women from the public sphere for centuries. However, if we look at the originality of the hadith, there are some problems with Abu Bakr's qualifications. According to Mernissi, three criteria must be met in order for a person to narrate a hadith: these are ignorance, intellectual capacity, and morality (1993: 59). Therefore, the reliability of the hadith can be brought into question since there are serious doubts

regarding Abu Bakr's knowledge and trustworthiness. According to Mernissi, although "it was collected as authentic by al-Bukhari and others, that hadith was hotly contested and debated by many" (1993: 61). Therefore, there is no sufficient Qur'anic basis for excluding women from public affairs and politics since this hadith is unreliable and there is no mention of excluding women from politics in the Qur'an.

After the Prophet's death, the process that had begun just before his death through the verses promoting the degradation and seclusion of his wives had progressed. However, according to Ahmed, this was simply an indication that "the seclusion and degradation of women typical of most of Islamic history is the result of Islam but of its interpretation by later generations" (1992: 690). In Khadija's example, first Islamic society followed the practices and rules of a pre-Islamic society in which women were relatively independent and active, and then it transformed them into a new community. I would argue that even though pre-Islamic women were active as priestesses, soothsayers, warrior-leaders, and poets, while also having a voice in marriage, divorce, and inheritance, Islamic society initiated the transform from a matrilineal society into a patrilineal one. The verses advocating the seclusion and restriction of the wives of the Prophet were applied to all Muslim women. Finally, "the images as recorded by the medieval scholars of Islam provided both the paradigm for the limits that needed to be placed on women's roles in religion and society, and also their justification, scripturalist proof of 'women's nature'" (Stowasser, 1992: 4).

With the exception of Aisha's active involvement in public affairs during and after the lifetime of the Prophet, the seclusion and exclusion of the Prophet's wives from the public sphere is defined as "righteous immobility, quiet domesticity, modest

comportment, and devout obedience" by Stowasser (1992). It is a well-known fact that the wives of the Prophet were with him throughout his spiritual and political struggles. They were active and fully involved in his mission, and, with the exception of Aisha, participated in wars and raids not as warriors, but as nurturers, healers, and followers.

What, or who, can then be considered the public and the private? If the state represents and fills the public sphere, is religion, as a private matter, representative of the private sphere? If religion is private, how can it define the public visibility of a woman? If religion frames family as the unit that shapes society, then it can be argued that as a result of her nature, women's publicity should be limited because a woman's body and nature are unchanging and fixed.

The distinction between the public and private spheres has given rise to separate and distinct roles for both women and men in society. Although the existence of two different spheres of influence is a Western social construct, that does not mean that in the Islamic tradition and laws lack a similar separation. As Hacak states, "it cannot be argued that similar terms in different legal and cultural systems correspond exactly to the same concept or meaning. However, it can be assumed that any term of one legal system can possess a 'similar and parallel' term when compared with another legal system" (2013: 52). As I mentioned earlier, there are two different rights in Islam: one is God's rights, and the other is men's rights. The latter concerns the worldly interests of an individual, whereas the former is all about the harmony and stability of society. In accordance with the rule of 'commanding good and forbidding evil,' the rights of God aim to protect the public interest or the interest of all human beings. Although these two rights are written in neither the Qur'an nor the hadith, these are parts of Islamic law, nonetheless.

Moreover, because the rights of God pertain to the public interest, these rights dictate the rules and roles of individuals in public. Therefore, I argue that in Islamic law, the public sphere is organized according to human interests and social harmony and stability, not according to sexual divisions. In other words, Islamic law is not interested in the separation of the sexes according to a public and private binary; instead it is concerned with improving the understanding and knowledge of human relations and interactions in accordance with the Qur'an and the hadith.

Additionally, one should recognize that the separation of spheres into public and private does not represent a static, fixed, and stable relationship between the two. On the contrary, it is an ongoing negotiation and process that varies between the sexes and social groups rather than adhere to male generated or patriarchal rules. To put it differently, as Nelson (1974) claims, one must not lose sight of the fact that social action is always a 'situated action' and circumscribed by culturally created constructs of social reality: the social stock of knowledge. It means that the range and influence of different genders in society depend on social situations, knowledge, and circumstances. Women and men can approach and influence the public and private spheres from different public and private positions, which means that alternative views on public and private spheres are created and (re)constructed everyday based on a range of interactions between men and women.

Since the Prophet was a revolutionary who believed that all women and men in his community were pious and righteous believers and that "women had their place as unquestioned partners in a revolution that made the mosque an open place and household a temple of debate" (Mernissi, 2011: 11), it is difficult to imagine that either religion or the religious text should be blamed for the current social dichotomy in many Muslim

countries. Rather, as Mernissi (2011) argues, this can be attributed to changing circumstances, a loss of morality, the failure of the Prophet's followers and their pursuit of pride and power in opposition to the vision of the Prophet.

Women's visibility in public and political life has been a long-standing topic of debate. The impact of religion and society's religious understanding has influenced the position and significance of women in politics. Moreover, political systems and party ideologies are highly powerful and exert significant control in the case of women's political office holding. Therefore, in order to objectively understand women's place in society, considering the whole picture and trying to understand the context before blaming any particular actor or institution is the best approach to take.

Rereading religion from the perspective of universal human equality, social justice, and by focusing on the local and global meaning of "woman" and the self-realization of female identity helps to transform the concept of agency by creating a fresh analysis of power and knowledge. Therefore, it is important to remember that "not only fundamentalism but also modernity has helped for the exclusion of women. The privatization of the family, and the legitimation of patriarchal authority in the private sphere, feminists argue, which positioned the individual as prior to and partially outside of society, permitted the exclusion of women from society" (Moghissi, 1999: 78).

Patriarchal and male dominant views have existed since the formative period of Islam: men are in power and women are exposed to power. Women have to realize and reconstruct their identities and pursue social justice by resisting the limits of the relationship between knowledge and identity. This will lead to a transformation of knowledge, a change of mindset, and shift to a focus on human dignity (Souaiaia, 2009;

Stowasser, 1994). However, knowledge transformation is largely dependent on time, sociopolitical circumstances, and institutions.

Summary

In this chapter, I first offered a review of the literature on women's representation in national legislatures as an example of a major body of work that aims to explain women's status in politics. This, I argued, is illustrative of the deficiencies of the existing analyses of the role of women in politics, since many studies offer a mere quantitative analysis, often conflict with each other in their conclusions, and all-too-often focus primarily on Western democracies. This literature fails to incorporate the main theoretical framework that will be used in this dissertation: that is, the public and private spheres of life debate that was introduced by Habermas and advanced by many others.

This theoretical benchmark, I claimed in this chapter, is a means to further problematize the roles of religion, culture, and the state in sanctioning the role of women in all areas of life. I argued that it is important to understand the coexistence of Islamic public and private spheres in the context of the political and religious lives of Muslim women. Furthermore, I proposed that the issue of gender equality in these two spheres of life be approached from spiritual and social perspectives. Accordingly, and based on the literature, in this chapter I situated female politicians within the context of formal state structures and dominant religious belief(s) and I proposed applying this framework to assess the ways in which women politicians in Muslim societies interpret these contexts.

I posit that this framework can help explain how women, as members of an Islamic society and religion, define their roles in the public sphere, view the limits of the

public sphere, and define publicity and visibility in public by contrasting it with the private. I put forward the notion that the dichotomy between public and private is related to state regulations. In Islam, as I discussed here, state regulations (and therefore the public and private distinction) emerged after the establishment of the Islamic state under the leadership of Muhammad.

Gender roles serve to dictate where women belong and they place limitations on women's existence and participation in life; these are outcomes of the most prevalent – either implicit or explicit – understandings of what is public and what is private. Hence, I argued that understanding a 'religious' separation of public and private is crucial to offering an explanation of the status of Muslim women. In the meantime, I recognized that the definitions of public and private can change considerably according to time and space. Moreover, there is an ongoing negotiation and process that causes shifts to occur between the sexes and social groups rather than respond to uniquely male generated or patriarchal rules. Ultimately, segregation and seclusion in public and private spheres are realities that are constructed politically, socially, economically, and religiously. Finally, I emphasized that cultural understanding and context create different identities for women within society, and that intersecting identities are able to lead to both oppression and opportunity at the same time. In summary, in this chapter I propose that a greater understanding of the public and private aspects of life and the role of women within a cultural context will aid our understanding of women's empowerment in Islam.

CHAPTER 4

RELIGION, POLITICS, GENDER, AND LEADERSHIP:

VIEWS OF "ISLAMIST" WOMEN MEMBERS OF THE TURKISH PARLIAMENT

In this chapter, based on the interviews conducted, I present a detailed account of the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) women members of the parliament views on politics, Islam, gender, and leadership. One of the conclusions here is that while the women representatives of the JDP observe that politics is a challenging domain for women, they underscore the party's and Recep Tayyip Erdogan's role in integrating more women into its politics at all levels –local, provincial, and national. The support coming from the leadership and party is as important as a woman being strong, educated, influential, and powerful. Then, I also find that the JDP's women MPs distinguish between the role of religion and culture in patriarchal social norms that bound women to fewer opportunities in all walks of life. Indeed, as I discuss in the following pages, the interviewees call for gender equality in opportunities for men and women.

The intertwining of Islam and politics, traditional and patriarchal religious values have restrictive impacts on roles for women in the public sphere. In Turkish case, although Turkish modernization was comprehensive and radical and the state defined new roles to women in public, gender inequality persisted due to traditional, patriarchal, and religious values promoted and these restricted women's roles to private. In Deniz Kandiyoti's, one of the most prominent scholars of gender studies in Turkey, words, "the corporate control of female sexuality, linking female sexual purity to male honor, the

segregation of the sexes, and the nature of female life cycles, have been singled out as features that exert a decisive influence in shaping and reproducing a culturally specific experience of gender" (1987: 335).

Looking at Turkish women in politics from a religious perspective and trying to interpret their position according to Islam is difficult; hence, the interviews here are locating the women leaders of Justice and Development Party in historical, political, and socio-economic transformations, and help identify the role of religion, gender relations, and socio-economics in their careers. In other words, locating how Turkish female parliamentarians acknowledge religion and where they place religion in their public and private lives constitute the basis of the discussion in this chapter.

In this chapter, I first set up the research design and methodology of this dissertation. Here, I also introduce my hypotheses. This section clearly outlines the source of the findings in this study, which are interviews with the women members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. After these, I present a summative profile of the interviewees. Then, I discuss the findings in four major categories. First, I cover the MPs understanding of women's status in society. Then, I discuss how the women MPs view the role of religion in shaping women's lives and politics. Third, I summarize how the Justice and Development Party's women MPs perceive the public and private spheres of life as it pertains to gender inequalities. Fourth, I discuss the women MPs' experience in politics –patriarchal norms and practices, relationship with other women in politics. The chapter ends by summarizing a profile of the women politician interviewed. This profile suggests that, the female representatives in the Turkish parliament that I interviewed are

empowered, capable and religious women, who complete and effect religion intentionally and exercise their agency in public and private spheres.

Research Design and Methodology

In this dissertation, I inquire about the role of Islam in women's awareness of themselves, the decisions they make, and the lives they lead. I explore the question of how female leaders experience the influence of religion—specifically Islam in contemporary Turkish politics— has had on their understanding(s) of themselves, their private lives and their political philosophies and aspirations. Because the discussion of women's roles and capacities in private sphere has been affected by religion and women have brought their private lives into their public lives as women, wives, and mothers, it is important to examine religion's influence on women who are active participants in the public sphere. I seek to show the ways in which women have bargained with both the state and religious constructions in society in order to increase their social and political competence and power.

In seeking answers to the role of religion in women politicians' worldviews and careers, a series of semi-structured elite interviews with the female members of the Turkish parliament offer significant insights. Since women representatives have experienced being and living in both public and private spheres, this method becomes more "important if one needs to know what a set of people think, or how they interpret an event or series of events, or what they have done or are planning to do" (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002: 673).

Case: Turkey, Turkish Women Politicians, and Islam

This project seeks to uncover how Turkish women, in politics, chart their course/path, and construct their public identities in accordance with the triangular relationship between state, religion, and gender. Among the predominantly Muslim societies, Turkey offers a well-appointed context to study women's status in society, and specifically in politics. The reasons for Turkey's suitability have to do with (a) its historical context, and (b) its regime type. Furthermore, Turkey has a long history of women's rights in politics. More specifically, with such background, in present Turkey, a conservative political party, the Justice Development Party (JDP), that has been in power since November 2002 and the women Members of the Parliament from JDP offer a relevant case study.

In modern Turkey, women's participation in politics dates back to its early republican years. Turkish women assumed roles in its independence movement (for example, Halide Edip Adivar) and then in its politics after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. At its height, the Ottoman Empire's leadership role in Islam further signifies the importance of the Turkish example. Arguably, Ottoman politics as a background makes the modern Turkish case for women's status in a Muslim society an even more intriguing case. In terms of women's status in society and politics, Turkey's move from the Ottoman rule to secular regime may be an appropriate comparison to the transition from the *jahilliya* to Islam. It is in this context that one may find women at the center of political conflict in Turkey.

As Souaiaia claims, both liberal discourse and conservative religious discourse "are about control and value. The difference is that one is mandated and enforced in the

name of humanism, secularism and modernity; the other is maintained and enforced in the name of god, society and morality" (2008: 9). Therefore, one may argue that women's status in society could be a result of secular-religious debate, in which religion has a controlling role in society and politics, or vice versa. Since there is a conflictual relationship between the secular state and Islam, Turkish women have been at then center of this conflict. The locus of this work, therefore, is women politicians, parliamentarians with an "Islamist" political party affiliation because they happen to exist at the intersections of the secular state and the religion have expressed and practiced their ideologies "over the roles and status ascribed to women" (Arat, 2005: 8).

Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, at the heart of the empire, Turkey declared its independence in 1920 and founded a republican regime in 1923. Women in Turkey have enjoyed political rights and freedoms since the early republican era: most notably, right to vote (1930) and freedom to run for office (1934). While the country was under a single-party regime from 1923 till 1946, competitive multi-party elections have been held regularly since 1946 –the first change in power occurring in1950. The Turkish military interrupted civilian politics multiple times (1960, 1971, and 1980); most recently, in 1997, as the military was actively –but, indirectly, involved in removing the government from power. This is especially important for the purposes of this dissertation, for the 1997 'soft-coup' (as it was dubbed in Turkey) eventually led to the emergence of the Justice and Development Party in early 2000s. A reformist group within the Nationalist Outlook Movement (Necmettin Erbakan's National Salvation, Welfare, and Felicity parties) parted ways with the conservatives to form the Justice and

Development Party. With such a background, the JDP ascended to power quickly, has remained the single-party government in Turkey since November 2002.

In its third term in office, the JDP women parliamentarians relate well to studying women's role in politics. While Turkey has achieved considerable accomplishments in political rights and freedoms, there have many setbacks and continued problems in Turkey's political and social life. Gender relations in Turkey are possibly at a vague point between accomplishments and troubles: on the one hand, Turkish women enjoy significant rights and freedoms. On the other hand, gender based discrimination against women remains to be a major issue in Turkey[25]. For the purposes of this study, Turkish women in politics are yet to eliminate the glass ceiling. Whereas Turkey had a woman in its highest executive branch (Tansu Ciller) and others have served in leadership capacity in national politics (Nesrin Nas, leader of the Motherland Party –most commonly known for its acronym ANAP, between 2003 and 2004), women politicians continue to exist in a masculine political life. Cultural and religious notions that shape Turkish politics have been occasionally pointed as the major reasons for this situation. Accordingly, the AKP women are expected to offer significant insights into women's political presence in Turkey.

There are some limitations to the Turkish case, and studying the Justice and Development Party (JDP)'s women politicians. First of all, the example of Turkey may not apply to other Muslim societies. Nonetheless, one can also find how this study may help explain (relatively) similar contexts, such as Pakistan or Indonesia. Then, in its contemporary framework, this study is rather concerned with a specific case in the JDP

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[25] According to Gender Gap Index, Turkey is ranked 125th among 142 countries. (www.reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/)

and women politicians in this political party. While the JDP originates from and is well representative of conservative, if not "Islamist" political tradition in Turkey, the discussion herein is limited to a specific context in the Justice and Development Party. Furthermore, this dissertation is exclusively about national level politics. That focus comes at the expense of understanding regional, provincial and local level political activism, where women may have major role and influence over political processes. In studying many individuals from diverse backgrounds at the Turkish parliament, I expect that some JDP women will also illustrate how sub-national political experience (or, lack thereof) may speak to their political office, role at national level.

Elite Interviews

I aim to understand the role of Islam in Turkish women politicians' public and private decisions by using qualitative methods, primarily interviews. My aim is to find how women's decisions are influenced by religious and secular ideologies in public and private spheres. Another interesting connection between the ideology of secular Turkish state and Islam is that both have a strong connection with community and "a belief system that allegedly prioritizes a collection notion of identity" (Arat, 2005: 2).

I utilize both surveys and interviews in order to increase the representatives of the sample, and with the expectation that not all MPs may be responding. With the questions in the survey and interviews (Appendix A), I aim at discerning the women politicians' approach to religion and their understanding of its role in politics –and, specifically in their careers. In addition to these questions, I also collect the publicly available information on each MP's personal background: education, family, prior political

experience. My main focus in this project is on women politicians' political attitudes, values and beliefs.

When conducting elite interviews, one needs to be prepared to "construct sound questions, establish a rapport with respondents, know how to write up their stories, and code responses accurately and consistently" (Goldstein, 2002: 669). Nonetheless, elite interviews also require some flexibility. According to Aberbach and Rockman, "[e]lites especially-but other educated people as well-do not like being put in the straightjacket of close-ended questions" (2002: 674), because they always want to explain details of what and why they think. That is, open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews give flexibility and opportunity to the women to express comfortably what they think about these questions.

In the meantime, there might be a risk that "the valuable flexibility of open-ended questions exacerbates the validity and reliability issues that are part and parcel of this approach" (Berry, 2002: 679). Nevertheless, combining open-ended questions with structured questions allows researchers to decide if they need to ask additional questions during an interview in order to get more details about an issue.

Other issues raised against elite interviews highlight the time commitment they require, slowing the process of data analysis due to transcribing, coding process (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002: 674). Likewise, managing elite interviews is not easy in terms of preparing questions, scheduling interviews, making effective and productive interviews, analyzing and generalizing the facts accurately. There is always a chance not to hear anything from the interviewees. However, even when this is the case, "small N lite interviewers have an advantage. Unlike those doing survey research of the mass

public, researchers using elite interviews actually know quite a bit about those who remain uninterviewed" (Goldstein, 2002: 672).

Interviewing Turkey's Women Parliamentarians

In this study, I focus on conservative female politicians in Turkey and on their role in shaping Turkish politics and society. Women politicians have used political and religious structures to change patriarchal political attitudes for centuries. So, by self-understanding of female subject and agency, women representatives in Turkey can use the opportunity of engaging in legislative process and transform the political and societal perception of women's role and function in Islamic societies. In other words, finding how Turkish female parliamentarians acknowledge the religion and where they put it in their public and private lives helps to understand the basis of the debate.

The Turkish Parliament is the legislature in the Turkish political system, and is unicameral. Members are elected through a party list. The 24th Turkish parliament (elected June 2011, dissolved June 2015) included 550 members, of which 78 were women. Among the four political parties present in the assembly, the number of women representatives in each party showed some variation (see, Table 5.1). In its third term in office, the governing party, Justice and Development (JDP), had 45 women representatives. For the purposes of this research, I am specifically interested in the women members of the parliament (MPs) of the JDP given the political tradition that the party represents. Furthermore, since this research is especially designed to study the accession of women to leadership positions, the women that I chose have been cabinet members, presidents or vice presidents of commissions in the parliament, deputy

speakers of the parliament, vice chairs of their political parties. Accordingly, I requested interviews with all women MPs of the JDP who were in leadership positions in the party, or in the government, or in the parliament.

The contact information –including phone numbers, email addresses, and office locations, of all members of the Turkish Parliament is listed on the Parliament's website.[26] For this research, I contacted all individuals in the study's population, and expect their (or, their staff's) response for scheduling interviews. The initial contact with the Justice and Development MPs was in the form of a brief advance letter (Appendix B). This letter included a project description (including the survey) for the interviewees to explain the purpose of my study, a time period that I would like to conduct the interview, and the ground rules for the interview. In my letter, I described the way of the interview (tape-recording) and offer the MPs to meet at their convenience. After the initial contact, if the subjects did not return, I followed up with the MP’s office with a phone call. Once the subjects agreed to schedule a meeting, this was considered the subject's consent[27]. The interviews took place in the Turkish parliament; otherwise, if the subject preferred another location, I followed the subjects' choice of location.

I requested that the Justice and Development Party’s women MPs responded to a survey as well. Once the subject completed the survey, I interviewed with the subject if the subject agreed to. After the surveys are received, I went over the responses before each interview and interpreted the survey results for analyses before the interviews. From the survey to the interview, I expected these procedures took about a week to 10 days – depending on the MPs’ schedules, as well as the plenary at the parliament. By design, I

[26] Accessed at https://global.tbmm.gov.tr/index.php/EN/yd/
[27] Both the author as the principal investigator and the dissertation advisor, Dr. Ahmed Souaiaia, underwent IRB certification through the University of Iowa.

expect the subjects to spend about 10-15 minutes on the survey, and about 30 minutes for the interview. On average, the interviews lasted for 30 minutes –while few took longer. Because the parliament continued its session during the summer of 2014, at the time of the interviews, I had a relative ease of access to the Members of the Parliament. While the MPs expressed readiness to participate in interviews, there was reluctance to complete the surveys. Due to very few surveys returned, I am not able to report any results from the survey questions.

Nonetheless, the interviews (n=15) offered rich documentations of women MPs' reflections on their careers, religion, public and private spheres. For analyses in this dissertation, I translated the transcripts into English after a professional transcriber under oath, who already was performing the same service at the Turkish Parliament under oath, transcribed the interviews.

Since I asked for the MPs general views about socio-political issues and not about personal interests, I assume that the interviewees were forthright in their answers. I deliberately developed a series of questions and surveys that would allow me to elicit the data that I need to explain the relationship between being a woman politician in an Islamic society. The answers to the questions and surveys are examined against ethnographic observations to allow for a more comprehensive and controlled study. These questions account for a better understanding of women's views of the impact of religion in their public and private lives as women and national and community leaders. The questions addressed, among other issues, the following: Who does the constructing of women's identities? How do women identify their place in religion and politics? How do women define themselves (identity)? What is the role of women and men in public

and private life? Why did people vote for a woman? What roles are currently assigned to women, as political agents, by the apparatuses of state and by the most prominent spokesmen of Islam in Turkey? Who, or what entity, does have the most influence in the construction of women's political agencies; and, how is this power exercised? To what extent are women conscious of the constraints under which they form their political identities and alliances? How have they responded to these constraints and opportunities?

Analytical Framework

In its analyses of the elite interviews, this projects looks specifically at family, education, religious expression, socio-economic background. Research on women's political representation identified these and some other key variables to condition women's status in politics. In the context of this particular research, these independent variables are expected to influence the dependent variable, women's political careers significantly (see, Chapter 3). In light of the earlier discussion (Chapters 2 and 3), one can deem these variables to dictate a woman's chances for leadership roles in Muslim societies –or, from a counter perspective, one may also expect that education, for instance, may allow an individual to break social chains. In addition, the examples of Aisha, Khadijah, and Umm Salama may suggest that personality does matter; for a woman in a predominantly Muslim society to assume leadership roles in politics, strong personality traits are necessary. The same historic figures may also suggest that familial ties, or social status (socio-economic background) will matter for aspiring women leaders. For the purposes of this study, I expect that socio-economic background matters in women's political careers in Muslim societies.

The analyses in this project are qualitative. The discussion of the surveys and interviews primarily include reports of political careers of the subjects. A descriptive, interpretive content analysis of the subjects' verbal statements follows this discussion. This analysis is semi-structured in that it traces the subject's account of the role of religion in their political careers.

Hypotheses

In this research, I expect to find a highly conscious, women politician agency in the conservative Turkish political elite. In other words, I anticipate that a conservative, politically active women profile in Turkey will emerge as ‘a new female political elite group’ who are members of a conservative party, Justice and Development Party (JDP), with high consciousness and agency. I look at the female members of the JDP, which has strong religious orientation in its own cadres and political organization. The selection of women to leadership positions runs counter to the idea that ‘Islamists try to keep women in their religiously sanctioned traditional roles in order to keep the Islamic social order on track.’ In interviewing these women, I look into if the JDP women leaders are traditional or ‘symbolic pawns’ (Kandiyoti, 1989). The interviews and demographic profiles of the interviewees seek insights into the notions of private and public spheres of life.

Historical records of prominent women in early Islam (Chapter 2) suggest that their socio-economic status mattered in the influence they had in the Muslim community. Furthermore, Moghadam (1993), Kandiyoti (1989), Erturk (2004) found in relevant research that socio-economic background, family’s involvement in politics also conditioned aspiring women politician’s career. We cannot separate socio-economic and

religious changes from the woman question in Turkish politics. Although religion and religious morals and values play highly important and mostly negative role on women's public visibility, the question will have more meaning if we also look at changing economic realities, class organization in society, and different and rival ideologies within Turkish politics. Also, it is also a fact for other parties such as the Republican's People Party that a privileged socio-economic status, family background, education play big roles in empowerment of women (Turam, 2008). Accordingly, I expect that Turkish women political leaders will have elite backgrounds (*Hypothesis I*).

Historical background of Islam also informs the next hypothesis of the study. Accordingly, in consideration of the figures of Aisha, Khadijah, and Umm Salama, I expect that Turkish women political leaders with strong personality will assume leadership positions in politics (*Hypothesis II*).

Notwithstanding, parliamentary systems, in comparison to other types of regime, allow for rising from the bottom of the political organization. Similarly, in the Turkish case, one may expect that women politicians of local party branches background would be rewarded with a seat in the parliament. However, I expect that such a background itself is not a sufficient reason for women MPs to reach a leadership position in the party or in the parliament as party representative. As Turam (2008: 480) argues, "it should be noted that the Justice and Development Party (JDP), very much like the founding fathers (of the Turkish Republic), selectively incorporated women into the political realm who were highly educated yet neither feminist nor active in women's groups." Then, in the JDP's example, women representatives in the parliament, with or without experience in

the party's local branches, will ascend to national politics due to familiarity with the party's top cadres (*Hypothesis III*).

One of the most prevailing notions about women politicians in conservative political parties in predominantly Muslim societies is that women politicians would be 'window dressings' and accordingly they would be subject to the control of male leadership of the party. As Kandiyoti (1989: 145) argues: "at a time when the tensions between political authoritarianism and democratic pluralism are openly on the Turkish political agenda, it will be interesting to see whether women's movements and feminist currents are able to finally emerge as an added voice in the search of democratization, or whether women's concern will continue to be played out in a manner that reduces them to being symbolic pawns." Put it differently, the research will show how the question of women's place in Turkish politics is shaped by an ideological and/or religious terrain of Turkey. However, one may expect that this would be a baseless claim at the leadership level. Women leaders in the Justice and Development Party: (*Hypotheses IV*).

(*IVa*) will *not* identify as a woman MP.
(*IVb*) will attribute their careers to the party's male leadership.
(*IVc*) will ascend to national politics due to their credentials.
(*IVd*) will disagree that religion, culture, and patriarchy subordinate women.

Finally, the construction of private and public spheres of life and also women's understanding of their world and capacity to use them intentionally for conformity and resistance, as covered in Chapter 3, will be the basis of the last hypothesis in this study. Given the conservative and patriarchal nature of Turkish society in general and its politics in particular, I argue that women representatives of the Justice and Development

Party will admit that there are different public and private roles for women (*Hypothesis V*) while using their agency for empowerment and influence within structural and cultural limits.

A Summary of the Political Context

In describing the political context of Turkey at the time of the interviews, Table 4.1 displays the summary information about the distribution of seats in the Turkish Parliament by gender within in each party and in the parliament. The 24th Parliament was elected in June 2011; according to the results of the election, of 550 seats 78 were women MPs. The percentage of women in the parliament of June 2011 was 14 percent. At the time of the interviews, due to deaths or resignations, there were 535 seats filled in the parliament –of which, 77 were women.

It is noteworthy that among the 15 seats vacant by June 2014 were also some that were occupied by women. Most significantly, Fatma Sahin of Gaziantep was a member of the Justice and Development Party –and, a cabinet member, when she was elected as mayor of Gaziantep, her hometown and a major metropolitan hub in southeastern Turkey.

Table 1. The 25th Turkish Grand National Assembly (as of June 2014)

	Women	% in Party	Men	% in Party	Party Seats
Justice and Development* (*Adalet ve Kalkınma*)	45	14.42	267	85.58	312
Republican People's* (*Cumhuriyet Halk*)	17	13.60	108	86.40	125
Nationalist Action* (*Milliyetçi Hareket*)	3	5.77	49	94.23	52
People's Democratic* (*Halkların Demokratik*)	8	28.57	20	71.43	28
Independents (*Bağımsız*)	2	16.67	10	83.33	12
Anatolia (*Anadolu*)	1				1
Democratic Regions (*Demokratik Bölgeler*)	1				1
Others					
Total	**77**	**14.39**	**458**	**85.61**	**535**

Source: Turkish Grand National Assembly.

* denotes that the party had a group established in the parliament.

As Table 4.1 summarizes, among the four political parties with a caucus at the 24th Turkish parliament, the People's Democratic Party had the highest percentage of women in its party group with 28.5 percent. The Justice and Development Party had the most number of women MPs in its party group; however, as a percentage of all the party's MPs, women accounted for 14.4 percent. That figure also represents the parliament's average figure in the 24th plenary, which was a historic mark in women's representation in the Turkish parliament. Among other political parties, of 125 MPs of the Republican People's Party 17 were women –that is, 13.6 percent of the party's seats. A prominent political party in Turkish political history, the Nationalist Action Party

featured only three women but 49 men in its party group. The Anatolia Party was represented by its leader at the parliament, Emine Ulker Tarhan (Ankara), who was elected in the Republican People's list but then resigned and established the Anatolia Party. Similarly, the Democratic Region's Party's (a social democratic party with an appeal primarily to Kurds in Turkey) co-chair is Emine Ayna, who was elected as a member of the parliament from Mardin, a predominantly Kurdish city in southeastern Turkey.

A Summary Profile of Interviewees

Of the 25 women MPs of Justice and Development Party contacted, 14 were interviewed for this research. Table 4.2 displays the names and roles of interviewees in the parliament at the time of the interviews –or, few cases, their most recent role in politics and other relevant (non-political) leadership roles. This dissertation makes use of the data from the MPs (and, other woman politicians) interviewed.

The interviews took place in Ankara in June and July of 2014 at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, in few cases at the Justice and Development Party headquarters, and in one case at the ministerial office. In addition to the JDP's women parliamentarians listed below, I also interviewed the first female minister in the JDP cabinet, Guldal Aksit (Party Deputy Chairperson in charge of Women's Branches; MP Istanbul 2002-2011; former cabinet member, Minister of Tourism and Culture). Former minister Aksit was the founder of the Committee on the Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men; at the time of the interview, Aksit was the president of the Justice and Development Party's women's branches. As the table summarizes and the ensuing

discussion in this chapter will illustrate the interviewees represent women in prominent leadership positions in the JDP and/or in the Turkish Parliament.

While I had reached out to some opposition MPs in order to seek their insights, there were even fewer returns from the women MPs in the opposition parties. The only two women MP of the opposition I was able to interview with were Binnaz Toprak (Istanbul) and Sedef Kucuk (Istanbul) –both of the Republican People's Party. At the time of the interview, MP Toprak was Vice President of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men.[28] With the addition of Toprak (Istanbul) and Kucuk (Istanbul, 16 women MPs were interviewed.

[28] Binnaz Toprak earned her doctoral degree in Political Science at the City University of New York; MP Toprak is an established scholar in the fields of religion and politics, and gender studies.

Table 2. List of Justice and Development's MPs Interviewed and Leadership Roles in the Parliament and/ or the Party

Name	Role in the Parliament
Aksit, Guldal	Deputy Chairperson of the Justice and Development Party in charge of women's branches; Former member of the parliament, and former cabinet minister
Bakbak, Derya	Member of the Central Decision and Administrative Committee
Bayazit Kacar, Sevde	Member of the Petition Committee and Inter-Parliamentary Union
Calik, Oznur	Vice President of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men, Justice and Development Party Deputy Chairperson
Dalbudak, Nurcan	Active in women NGO's and chair for women's branches; the first woman entered in the parliament with a headscarf
Dalyan, Gulay	Mining and Leather Industry manager in private sector before being a representative
Eronat, Oya	
Hotar, Nukhet	Deputy Chairperson of the Justice and Development Party
Gonul, Azize Sibel	President of the Committee on Equal Opportunity for Women and Men
Islam, Aysenur	Minister of Family and Social Policy
Lok Beyaz, Mine	Member of the Board of Spokespersons
Memecan, Mesude Nursuna	Member of The European Union Harmonization Committee, Vice President of Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly
Sanli, Nurdan	Patent and Brand Manager in public and private sectors before being a representative
Satir, Mihrimah Belma	Deputy Chairperson of the Party Group

Before the substantive discussion, a presentation of the interviewees' personal and professional backgrounds (as they relate to the themes that this dissertation raised in previous chapters) is in order. Table 4.3 summarizes this background information. Of the 14 MPs interviewed, three (Dalbudak, Eronat, and Sanli) had no experience in politics, four (Bakbak, Bayazit, Lok Beyaz, and Satir) involved in the Justice and Development's local branches. In June 2014, some others were incumbent members of the parliament already (Calik, Hotar, Gonul, and Memecan). Three MPs (Bakbak, Hotar, and Aysenur Islam) came from an academic background. In other words, the MPs have had various levels of previous political activity either with the Justice and Development Party or other political parties. The women MPs interviewed here represented many different electoral districts in Turkey; hence, in terms geographic representation the discussion is illustrative of Turkey's various regions.

In terms of elite backgrounds, six (Aksit, Memecan, Bayazit, Lok Beyaz, Dalbudak, Islam) have had immediate family members in politics at the national level, and six (Aksit, Satir, Bayazit, Memecan, Dalyan, Islam) had well-known family members in Turkish society. Without any exceptions all the interviewees had at least a bachelor's degree –and, many others completed graduate or professional degrees –notwithstanding, the male MPs' or politicians' profile in Turkey. Then, among the interviewees only one – Nursuna Memecan of Sivas, had studied or lived abroad. As to their marital status, of all the interviewees all but one (Eronat) were married and all had at least one child. Finally, before assuming political office, many interviewees were also active members in professional (Bakbak, and Gonul) and non-governmental organizations (Bakbak, Bayazit, Calik, and Satir).

Table 3. Interviewees' Background Information

	Year, Place of Birth	Education	Profession	Parents' Profession	Marital Status	Electoral District	Political Experience	Notes
Aksit, Guldal	1960, Malatya	Law, Istanbul	Lawyer	Galip Demirel (father) MP,	Married	Istanbul	Founding member of JDP	Minister for Tourism (2002-2003) State Minister (200x)
Bakbak, Derya	1972, Gaziantep	Architecture, Gazi Civil Eng, PhD Gaziantep	Architect, Civil Engineer	Father, businessman Uncle, member of a local council	Married, two children	Gaziantep	Gaziantep Provincial Admin JDP	Active in multiple NGOs and professional organizations
Bayazit Kacar, Sevde	1974, KMaras	Public Relations, Anadolu	Producer, Media consultant	Erdem Bayazit (father), MP and author	Married, two children	KMaras	Member of municipal board Bahcelievler Istanbul (2004)	Active in multiple NGOs
Calik, Oznur	1965, Malatya	Pharmacy, Marmara	Pharmacist		Married, two children	Malatya	Canditate from True Path Party, first elected in 2007 from JDP	Active in multiple NGOs –including women's
Dalbudak, Nurcan	1979, Afyon	Textiles, Pamukkale		Husband, founder member of JDP, member of local district council	Married, two children	Denizli		
Dalyan, Gulay	1962, Istanbul	Math. Eng, Yildiz Tech.	Math. Eng., Business		Married, one child	Istanbul		Professional, and NGOs (esp. immigrants)
Eronat, Oya	1962, Diyarbakir	Civil Eng, Firat	Civil Engineer		Single	Diyarbakir		

Table 3 –continued

	Year, Place of Birth	Education	Profession	Parents' Profession	Marital Status	Electoral District	Political Experience	Notes
Hotar, Nukhet	1961, Malatya	Dokuz Eylul Calisma Econ, PhD Dokuz Eylul	Professor		Married, one child	Izmir	First elected in 2002	Elected again in 2015
Gonul, Azize Sibel	1966, Istanbul	Architecture, Istanbul Technical	Architect		Married, two children	Kocaeli	First elected in 2007	Active in professional organizations
Islam, Aysenur	1958, Istanbul	Turkish Lit, Ankara Turkish Lit, PhD, Gazi	Professor	Father-in-law, MP	Married, one child	Sakarya	Director at Ministry of culture and tourism (2007)	
Lok Beyaz, Mine	1973, Ankara	Architecture, Gazi	Architect	Grandfather, country commissioner Father-in-law, country commissioner	Married, one child	Diyarbakir	Municipal board Ankara Metropolitan	Member of the Board of Spokespersons
Memecan, Nursuna	1957, Istanbul	Industrial Eng, Bosporus Business Adm, Temple Intl Rels NYU	Engineer	Grandfather, businessman and MP; Great Uncle, MP	Married, two children	Sivas	First elected in 2007; Served in the Turkish delegation at the European Council	Media, children's books Turkish-American Work Forum
Satir, Mihrimah Belma	1961, Erzurum	Law, Istanbul	Lawyer		Married, one child	Istanbul	Founding member of JDP, member of the main decision making authority First elected in 2011	Served in some government and non-govt boards; involved in women's organizations
Sanli, Nurdan	1954, Ankara	Business Adm, Ankara	Business Executive		Married, one child	Ankara		

Views of the "Islamist" Women Members of the Turkish Parliament on Gender, Religion, and Politics[29]

The following sections present a detailed account of the interviews with the Justice and Development Party's women members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The discussion follows an outline from a broader understanding of women's status in society and women's identities to religion to the MPs' perception of politics and gender relations in political life to the MPs' views of the public and private spheres of life. An appropriate reading of each section's title may add the phrase 'and women' to the end.

Women in Society / Self-identification / Self-awareness

In one of the introductory questions, following the discussions on multiplicity of one's identities (also see, the reference to intersectionality debates, Chapter 3, fn.##), I asked the Justice and Development MPs how each defined themselves. Among others, the question offered woman, Muslim, mother, politician, Turk, democrat, pious as potential markers. As an open-ended question, the respondents were expected to tackle the question, or otherwise offer alternative identifiers. The working theory behind the questions about multiple identities was to see how they could make all these identities work in public and private lives.

[29] Since the majority of the women MPs did not submit their surveys but expressed interest in and willingness to meet for an interview, the surveys prepared for this research could not be incorporated into the discussion here.

According to Aksit (Party Deputy Chairperson in charge of Women's Branches; MP Istanbul 2002-2011; former cabinet member, Minister of Tourism and Culture), being a woman changes a person's attitude and perspective in a positive way, and makes her more gentle and patient towards political issues. The Diyarbakir MPs Eronat and Lok Beyaz argue that being a woman politician may have different sensitivities, interests in social issues. As members of the Parliament from the southeastern Kurdish majority city, Eronat mentions how with Lok Beyaz, they reached out to Kurdish mothers whose sons and daughters left home to join Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an internationally recognized terrorist organization. Eronat and Lok Beyaz attributed their interest in the Kurdish mothers and their challenges to their own woman identity.

Often, the woman identity is tied to motherhood quickly: for instance, after highlighting the importance of women's gender-awareness in politics, Gonul (Kocaeli, Committee President) says 'even though women do not involve in public affairs, politics, women raise generations. Women shape society by raising new generations.' This also quickly brings up biases associated with womanhood; for example, Hotar (Izmir, Party Deputy Chairperson) adds "a woman in politics is expected to compete with predominantly male politicians, without highlighting her gender identity and by owning the many restrictions of her gender identity." Hotar offers the example of meetings that run well into the early morning hours: "As a woman, it is not right that you stay out that late. Then, we do not wish to join these meetings either. When it is necessary, women attend such occasions too; however, for male politicians, this is less of an issue."

While many MPs refrained from prioritizing one identity over the other, a number of them highlighted 'being a mom' as a key feature of self-identity (for instance, Bayazit

of Kahramanmaras and Memecan of Sivas). Notably, Bayazit noted that she is “a mother everywhere.” Furthermore, some suggested how motherhood relates to politics: Dalbudak (Denizli) suggested that being a mother translates to a major sense of responsibility in politics. Dalyan (Istanbul) also shared this view: “I carry the responsibility of being a mother, a wife. In all my political activity, I feel the sense of responsibility of being a mom; thank God.” The follow-up question in no single interview suggested a clear definition of what this notion of responsibility was for any of the interviewees.

The woman and mother identities help MPs get closer with people –or, rather, citizens reach out to women MPs with the expectation that they will empathize, some interviewees mark. Bayazit (Kahramanmaras), for instance, elaborates on this at length:

> …our electorate, women and men, say that ‘as a woman, you will understand us.’ I would like to give an example. A person from Trabzon province [in northeastern Turkey] requested a meeting from my office, yet I insisted to direct them to his/her representatives from Trabzon in the parliament –s/he continued with the request to meet with me: ‘No, I would like to meet with you.’ Then, I approved the request, and an elderly couple showed up to the meeting: ‘We have a request from you. Our son needs an appointment; we would like you to address it.’ When I responded again that they should reach out to the Trabzon MPs, their response was: ‘Only you can solve this.’ To my inquiry, the couple replied: ‘You are from Kahramanmaras. The person who is in charge of the government branch for appointment decisions is from Kahramanmaras.’ I continued my resistance with the argument that I was a novice to the parliament and the

> six other MPs were more experienced, and I asked 'Why me?' The couple's response: 'You are a woman. You would know how a mother relates to her child, a father does. We have a single son, and would like her beside us.' I had no response, and eventually helped the family.

Others also note that motherhood may have implications for one's careers. For instance, Memecan (Sivas) thinks being a mother can limit women's professional life as it did to her –in the meantime, Memecan herself did not have major repercussions of her motherhood for her career. Nonetheless, Memecan reflects: "women with any number of child inescapably divides her attention. Always, part of that woman's mind is at home, is thinking about her child."

Religious identity surfaced for many MPs as well, and ranked higher as they attempted to rank multiple identities each would claim. For Aysenur Islam (Sakarya), who describes herself as an observant Muslim, "our religion finds politics necessary [in life]." In few interviews, for instance with Memecan (Sivas), neither religious identity nor religiosity become a topic of conversation –despite the semi-structured nature of the interview.

The respondents did not mention 'being a politician' in significant numbers. Arguably, this identity did not become dominant, or even noteworthy, among others mentioned in the question. For none, being a politician was the first personal identifier. One of the reasons for this finding may have to do with the understanding that "politics is not a profession" (Aysenur Islam). Only few, Eronat (Diyarbakir) and Dalbudak (Denizli), mentioned their politician identity as a prominent marker in addition to others.

Dalbudak briefly elaborated on her identity as a politician as a constraint for her role as a mother.

On multiple interviews, the Justice and Development's women MPs voiced their rejection to self-identify as a 'woman' in politics. Accordingly, for these respondents, gender did not (or, rather, should not) matter in politics. They do not observe the gender of their peers; for instance, Aksit mentioned her perception of male members of the cabinet as 'Minister of X' rather than 'a male minister.'

Similarly, while Lok Beyaz (Diyarbakir) mentioned how woman and mother identities may translate to her advantage in politics (see below, as Sanli too highlights), in the parliament. Lok Beyaz does not see herself as a woman; she is a member of the parliament, as are any others in the parliament. Lok Beyaz adds that 'women should not hide their identity as women. They have to be in public, in politics as women.'

Another noteworthy conversation on self-identification illustrates how the respondents offered alternative identity markers –and, also the significance of religion in MPs' lives. A few interviewees proposed that the first identity anyone has is being a human being. In these instances, it was remarkable that the MPs very vividly illustrated the notion of *insan* (human being) as it is mentioned in the Quran. In an ensuing discussion, this understanding will also surface as the main reason for underscoring gender equality.

More specifically, for Calik (Malatya), Hotar (Izmir), and Sanli (Ankara), the very first identity for both men and women is *insan*. Calik believes, everyone has to be *insan* first. Being *insan* is prior to gender, religion, color, etc. she says being a woman includes being a mother and wife. In the context that the notion of *insan* was mentioned,

it was noteworthy that two respondents (Hotar and Memecan) also highlighted self-confidence. For both Hotar and Memecan (Sivas), as much family upbringing, self-confidence is key to a woman's self-awareness. For Hotar, religion has a major role in reinforcing this perspective: 'God created and will judge human beings, according to Islam, as *insan*, not based on their gender.' Similarly, Dalbudak (Denizli), Gonul (Kocaeli), Lok Beyaz (Diyarbakir), and Sanli (Ankara), believe that men and women were created as equals as *insan* and there should not be gender discrimination in politics against women.

The interviewees recognized that they have multiple identities (and, the question, without prompting any particular response, possibly implied that as well). For instance, Satir (Istanbul) says she is a modern woman with other identities such as mother, wife. Likewise, Dalyan (Istanbul) defines herself as a woman, mother, wife, Muslim and politician. For Dalyan, these identities are merged into each other. In Aysenur Islam's (Sakarya) words: 'no identity should be prior.' That one has multiple identities leads Aysenur Islam (Sakarya) to argue for meritocracy.

In pursuing these multiple identities, one question explored what motherhood and marriage may imply for women's status in society. According to Calik (Malatya) and Satir (Istanbul), being married and a mother increase the value of woman in Turkish society. Likewise, Aksit (Party Deputy Chairperson in charge of Women's Branches; MP Istanbul 2002-2011; former cabinet member, Minister of Tourism and Culture) recognizes that in Turkey, married women with a family life are more respected. Among the interviewees, Hotar (Izmir) very clearly marks that she does not believe these notions

but the Turkish society does. Hotar argues that this is not coming from religion but is rooted in culture.

As women in Turkey assume more identities, and in this case become politicians, one observes that family relationships, especially husband-wife relations, have changed for these women because in any condition, husbands support their wives in all terms; raising kids, cooking, housekeeping, etc. which are usually thought as women's chores.

Equality of Women and Men

Gender equality comes across in the interviews in the context of (a) family background and how this is instilled in the MPs family life and upbringing since then, (b) religion –i.e. as elaborated above in the notion of *insan* in particular, (c) legal framework, where women are not discriminated against, and (d) cultural norms that do not provide women the same opportunities men have in all walks life. The interviewees recognize cultural, traditional restrictions on gender equality. In the meantime, they highlight the Justice and Development Party's policies as well as the role of Recep Tayyip Erdogan in seeking and supporting space for women.

Prevalent notions of gender equality and realities of gender discrimination in society are important for they translate to women's role in politics. Indeed, Aysenur Islam (Sakarya) observes: "in terms of gender relationships, what we have in society is what we have in the parliament." However, women's presence in politics may have the same effect in creating gender equality in society. For Gonul (Kocaeli), gender equality will happen when there are more women in politics. Gonul believes when there are more women at decision-making levels, this will help to have more women in every aspects of life. Therefore, Gonul says, we have to increase demand and consciousness.

Few interviewees mentioned the role of family background, upbringing in their conceptions of gender relations in society. That is, for some respondents, while they may have grown up in a conservative family, growing up they were offered the same or more opportunities than men in the family. Relatedly, as I elaborate in the examples of Eronat (Diyarbakir) and Lok Beyaz (Diyarbakir) later in the following pages, the MPs' mentioned their families pursuing the education of women in the family as a priority over men's.

In both Hotar's (Izmir) and Memecan's (Sivas) cases, family background is very evident. For Hotar, there should not be any gender differentiation in society. Then, in Memecan's words:

> I have never thought that as a woman I faced any limitations in life. So much so that I even questioned that there were 'women's issues' or 'commissions and committees for women' or women this and that; I was skeptical about the need to mark such distinctions. Perhaps these are due to my upbringing and my self-confidence… Whenever I am unsuccessful, I never resort to 'I could not because I am a woman' argument. If I could not, then it was since I did not put enough effort in it. To the contrary, for such reasons, and again likely due to my self-confidence, I often think about myself as superior to men.

As I discuss above, for many interviewees, religion informs notions of gender equality. The notion of *insan* (human being) highlights this very clearly. In addition, the religious understanding of human creation supports this notion of equality. Finally, the

MPs reveal that the idea of gender equality is conflated with physical equality at times and then most would quickly shift to emphasize gender equality before law.

In Calik's (Malatya) words, there is an important account of gender equality:

> When we take religion as the main reference to our existence, everyone must recognize that human beings are sent to Earth as caliphs of God before they were separated as men and women. To all Abrahamic religions, this must be known. Accordingly, what are equal rights and freedoms between men and women at birth are taken away from women – this is hurtful. This also means that from the moment of birth, women should fight for their God-given rights and freedoms. Rights are earned, not given.

Calik believes men and women are different in terms of *fitrat* (creation), but they have to have equal opportunities in all areas of life. Calik thinks that the difference coming from the creation gives different perspectives for men and women, which –again, according to Calik, helps solving problems.

According to Gonul (Kocaeli), while there are obstacles against the equality of men and women in society, in Islam, there is no difference between men and women; they were created equally. They have equal responsibilities. Also, it is not possible to change society in a day; it takes some time, education. Gonul looks men and women as *insan* (human beings), and they have to be all equal before law.

While some like Aksit (Party Deputy Chairperson in charge of Women's Branches; MP Istanbul 2002-2011; former cabinet member, Minister of Tourism and Culture) are quick to mention physical differences between men and women, most if not

all women MPs of the Justice and Development Party interviewed would rather start with the equality of men and women before law. Here, again, the idea of being an *insan* comes afore. To illustrate, similar to Gonul's (Kocaeli) remarks (above), Dalbudak (Denizli) starts by noting that she understands justice from conversations about gender equality; that is, justice to all human beings (*insan*) without gender difference. Aysenur Islam (Sakarya) believes in gender justice. Then, in Aksit's words, 'what is important is to get equal opportunity and equality in front of law.'

Many of the interviewees indeed emphasized the significance of equal opportunities for both men and women in society (among others, Aksit, Eronat, Hotar, Gonul, and Satir). In the meantime, the MPs mentioned cultural norms prevent both genders having equal opportunities professionally, in politics, or broadly speaking in life. According to Aysenur Islam (Sakarya):

> Religion did not, but traditions attribute the roles to women [in Turkish society]. Traditions are systems that include many problems therein and every generation has to reevaluate this system. In other words, when we say "Islam," we often mean the totality of time-long traditions that have many deficiencies. Indeed, within this flawed system of tradition, yes, there are norms that suggest women to stay away from politics, and administration, and social life.

The women representatives of the Justice and Development Party praised the party's policies in 'elevating' women in its cadres, and creating opportunities for women in the party at all levels. Like many others, Sanli (Ankara) mentions how the party and

Recep Tayyip Erdogan 'value women and women's roles in society.' In Hotar's (Izmir) words, "Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the party have made what was impossible [women's increased representation in politics] possible." Likewise, Aysenur Islam of Sakarya highlights the initiatives taken and legal amendments made by the JDP governments, however also recognizes that these need to translate to social life, cultural norms must change:

> men and women, all have to have equal opportunities. We, as a government, changed the law and customs will change eventually, so we will able to see more women in politics in near future. She says we cannot change customs and norms by changing law. Customs and norms do change by themselves in a long time.

Accordingly, the JDP's women leaders recognize that changes will take time. Hotar (Izmir) observes, "there are still traditional biases against women in the society." Gonul (Kocaeli) noted that time is needed for major change in cultural norms. Aksit, a former cabinet minister and the party's administrator for its women's branches, argues that "it is still in the society that leadership and woman cannot get together." For Aysenur Islam (Sakarya), "women's leadership process will take time because the action always and everywhere takes time."

A stark account of women's movement for rights and freedoms voiced in one interview: Gonul (Kocaeli) was the only MP that related the discussion about women in politics, and gender inequalities, to women's rights movement on a global scale. Rarely, others noted women's issues and gender inequalities elsewhere and interpreted the

discussion from a broader perspective. Gonul emphasized not only the fact that changes take time but also that there is no room for a pause in women's progress. For Gonul, women should continue to fight for equality:

> Moreover, we realize that all these gains could be easily lost. That is why we have to work constantly. In history of human, this area, men have occupied politics until 19th century. It is only a hundred years that women have involved and shared with men.

Most others rather attempt to define gender equality by distinguishing this from physical equality of men and women. Then, the interviewees emphasize 'equality of opportunities' for both men and women. This observation is noteworthy, for it is voiced in many conversations. For instance, Satir (Istanbul) says she does not believe in equality in creation, emotionally, biologically, physically, however Satir seeks equality of opportunity for men and women. Similarly, Hotar (Izmir) also thinks "men and women have superiorities against each other coming either from birth or life experiences." In emphasizing that men and women are not equal in Turkish society, Sanli (Ankara) notes "there are physical differences between men and women from birth but they have to have equal opportunities."

Other MPs who clearly accept gender inequalities may mark the significance of Gonul's (Kocaeli) remarks. Eronat of Diyarbakir says she does not believe equality of men and women. Instead, Eronat takes for granted that "men and women have different responsibilities and roles in public and private." Similar to Eronat (Diyarbakir), an Istanbul representative, Dalyan illustrates how these cultural norms are ingrained in the

minds of many in the Turkish society, including women representatives in the parliament: “a woman should respect to her husband, this is how I am raised.”

Religion

When asked about the role of religion in their lives, the Justice and Development women MPs rejected the notion that religion applies to certain areas of human life and is separable from some other parts. For instance, then Minister Aynenur Islam (Sakarya) says, “religion constructs my life.” For Aysenur Islam (Sakarya), this applies to professional life as well: “I would forego my job if it were to contradict my religion,” she says. Similar to Aysenur Islam (Sakarya), Dalbudak (Denizli), Hotar (Izmir), and Lok Beyaz (Diyarbakir), also marked how central religion is to their being.

Accordingly, for many women leaders of the JDP, religion is a “lifestyle” and cannot exist in one sphere of life and does not exist in other. The interviewees’ own words are telling:

Dalbudak (Denizli):

> …since the foundation of the [Turkish] republic, there has always been attempts to draw the boundaries of religion. In fact, there is no framework to fit religion in. (…) Because religion is a program, in other words it tells you how to live your life, what ethics to follow, how to practice your religion –it regulates these all, religion is a program. (…) Religion is everywhere. (…) One lives religion anywhere; the religion of Islam is to be lived everywhere.

Hotar (Malatya):

> Religion is the roof of my life. Under that roof, I may adjust in my individual, professional, and social lives. However, I strive to follow the rules of my religion as best as I can. In spite of all my personal deficiencies in fulfilling my religious duties, all that I cannot do, my words and deeds or lifestyle one way or another absolutely ties to my religious beliefs.

Aysenur Islam (Sakarya; Minister of Family and Social Policy):

> Religion is a lifestyle. (…) [Religion] is a constitution that regulates your whole life. (…) As a Muslim, religion is always present in your life. In others words, religion is not something that you can leave out at certain times. (…) Religion is influential [in your life] without your realization. For your faith determines your ethics. (…) What makes up Aysenur Islam is her faith.

Lok Beyaz (Diyarbakir):

> …believing is a lifestyle for one. There is nothing like religion is this way in politics, that way in public or private. It is all about believing…

One of the MPs, Dalbudak from the Denizli district, illustrated the place of religion powerfully while she elaborated on her decision to wear a headscarf. Dalbudak is the first woman in Turkish history to be present in the parliament's chamber as a voting member. Similar to Recep Tayyip Erdogan's views on secularism, Dalbudak argues that

states or governments can be secular but individuals cannot. Dalbudak does not believe the secularity of people; to reiterate, for Dalbudak too, "religion is everywhere." As I elaborate below in the discussion of public and private spheres of life, Dalbudak very forcefully puts that 'there is no such thing that I can follow my religion here but not there.'

Another MP mentioned the privacy of religion to an individual: Dalyan (Istanbul) says religion belongs to private. For Satir (Istanbul), religiosity, if not religion, must be private and not publicized. According to Satir, "*din* [religion] is a private matter." For Satir, 'the only way that religion can enter into political arena is by ethical values and norms, like loving and respecting others. However, other religious issues should remain personal and private.' In her quotation above, Aysenur Islam also makes the same point with respect to religion influencing politics through its ethical values.

The role of religion is also highlighted in Calik's (Malatya), Dalbudak's (Denizli), and Eronat's (Diyarbakir) references to Khadijah. It is clear that for the MPs Khadijah serves as a prominent example. While first mentioning Islam introducing changes to gender relations in Arabia, Calik says "Khadijah is the most important example" to illustrate how 'with Islam, women assume significant roles in trade, politics, and decision-making.' For Dalbudak, 'Islam cannot have a role in women's low self-confidence in Muslim societies, because Khadijah was a women involved in trade…' Similarly, Eronat raises Khadijah's role as a businesswoman; she argues, "in our religion [Islam], there are no restrictions in women's activities."

Satir (Istanbul) adds problems that women experience in politics, such as less number or special topics for women, is not about religion. If it was about religion, there

would be no women here in the parliament or you would not find any male and female representatives talking to each other side by side. This is all about cultural values.

The role of religion in the Welfare Party and the Felicity Party, and its influence in party's organization, is separated from that in the Justice and Development. For Aksit (Party Deputy Chairperson in charge of Women's Branches; MP Istanbul 2002-2011; former cabinet member, Minister of Tourism and Culture), "It would not be easy to make politics as a woman in Welfare [*Refah*] or Felicity [*Saadet*] because of their religious backgrounds (in terms of leadership, because Refah was the one started a strong woman braches in politics)." Dalyan shares the same view, she says when Dalyan was elected as the leader of the local party branch in her hometown, men could not easily accept a leadership of a woman. Dalyan observes that the majority of those were from a Welfare [*Refah*] Party background.

Only one MP, Aysenur Islam (Sakarya; Minister of Family and Social Policy), boasts about her political background going as far back as the *Refah* Party: "my political careers starts with the JDP's origins, that is the *Refah* Party. In that manner, I must frankly state that I have a nationalist stand…" By "nationalist," Aysenur Islam very likely means her ties to the national outlook movement.

Public and Private Spheres of Life

The conversations about the distinction between public and private spheres of life centered on a few themes: cultural hegemony that restricts women to home (private) and that curtails her freedoms in the workplace and in legal terms (public), and religion (as a

mixture of private and public). While the former only implicitly stated in such terms, the latter was very clearly described –especially in Dalbudak's example.

The most telling discussion of the public and private spheres in the context of religion took place in the Dalbudak (Denizli) interview, where Dalbudak –as one of the only three members of the parliament who wears a headscarf, talked about the headscarf as a rights and freedoms issue and tied it to the public and private spheres of life. Dalbudak criticized the Turkish state's decades long ban of the headscarf in public space (*kamusal alan*):

> …approximately 70 percent [of women] wear the headscarf [in Turkey]. Nonetheless, one lives in one country, Turkey, such as that; however, because you are a member of the parliament or because it is defined to be a public space [you are not allowed to wear your headscarf] –then, I do not know how those made this decision will defend themselves in front of Allah. When you enter a building, it is public space; when you are outside, it is normal life. Such ridicule… it is torture!

The interviewees associated family as private, and voiced how others in Turkish society than the MPs (including women) have difficulty in distinguishing and even imagining the public and private spheres of a woman MP. Guldal Aksit (Party Deputy Chairperson in charge of Women's Branches; MP Istanbul 2002-2011; former cabinet member, Minister of Tourism and Culture) told how other women were astonished to hear that as a woman member of the cabinet, she may be occupied with house chores. For Aksit, the home belonged to private sphere of life: Aksit rejected any interviews with

members of the press to take place at her home. While interviews with and photographs of politicians at their homes is a common visualization in Turkey, Aksit mentioned requests for, or inquires, to capture her in the kitchen.

A number of MPs identified family life, home as private (Aksit and Satir, among others). While most mentioned their tendencies or pleasures in doing house chores, none mentioned or identified their partner's similar roles at home. Also, notably, Diyarbakir MP Eronat implied distinct duties for men and women in the family.

It was evident in at least two conversations that interviewees' identity as a member of the Turkish parliament translated to loss of privacy. Bakbak (Gaziantep), accordingly, distinguished between her identity as a mother, a family member in her private sphere of life and her identity as an MP. This distinction was the most evident in Dalbudak's example.

MP Dalbudak from Denizli province decided to cover after constitutional amendments that allowed Turkish women to wear the headscarf in 'public spaces' [*kamusal alan*] and her second pilgrimage (*Haj*). As discussed earlier, Dalbudak refers to the Qur'an regarding the headscarf; for her, this is a rule in the Qur'an that she must comply with but had "sacrificed" for many years given Turkey's legal codes. Dalbudak very powerfully tells her decision to cover once she fulfills her pilgrimage duty. For Dalbudak, this decision was a personal, private one; in fact, Dalbudak shares that until she started to drive to the Parliament for the first time with her headscarf on, she had not noticed the *public* relevance to her *private* decision. In Dalbudak's own words, "private had become public" and that overwhelmed Dalbudak;

> …[talking about her pilgrimage] Upon return, neither your children, nor your spouse, nor your finances, nor your status, accomplishments matter anymore –for at least 20 days… It is such a spiritual phase, so intense… Nothing fares against its spirituality, and one says to herself ‘cover yourself now,’ it is another new world. Then, I wore my headscarf and started driving down from Cankaya towards the parliament down the protocol road [as it is colloquially called]; only then, I noticed that here I was on this earth and soon I was about to step into the parliament. This all was going to be a historic moment [for Turkey]. Frankly, this distressed me.

There is also a religious perspective that informs Dalbudak’s views on the issue of public and private spheres. According to Dalbudak, there is nothing like public and private in terms religion. In Islam, public and private lives are together and cannot be separated. This religious element also surfaced in that Eronat (Diyarbakir) says ‘in Islam, there is no limitation for women to be in public; Khadijah. Islam wants all people to be productive and work, this is an order.’

According to Memecan (Sivas), the Justice and Development Party has made a dramatic change in women’s lives in Turkey. Memecan says as a result of the party’s policies, there has been a change in definitions of the public and private spheres, and gender roles. The party showed women there is another life and purpose outside of their homes. They have started working in public, with other people. This is a big change. It would take years but now women are working outside of their homes for a purpose. Also, their families and husbands support them in all terms. Memecan (Sivas) shares one of her

experiences with members of the JDP's local woman's branch in while campaigning in her district:

> A few months ago, while we are travelling to various county branches, Sivas [the province] women's branch chairperson [of JDP] and two other members of the branches are with me. They are women with a traditional family. We are on the road; we stayed at one county seat town, and another… The woman is on a professional travel… We were planning to return back home, yet then plans changed. No one will make it back to dinner, and I will miss my flight. I called Salih [Memecan's husband]: 'Salih, I cannot come back tonight, so you know… Then, the chairperson called home: 'I will not make it back, take the kids out to eat.' The other two women called their husbands: 'Ms. Memecan is here, I cannot come back. There is food in the fridge…' This is where we are today.

Memecan suggests that such conversations were very unlikely to happen in the province of Sivas. Another anecdote with her electorate is also indicative of these new dynamics, and Turkish women's steps outside from the private to the public:

> A group of women from Koyunhisar visited my office a few months ago. They talked about all they did for the party's local branch, for the party's success, and all they learned… Then, they said that they want to start selling their home-made produce and asked for connections, advise… One of the women says: 'Ms. Memecan, we have learned, we will no longer fit in our homes!

Aksit (Party Deputy Chairperson in charge of Women's Branches; MP Istanbul 2002-2011; former cabinet member, Minister of Tourism and Culture) too says 'the Turkish society is changing. More women are in public, and they work outside of home. The Justice and Development Party makes this happening.' Sanli (Ankara) agrees 'women can enter and be visible in public and private.' Sanli suggests women's advantage in these strict notions of public and private: 'Women can enter houses. Women can work everywhere. This feature makes women to able to use public and private roles in order to be involved in many places with many people. This traditional and private role, in other words, makes women to get more involved with other people.'

Many of the MPs also voice the education of women as a breakthrough, an opportunity to crash the prevailing notions of public and private spheres for women's presence in Turkish politics and society. Oya Eronat (Diyarbakir) puts this in the context of her father's approach to her education; Eronat's father prioritized her education over her brother's, for he believed that 'education would be Oya's safety [*altin bilezik*] in life.' Lok Beyaz, also of Diyarbakir, mentions the same reasoning on her family's part. On the other hand, these also highlight that, as the MPs occasionally raise in the interviews, the underlying idea here is that women have to have more qualities than men to have a voice in society. With such reasoning, Dalbudak (Denizli) very clearly vouches for women's presence in all walks of life and argues for the removal any and all obstacles in women's way. Dalbudak suggests that for these all education is a sine qua non: "[If the government must,] we must force women to go to school. Education must be in [women's] lives."

For Dalbudak, and others too, education then becomes a key to women's escape from the confines of the private to the public –and, under as equal circumstances as possible. Dalbudak argues for women to be aggressive: "Women have to be demanding." In Dalbudak's words:

> We aim to create strong women, ruling women. If we succeed that, we can create strong family relations and society. However, we never think that women and men have always to be equal. We believe that they were created different and this role distribution in society has to be just. We never think that women have to be at home and raise kids. On the contrary, we imagine a resilient woman for a better future.

Politics

The interviewees' experience in politics ranged from no previous exposure (Satir) to taking part in every level starting with local party branches (Bayazit and Dalyan). Others owed at least part of their political careers to family background (Aksit and Bayazit). Few of the interviewees rather identified as academics and attributed their involvement in politics to their expertise (Aysenur Islam and Hotar). Then, a number of MPs gained experience in non-governmental or professional organizations, which they emphasized as major inspirations (Satir). It was also noteworthy that some interviewees mentioned role models in politics, that is, women's presence in national politics (Calik). Other notable remarks include the argument that 'politics is not a profession' (Aysenur Islam and Memecan) and that 'when women commit to a political event, they do not leave in the middle of it' (Dalbudak).

Significance of family in political career

Among the interviewees, Guldal Aksit and Sevde Bayazit come from prominent families –respectively, a politician father (Galip Demirel), and a prominent poet who inspired especially conservative political leaders (Ekrem Bayazit). Both reflect very openly on their family backgrounds, however Aksit (Party Deputy Chairperson in charge of Women's Branches; MP Istanbul 2002-2011; former cabinet member, Minister of Tourism and Culture) and Bayazit (Kahramanmaras) also differ in capturing this impact. To Aksit and Bayazit, one would Nursuna Memecan (Sivas) as well. For one of Memecan's grandparents and one of her great uncles were members of the parliament.

For Aksit, she exists in politics as herself not as 'someone's daughter' or 'this person's partner.' Aksit, nonetheless, recognizes the benefits of growing up in a family that was very much part of various different official settings (ceremonies, acquaintances, etc.): "I grew up in the state."

Bayazit's (Kahramanmaras) induction to politics relates to her father's prominence and illustrates the role of the father figure in the traditional Turkish family life –both in conformity and also with some contradictions. As discussed below, in that her father initially halted Bayazit's interest in politics is illustrative of the control over adult women's lives. Ekrem Bayazit's eventual approval for Sevde Bayazit comes only due to his acquaintance with Recep Tayyip Erdogan. However, Sevde Bayazit prefers to begin her political career at local party branch rather than starting as an appointee at higher echelons of the then in its initial phases Justice and Development Party. In her interview, Sevde Bayazit reflects on this phase and says, "what is important in one's political career is not how it started but rather how it is moved on."

While other interviewees than Aksit, Bayazit, and Memecan do not have family figures (fathers, mothers, or other extended family) prominently active in politics and would account for elite background in politics, majority arguably had well-off family backgrounds in that fathers were governors or businessmen. For instance, in an apparent rejection of such background, Satir (Istanbul) does not recognize that her family background still would place her as an elite in the Turkish society. Satir describes her family as a traditionally, but not religiously, conservative. Satir's father was a lawyer, who graduated from the prominent Ankara University's School of Law, and supporter of the Republican People's Party. Satir also reflects on elitism in Turkish politics, and the Justice and Development Party as a counterexample to that:

> In politics in Turkey, people have accessed offices for they were someone else's child, someone else's partner or who were popularly known… Many names in the past, all have had connections. Father's daughter, someone's bride, or from this community… This is the same for men –yet, I am emphasizing here the woman experience in politics. However, with us, with AK Party [JDP], people with so such background have joined politics, and I am one of those.

Patriarchy /gender bias in politics

The prominence of father figures and also seeking the blessing of spouses may (rightfully or not) raise the issue of patriarchy in women's political career in Turkey. Indeed, patriarchy surfaced in multiple ways in the interviews. Indeed, MPs interviewed think that being in politics as a woman is really difficult, because of patriarchal values: In

Dalyan's (Istanbul) words, "the society thinks women should be at home." Dalyan and few others mark that such views were more evident in the Justice and Development Party's origins in the Welfare Party and its founder Necmettin Erbakan's tradition (though no one mentioned Erbakan by name).

Her father's response to Bayazit's (Kahramanmaras) political ambitions is indicative of both men's dominance in women's political aspirations and the prevalent gender bias in politics. When Bayazit initially entertained the idea of pursuing a political career, her father did not want her to be in politics since he thought politics is for men. Erdem Bayazit's (father; a prominent poet, writer) response only changed when his personal acquaintance Recep Tayyip Erdogan begun organizing what eventually will become Justice and Development Party. For father Bayazit knew Erdogan personally, he believed that Erdogan is the one who believes women's roles in politics; and, only then did he give his blessing to her daughter Sevde Bayazit for politics. A counter example where a woman MP was rather encouraged by her father is Dalyan (Istanbul), whose family migrated from Albania, says her father encouraged her to be a politician.

As the only woman MP representing the province of Kahramanmaras, Bayazit regrettably accounts for how her electorate treats MP Bayazit and her experiences on the campaign ground in Kahramanmaras with her peers (other male candidates in the party list). First, Bayazit recalls that on many occasions she finds herself with the request to get her voters in contact with the other representatives of Kahramanmaras (i.e. male MPs). For Bayazit, simply put, this is 'being treated as a secretary.' Then, telling a particular experience in Kahramanmaras on the campaign trail, Bayazit was asked by the event announcer (a male) to 'keep [her speech] short.' Bayazit accounts for the experience:

> I am the fifth candidate in the [Justice and Development Party's] list for Kahramanmaras. When it is my turn to speak to an audience after others… I know Maras is a conservative place, the people [of Kahramanmaras] do not like hearing advice from a woman, or her to speak long. Hence, I talk for a short time –as best as I can. When I was a candidate for the first time around, I would not speak even for three minutes. Regardless, I would hear as I am handed the microphone: 'Please keep it short.' Well, everyone is speaking for 15-20 minutes, an hour. Nonetheless, I would still hear this warning. This does not come from my peers [other candidates, all males, in the list], but from the announcer.

While all interviewees mentioned the Justice and Development Party's innovations on women's politics (especially among conservatives), among the interviewees only one (Guldal Aksit, Party Deputy Chairperson in charge of Women's Branches; MP Istanbul 2002-2011; former cabinet member, Minister of Tourism and Culture) recognized and criticized gender bias in the Justice and Development Party:

> I am not attending meetings with the prime minister [Erdogan] or the party's Central Decision and Administrative Committee, Central Executive Committee meetings as a woman [but as one of the many other participants]. You may ask "Is everyone the same in the party [with respect their views on women]?" No! There is a mass that thinks 'women distribute brochures, and move out of the way then after.' Unfortunately, that is our most significant handicap.

An MP from Diyarbakir, Lok Beyaz emphasizes the size and depth of the women's branches of Justice and Development; many others (Aksit, Hotar, Lok Beyaz, and Sanli) highlight the role of Recep Tayyip Erdogan in supporting women's representation in the Justice and Development Party since its foundation. As discussed earlier, Memecan's (Sivas) experience with her women electorate, where one of them told "we will no longer fit in homes," also illustrated how much the women of Sivas benefited from the local party branch and looked for further gains in life.

Patriarchy and gender bias in Turkish politics surface in multiple different examples. For instance, according to Bayazit of Kahramanmaras, 'usually men think that they are the authority to decide who talks about what, specifically in the parliament. Since they have been using the political arena by themselves, it is not easy to give up or limit 'luxury' of being the only.' Bayazit argues that when there is a woman in the party's list for a district, men think that they do this as a favor; they give up 'voluntarily.'

The argument for meritocracy in politics (see earlier discussion) takes an interesting turn when the interviewees evaluate the patriarchal constraints in Turkish politics. Lok Beyaz (Diyarbakir) claims that merit and capability determine the roles in the party. She asserts that women have to work harder to show their skills and fit for politics. According to Lok Beyaz, women have to work harder than men through the political grinding process. In a notice-worthy way, Calik (Malatya) believes that women can survive in politics after going through two years in politics. Hotar (Izmir) expands patriarchal politics beyond Turkey:

> In politics, as well as any profession, and not in Turkey only, everywhere in the world, from the most developed to developing countries, in any place and for any profession in order to be successful, if men work one, women have to work five times.

The other side of the argument that 'women need to work harder so as to have a chance' is that women's failures in professional life would be more prone to criticism if not irreversible. The Justice and Development MPs voice this; Sanli (Ankara) notes that women's mistakes become "more visible." Aksit (Party Deputy Chairperson in charge of Women's Branches; MP Istanbul 2002-2011; former cabinet member, Minister of Tourism and Culture) puts more bluntly: "if a female politician makes mistakes, it could be end her career easily but it is not true, not always, for men because they have been in politics for some time."

As various examples from the interviews illustrate, the Justice Development Party's women MPs overwhelmingly recognize cultural, customary, and traditional restrictions, biases they face in politics (among others Aksit, Gonul, and Satir). Few, most notably Memecan (Sivas), suggest the counter argument that there are no such restrictions; Memecan claims that there are no restrictions on women due to culture, customs, or patriarchal norms. Nevertheless, Memecan attributes to her family origins and her upbringing.

The MPs admit the predominance of patriarchal norms in Turkish politics specifically and society in general. More specifically, Satir (Istanbul) argues that 'politics is a men's game, and women are new to this game.' In agreement, Bayazit

(Kahramanmaras) claims that women face backlash when they enter this game. Furthermore, Satir highlights that ‘in politics, selection [to party lists, offices, candidacy] is dominated by men.’ Relatedly, Bayazit argues that because women are new to politics, women must fight harder.

The Justice and Development’s (JDP) women MPs also mentioned the importance of opportunities for women. Aksit and Dalbudak argued for Turkish women having a right to choose. Many MPs (Hotar and Lok Beyaz) recognize males’ support for women in politics. As mentioned elsewhere, in this context, the JDP’s women give the party much credit in creating more opportunities for women. Aysenur Islam (Sakarya) says:

> To our party’s policy, the women are at the front lines. (…) Many women who were willing to involve in politics were banned from politics, before the AK Party [JDP]. (…) The state banned those women. We are talking about a mass of women who were prohibited from politics. For women acted in accordance with their faith [referring to headscarves], they were not allowed in politics. In other words, not all women were actively present in Turkish politics until recently. This is just a new phenomenon; it is but a year old. And, the number of women in Turkish politics will exponentially grow, that what I make of this.

Dalbudak (Denizli) and Lok Beyaz (Diyarbakir) believe that there should not be gender difference in general and especially in politics. They see politics as teamwork. ‘Since men and women are complementary and have different perspectives, they can manage what they want working together,’ they say.

Support for and Competition with Women in Politics

Where men are dominant, one may expect a confluence of interests among the few women in politics. For the purposes of this research, an expected alignment of interest is among conservative women politicians specifically. To the contrary, there appears no such convergence among the Justice and Development Party's women MPs.

Both at the local and national levels, there are accounts of competition among women in politics. For instance, Bayazit (Kahramanmaras) mentions her ill treatment at the local branches (but support from higher cadres). At the national level, when she was a member of cabinet, Aksit says for other women MPs she was 'perceived as *the* competition.' According to Satir (Istanbul), women's competition with other women in politics is 'amateurish.'

Contrary to these accounts of contests among women, few MPs offered how women politicians support each other. Bayazit said 'at the national level, every woman knows how hard it is to get here and we support each other.' Satir (Istanbul), a party whip at the time of the interview, told that when she attends any invited events, she always seeks other women in the party to join her attend. For Satir, such presence may help women to take part in events that otherwise may be an exclusively male event. Satir hopes that her peers may have opportunities to develop their political networks.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented a detailed summary of interviews conducted with the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) women Members of the Parliament. In order, I discussed the MPs' understanding of women's status in society, how the women MPs view the role of religion in shaping women's lives and politics, how the JDP's women

MPs perceived the public and private spheres of life as it pertains to gender inequalities, and finally the women MPs' experience in politics –patriarchal norms and practices, relationship with other women in politics.

One of the conclusions here is that while the women representatives of the JDP observe that politics is a challenging domain for women, they underscore the party's and Recep Tayyip Erdogan's role in integrating more women into its politics at all levels – local, provincial, and national. Then, I also found that the JDP's women MPs distinguish between the role of religion and culture in patriarchal social norms that bound women to fewer opportunities in all walks of life. Indeed, the interviewees called for gender equality in opportunities for men and women.

In summary, I found the female representatives in the Turkish parliament that I interviewed are empowered, capable and religious women, who complete and effect religion intentionally and exercise their agency in public and private spheres. Otherwise, the interviews suggest the following conclusions, among others:

(a) The JDP women MPs come from various different backgrounds: some had no experience in politics, some were involved in local branches, some were incumbents in the parliament, and some were academics. A number of the MPs were active in non-governmental (or, professional) organizations before their political careers.

(b) About a half of the interviewees had immediate family members either involved in national level politics or were well known in Turkish society.

(c) Without any exceptions all the interviewees had at least a bachelor's degree –and, many others completed graduate or professional degrees.

(d) Of all the interviewees, all but one was married, and all had at least one child.

(e) The JDP women MPs have traditional and modern identities; they mix up these effectively and efficiently. Most of the women MPs interviewed do not accept a cliché of definition of being woman in society.

(f) While many MPs rejected the idea of prioritizing one identity over the other, a number of them highlighted ‘being a mom’ as a key feature of self-identity. Often, the woman identity is tied to motherhood quickly.

(g) Religious identity surfaced for many MPs, and ranked higher as they attempted to rank multiple identities each would claim.

(h) For none, being a politician was the first personal identifier. One of the reasons for this finding may have to do with the understanding that “politics is not a profession.”

(i) Gender equality comes across in the interviews in the context of (a) family background and how this is instilled in the MPs family life and upbringing since then, (b) religion –i.e. in the notion of *insan* in particular, (c) legal framework, and (d) cultural norms that do not provide women the same opportunities men have in all walks life.

(j) The interviewees recognize cultural, traditional restrictions on gender equality.

(k) In the meantime, the MPs highlight the Justice and Development Party’s policies as well as the role of Recep Tayyip Erdogan in seeking and supporting space for women.

(l) The Justice and Development’s women MPs note that men and women are different in terms of *fitrat* (creation), but they have to have equal opportunities in all areas of life. In the meantime, the MPs mentioned cultural norms prevent both genders having equal opportunities professionally, in politics, or broadly speaking in life.

(m) The Justice and Development women MPs rejected the notion that religion applies to certain areas of human life and is separable from some other parts. Accordingly, for many women leaders of the JDP, religion is a “lifestyle” and cannot exist in one sphere of life and does not exist in other.

(n) The conversations about the distinction between public and private spheres of life centered on a few themes: cultural hegemony that restricts women to home (private) and that curtails her freedoms in the workplace and in legal terms (public), and religion (as a mixture of private and public).

(o) As a result of the Justice and Development Party's policies, so the women MPs of the party argued –and, offered some concrete examples, there has been a major change in definitions of the public and private spheres, and gender roles.

(p) Many of the MPs also voice the education of women as a breakthrough, an opportunity to crash the prevailing notions of public and private spheres for women's presence in Turkish politics and society.

(q) The MPs interviewed think that being in politics as a woman is really difficult, because of patriarchal values: "the society thinks women should be at home."

(r) Women have to work harder than men through the political grinding process. Women's failures in professional life are more prone to criticism, if not irreversible.

(s) As the Justice and Development Party's women MPs suggest, both at the local and national levels, there are accounts of competition among women in politics.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION:

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY TURKISH POLITICS

In this chapter, I relate my findings in the interviews to this historical context and the associated literature in Turkish politics and gender studies. In this discussion, I situate Turkish women in politics from a broader spectrum than the previous chapter. In doing so, in this chapter, I tie the findings based on the interviews in the previous chapter to the hypotheses (see, Chapter 4), and offer conclusions on this dissertation's findings.

This chapter is divided into two main sections; first, I elaborate on women in politics in contemporary Turkey. In this section, I relate my findings to the existing literature and claim that Turkish women politicians realize women's status in society and have used social, religious, and political constraints into their advantages. Then, I take on the broader issue of women's political leadership in Islam. Based on the Turkish case, in this part of the chapter, I develop a profile of Muslim women in political power. According to my argument, a woman political leader in predominantly Muslim societies has a higher chance of accessing political power when she has socially and financially powerful family background, a good education, work experience, financial independence and effective network in politics.

Understanding Women in Contemporary Turkish Politics

As it is the case in other stories of modernism, “it is the construction of women as public citizens and women’s rights that are the backbone of Turkish modernity. In other words, women’s bodily, social and political visibility defines the modernist public sphere in the Kemalist project” (Gole, 1997: 65-66). How do women representatives in Turkey understand to be visible? By different visibilities, do we have different understanding of the public sphere? As a result of the social, political and cultural transformations in the 1980’s, new public roles have been defined for women. By changing the image and understanding of women and transformation of knowledge of the public and private spheres, women have started to identify their visibility socially and politically.

To determine the role of religion on women’s role in the Turkish parliament, this study explored what women believe about themselves and the society, and also how the relationship between men and women has been constructed socially and religiously. It is the premise of this study that Turkish women politicians are a good sample group to show the different background of Turkish women in general and to decode the influence of religion on their mindset and identities. According to the interviews, the fact that many women MPs (Dalbudak (Denizli), Hotar (Izmir), Aysenur Islam (Sakarya), and Lok Beyaz (Diyabakir)) very clearly articulated that religion cannot be divided between public and private spheres confirm Habermas’s argument that “many religious citizens would not be able to undertake such an artificial division within their own minds without jeopardizing their existence as pious persons” (2006: 8). This, as Habermas foresees, highlights the integral role of religion in the life of a religious person.

According to Arat (1989), women politicians in Turkey have been working outside the established power structure to gain power from within so as to change asymmetrical gender and power relations in different levels of society; in the present context, this may be revised that women made incursions to politics and are now working from inside the established power structure. Nonetheless, higher women representation in the parliament does not automatically translate to increased influence in politics. To the contrary, even the women MPs in leadership positions observe the challenges of becoming part of what is observed by many as 'a men's game.' Bayazit (Kahramanmaras) says, "in Turkey, politics is for men. When you enter and intervene men's space, men react and show you where you should stay in politics. In other words, they try to determine women's roles in politics because you, as a woman, happen to intrude men's area." As Satir (Istanbul) says in her interview, "being in politics, as a woman is difficult, it is not that you are unable to do the job but it is men's arena and you have an access in it. Also, it is not about gender only, it is also about being experienced and maturity because you can only learn politics by living it. There is a different between women and men in doing politics. Genetically, men are more rational and direct, whereas women talk implicitly or they insinuate." By being 'different' and demanding, as Dalbudak (Denizli) adds, women can create her own place in politics. For Hotar (Izmir), "party leaders and party cadres control and decide who is in and who is out in politics for both men and women. AK Party's [JDP] ideology for women is different but it cannot be claimed for other areas."

Indeed, one can argue, following such examples that the Justice and Development Party's women politicians have been trying to create a new understanding of public

sphere within ‘men’s world’ in order to initiate ‘change.’ In this process, most interviewees marked that it is necessary for men to support women’s presence in politics, as expected in *Hypothesis IVb* that Turkish women will attribute their careers to the party’s male leadership. More specifically, the Justice and Development Party women have the realization that men’s support, especially Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s support, were crucial on their decisions about politics. According to Hotar (Izmir), Bayazit (Kahramanmaras), Dalbudak (Denizli), Lok Beyaz (Diyarbakir), Aksit (Istanbul), the reason women’s roles in public space and politics in Turkey changed in a positive way and dramatically is Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his leadership[30]. According to their view, Erdogan’s trust and support for women’s potential to change the country makes women believe themselves.

Expanding women’s rights and visibility was one of the priorities of Turkish modernization. However, that priority itself and processes towards that objective, men decided the expansion of women’s equality with men and increase in women’s political participation. More generally, as an agent, a woman has power and influence in public and political spheres. However, the distinction between power and culturally and institutionally legitimated authority and legitimization of the use of power by authority (Rosaldo, 1974) defines places of male and female. The idea behind this is that the first generation of Turkish Republican women “believed that they owed their existence to the Kemalist reforms and Kemalism” (Arat, 2005: 18). As it happened in the beginning of the Turkish Republic, women still need men’s support to enter politics. In the Turkish case, “Islam and Kemalist ideology have not only introduced and legitimized, but, at the same

[30] Although this characteristic of Turkish society may seem to weaken women’s agency, it still shows us exhibition of women’s agency, intentional actions of conformity or resistance, which makes women central to the story (Burke, 2012; Salem, 2013).

time, promoted and perpetuated patriarchal ways of life" (Arat, 1989: 21). In other words, the republic and Ataturk liberated Turkish women by making her responsible to the 'new Turkey.' Some of the women that I interviewed had very similar idea for their parties and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, then the prime minister.

Either the MPs' or their immediate families' acquaintance with Erdogan specifically appear to have made difference for the political careers of the many of the women MPs of the Justice and Development Party interviewed here (*Hypothesis III*). For instance, Ekrem Bayazit's consent that his daughter Sevde Bayazit (Kahramanmaras) could involve in politics was very much tied to his familiarity with Erdogan. Other MPs mentioned personal contact with Erdogan or other (male) members of the Justice and Development Party cadres earlier in their political careers.

In contemporary Turkey, however, according to the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) female representatives, patriarchal ways of life are not the results of Islam but traditional society and its' norms and values. In other words, the JDP's women representatives differentiated religion, culture, and patriarchy as they elaborated on how each constraint women in politics. Then, *Hypothesis IVd* that JDP's women leaders will disagree that religion, culture, and patriarchy subordinate women suggest the following conclusions: the JDP MPs (1) reject religion's constraints, but rather (2) recognize culture's role in subordinating women. Finally, the JDP MPs (3) find patriarchal norms in politics that limit women's roles.

The interviewees do not reject the traditional roles of women; however, they also give a new shape to the public sphere. The Justice and Development women MPs recognize the public and private roles for women (*Hypothesis V*). They also admitted that

variations of structures in the private sphere are related to variations in the types of female power. This has great impact on women's status in public and private roles (see Rosaldo, 1974). The MPs also mention the various ways these roles emerge in their lives –Dalbudak's (Denizli) experience with the headscarf in Chapter 5. Furthermore, the MPs' anecdotes with the Turkish public –Bayazit (Kahramanmaras) and Memecan (Sivas), illustrate these roles beyond the women in politics.

One of the main problems that women face in public is that in both religion and politics, women have *not* been regarded as individuals and agents who are capable of making decisions for themselves, because expressions of individuality and agency are against the idea of strong connection with community. In the public sphere, Turkish women have impact for sure. However, as in the difference between power and authority; de facto and not necessarily recognized, recognized and legitimized by culture and institutions, respectively, "female authority may imply power, female power does not necessarily imply authority" (Sanday, 1974: 191). Nevertheless, as in the case of JDP women, "respect for the individual woman, rights for self-determination, and criticism of patriarchal culture" (Arat, 2005: 23) are the areas, which would demonstrate the new Turkish women.

There is a myth that women are not interested in politics naturally. However, giving back her own individuality and agency by a new interpretation of religion, a different reading of practices and gender relations in society, Turkish women politicians have found a new relationship for themselves in politics. As Calik (Malatya), Gonul (Kocaeli), and Dalbudak (Denizli) say, women have to be visible in public and free, if not, we cannot talk about freedom, democracy and human development in society.

Changing practices and gender relations in society is based on the idea that 'private is political'; locating what is political in the private sphere and which private issues have political impacts (Arat, 2005).

Being in politics and visible in public as a woman have been debated for many countries. The impact of religion and religious understanding of society have influenced the position and significance of women in politics. Moreover, political systems and party ideologies are highly powerful and controlling in case of women's political office holding. According to Arat, "electoral chances of women are highly dependent on their status in their respective parties. In a system with a lost vote, as is the case in Turkey, parties decide which candidates are to be elected when they prepare the candidacy lists." (1989: 60). Therefore, there is a high expectation as selecting women candidates, between party ideologies and economic, social, and educational background of women, as in the case of Justice and Development Party.

Most of the time, women are more qualified than men in terms of their profiles. Without any exceptions all the interviewees had at least a bachelor's degree –and, many others completed graduate or professional degrees. This conforms with *Hypothesis IVc* that women representatives in the parliament will ascend to national politics due to their credentials.

Moreover, being someone's wife or daughter, personal-family relations, as in the cases of Aisha, Khadija, and Umm Salama, help women's political involvement. Among the JDP women MPs, many had had immediate family members in politics at the national level, or had well-known family members in Turkish society; a majority of the interviewees arguably had well-off family backgrounds in that fathers were governors or

businessmen. As the MPs' backgrounds illustrate, then, this study confirms that Turkish women political leaders will have elite backgrounds (*Hypothesis I*).

The presentation of early women leaders in Islam also suggested that Aisha, Khadija, and Umm Salama had strong personalities. Accordingly, I expected to find that Turkish women political leaders with strong personality would have leadership positions in politics (*Hypothesis II*). The interviewees' reflections on themselves suggest that this indeed is correct. While such comments on the MPs' selves were either implicit or rather rare, in some cases strong personalities were very evident, such as Aksit (Istanbul), Hotar (Izmir), and Memecan (Sivas).

Turkey is a patriarchal society with its political, religious and cultural expressions where basically men have shaped women's roles in public and private spheres. "Identified as their fathers' daughters and their husbands' wives, women define themselves within this system of patriarchy" (Arat 1989: 118). Even though they do not have any relatives in politics, women politicians have been motivated by men such party leaders. In other words, as Kandiyoti (1988) argues, women have made a 'patriarchal bargaining' with the system in order to be in the system. According to Kandiyoti, "these patriarchal bargains exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts." (1988: 275). Moreover, women's bargain with patriarchy has changed in accordance with ethnic, race, historical, class and no specific rules because it changes according to society. Since power and authority of men and women in public and private spheres are defined by gender, "women must articulate their goals regarding their role in politics" (Arat, 1989:

125), but not considering their gender identity that are assigned to them by religion and culture.

In politics, being a woman is not only about authority of patriarchy but also the mindset in a culture that essentializes hierarchy and rank between genders. Women's coping and bargaining mechanisms against patriarchal system might be defined by culture, class, and "how men and women resist, accommodate, adapt, and conflict with each other over resources, rights, and responsibilities" (Kandiyoti, 1988: 285).
That is why many women in the parliament, whether secular or Islamist, are put away from the table of authority by patriarchy (Badran, 2005: 23), consciously or unconsciously.

According to Badran (2005) there are two types of feminist paradigms in the Middle East as secular feminism and Islamist feminism. The major difference between the two is the former is based on Islamic modernism, human rights, and democracy, whereas the latter takes the Qur'an to the center. Although it seems that they have different approaches in terms of women, secular and sacred have constructed each other and cannot be separated as Asad (2003) argues. Islamist feminism has its argument on the ground of being *insan* and social justice, which is about "the equality of women and men as insan across the public/private spectrum" (Badran, 2005: 14). In other words, in Islamic feminism there is no role differentiation for women and men in public and private. However, secular feminism believes the full equality of women and men in public but 'gender complementarity' in private, also "hierarchical gender roles in the family privileging male authority" (Badran, 2005: 14), as in the case of a few interviews. Therefore, here it can be argued that in the Turkish parliament, whereas some women of

the Justice and Development Party can be identified as 'secular feminists,' the rest of the women parliamentarians that I interviewed can be identified as "Islamist" feminists according to their understanding of *insan* [human being], as in the case of Hotar (Izmir), Dalbudak (Denizli), Gonul (Kocaeli), Lok Beyaz (Diyarbakir). It is very plausible that this understanding of *insan* also informed the women MPs' reluctance to identify as a woman. Accordingly, *Hypothesis IVa* receives support in that Justice and Development's women MPs do not identify as a woman.

Similar to Badran (2005), Turam (2008) describe Turkish female parliamentarians as pious and secularist. In Turam's definition, pious parliamentarians, at least some of them, are described as having no faith-based lives but they have been in line and support pious life style of others. Most of the Justice and Development Party's female members of parliament that I interviewed prioritize religion both in their private and public lives. Some of them are assigned in 'high level political decision-making locates in strategic positions.' One can see the impact of religious ideology on Hotar (Izmir), Aysenur Islam (Sakarya) and Dalbudak (Denizli). Aysenur Islam (Sakarya), then a member of the cabinet as Minister for Family and Social Policy, says, "religion constructs my life. I would forego my job if it were to contradict with my religion." Similar to Aysenur Islam, Dalbudak (Sakarya) and Hotar (Izmir) also marked how central religious ideology of the party is into their visibility in politics.

Based on the two women MPs that I interviewed from the Republican People's Party, Turam's claim that "regardless of whether she has a religious faith or not, she bases her life, politics, activism, worldview on laicism, a particularly rigid form of secularism in which religion is not only privatized but controlled by the state" still holds

(2008: 477). Therefore, the main difference between pious and secularist or secular and Islamist women in the parliament is that the former has a tendency to make her religious beliefs visible both in public and private, whereas the latter keeps it invisible and private. In terms of party/ideology decision, religious ideology and its relationship with gender and women affected both sides seriously. Put it differently, while analyzing the political engagement of women in leadership positions in Turkish politics, the religious standpoint of a political party has a crucial impact on women's decision and the possible role of religion in women's role in politics.

Role of the religion in society influences women's experiences in politics. Since religion and culture together define and control female sexuality, womanhood, and femininity and female roles in public and private spheres, "the state may be a powerful instigator of change through policies that may in some cases represent an onslaught on existing cultural practices" (Kandiyoti, 1987: 323). However, the Turkish modernization on women did not change much for women in terms of gender relationships, the double standard of sexuality, and a primarily domestic definition of the female role (Kandiyoti 1987). I argue that the blend of religion and culture creates different kinds of female consciousness and as a result it constructs a unique female subjectivity for Turkish women, which forms a distinctive public experience for them. That is why "the relationship between Turkish women's gender roles and their professional roles, on such occasions that women do step into public roles, is extremely puzzling" (Kandiyoti, 1987: 328). Therefore, this puzzling relationship of women in society, such as control of female sexuality, has been a result of a mix of religious interpretations and cultural morals and

values rather than Islam itself as Aksit (Istanbul), Calik (Malatya), Gonul (Kocaeli), and Aysenur Islam (Sakarya) disagree that religion subordinate women (*Hypothesis IVd)*.

The intertwining of Islam and politics, traditional and patriarchal religious values have restrictive impacts on roles for women in the public sphere. The Justice and Development Party representatives that I interviewed reject the idea of the religion as a handicap in women's role in public and politics. However, they believe that it is not religion but customs and norms and culture that stay women out of politics. Kandiyoti says, "the corporate control of female sexuality, linking female sexual purity to male honor, the segregation of the sexes, and the nature of female life cycles, have been singled out as features that exert a decisive influence in shaping and reproducing a culturally specific experience of gender." (1987: 335). In Turkish case, although Turkish modernization was comprehensive and radical and the state defined new roles to women in public, gender inequality persisted due to traditional, patriarchal, and religious values promoted and these restricted women's roles to private. However, since modernization does not promise for the breakdown of traditional society and equal treatment for women, "traditional society did provide meaningful, necessary and guaranteed roles to women" (Abadan-Unat, 1978: 306), which help to construct sub-counter public spheres and bargain.

As in the case of the Justice and Development Party female representatives, they used religion in order to empower women in politics. By using their religious identity and highlighting how essential it is in their public and private lives, they have created alternative sub counter public spheres. Therefore, as Arat argues, "religion in general, and Islam specifically, need not necessarily be a threat to women's interests. If, as feminists,

we respect women's agency, we need to be ready how women can expand their opportunities of empowerment or fulfillment through religion. But we also need to be watchful of the secondary roles orthodox interpretations of religion assign to women and control they exert over the bodies and moral choices of women." (2010: 881). Women parliamentarians have brought change into Turkish politics. Whether they are Islamists or secular, they have brought changes in political values by redefining and reinterpreting their identities and 'bargaining' public and private patriarchy. Women's political activism has been reformed by and with women. They have changed boundaries of politics and religion. By using their democratic and religious rights to participate in politics and being visible in public, women have redefined their roles in public and private. They also realize that participation in politics, being visible in public is a long process, as Aysenur Islam (Sakarya) says "the action, always and everywhere, takes time."

Turkish women have been changing the scope and definition of public and private spheres. They have been using their public and private roles (as in *Hypothesis V*) and experiences to transform the political and religious mindset in Turkey. They realize that "initiating collective challenges for meaningful political reforms requires participants to accept social differences that are often used to divide them. These differences are experienced corporeally in politicized public space, where they can be negotiated in the process of building coalitions" (Ehsani, 2014: 159) with the state, religion and patriarchy – it can be called, as in Kandiyoti's term, as 'bargaining with patriarchy.' Although it is the state that defines and transforms limits of the spheres, Turkish female politicians have been an actor transforming public and private spaces into their advantages. To put it differently, they try to "decolonize public place" (Ehsani, 2014) by using their public and

private identities and the religion itself because it is clear that "space is dynamic and often shaped by the needs of its users as well as by those who design it" (Sawalha, 2014: 166). Women's engagement and presence in the public sphere and their capability of controlling and shaping of their own spaces is not new as it happens in the experience of Turkish female politicians since the late twentieth century.

Patriarchal and male dominant views have existed since the formative ages of Islam, men are in power and women are exposed to power. Women have to realize and reconstruct their identities and social justice by pushing the limits of the relationship between knowledge and identity. That leads to a transformation of knowledge, change of mindset, and focus on human dignity (Souaiaia, 2008; Stowasser, 1994). Re-reading religion from a perspective of equality of all human beings, social justice, and focusing on local and global meanings of being women, and self-realization of women's identity transform the concept of agency by creating a fresh analysis of power and knowledge.

Knowledge transformation is dependent on time sociopolitical circumstances, and institutions. In order to build new knowledge, one must start by "building and protecting civil society institutions is a more effective way of improving the status of women than relying on legal reforms or on increasing the representation of women in judicial, legislative and executive bodies, separation of governing powers, the initiation and safeguarding of critical public service institutions and legal protection of civic and civil entities without any discrimination" (Souaiaia, 2008: xiv).

This transformation will take time, as the interviewees recognized. Arguably, the Turkish example is both fitting with and going against Souaiaia's (2008: xiv) account of this process, in that "building and protecting civil society institutions is a more effective

way of improving the status of women than relying on legal reforms or on increasing the representation of women in judicial, legislative and executive bodies, separation of governing powers, the initiation and safeguarding of critical public service institutions and legal protection of civic and civil entities without any discrimination" happens in the careers of women politicians. A majority of the women leaders of the JDP MPs did gain experience in civil society institutions before they pursued politics. In the meantime, going against Souaiaia (2008), the Turkish case also illustrates the introduction of many legal reforms, which the interviewees referred to many times. With respect to this, the MPs shared an optimistic vision for the future that 'legal amendments will make a difference in practice.'

Also, since Habermas's division of public and private are historically rooted in Europe and European history, it does say very little about other regions and publics and privacies other than Europe. Therefore, there is a need in the literature to look at different meanings of public and private outside of Europe. As Thompson (2003: 53) claims, "current gender boundaries in the Middle East are neither mere imitations of, not deviations from, European practice. They have refocused our attention on the local historical contexts that have shaped the meanings of gender boundaries." Therefore, the concepts in local historical gendered contexts are important in order to understand the Turkish case. In Turkey, women's roles, experiences and consciousness have changed as they have entered the public.

Muslim Women's Political Activities

There is an assumption that women's participation in interpretation and in governance will necessarily balance the outcome and increase advocacy for women (see Wadud, Barlas, Ahmed for interpretation of the religion; see Bilgili, , Moghadam, Kassem for female representation). It is important to remember that besides gender, social and economic statuses of women are crucial. Souaiaia (2008) disagrees with Mernissi (1990), who says women's status is due to the males' dominance of the economic, religious, educational, and political life to the exclusion of women. Souaiaia identifies the cause of the problem to be the societal and cultural eliticism that relies on wealth manufactured majoritarianism to create and preserve an environment that is less accommodating to historically disadvantaged social groups – *Hypothesis I*. He argues for the creation and protection of civil society institutions that would resist the power of the state and challenge the oppressive nature of society in order to improve conditions of women and minorities and the poorest in the community. Educational institutions are the most important one to prepare men to accept new ideas and novel interpretations of society's traditional heritage, justice, fairness, respecting human dignity (Souaiaia, 2008).

In Turkey, the patriarchal mentality of the state institutions creates its own hierarchy within the society. Although Weberian definition of the term patriarchy is a system of government in which men rules by using their positions in society as a head of household, the term has redefined by many times by scholars for different situations (Donmez, 2013: ix). In this project, I will use the term as public and private patriarchy and their relationship in the Turkish parliament. I believe that there is a close relationship between the two, which plays a significant role in women politicians' decision-making

process in Turkey. As Akman puts it, sexist obstacles of women, both religious and secular, in Turkey have been the production of patriarchy. (2013: 113). Akman also adds that "the gender politics of the secular state controlled by the male elite have contributed to the maintenance of restrictions on women's participation in the public sphere through both a façade of non-interventionist policy into the private sphere and the promotion of an orthodox interpretation of Sunni Islam." (2013: 114). Therefore, both secularism and religion in Turkey have intervened and interpreted the definitions of the public and private by the state over women's bodies. In other words, both the secular and religious minds of the state, which are represented in the parliament, have defined public and private by using women, sexuality and morality and placing women in private more than in public.

Since the term gender can be understood by understanding social and cultural characteristics of a society and patriarchy is a social structure that is a result of these social and cultural characteristics of the society, I take the terms public and private gender oriented and created by patriarchal mentality both religiously and politically. That was the reason why, in this research, I interviewed women representatives from the AK Party to reach an idea about how religion affects their public and private life in the parliament.

There has been a discussion about political participation of men and women and gender-biased politics in political science literature. The literature is based on different forms of political gender stereotyping and gender based descriptions of different political behaviors and beliefs such as "there is a considerable agreement across a large number of psychological studies that a typical woman is seen as warm, gentle, kind, and passive,

whereas a typical man is viewed as tough, aggressive, and assertive" (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993: 121). As they continue, women and men have different areas of expertise because of women's nature of compassion and gentleness and men's toughness and aggressiveness. So, there is thought that women's compassion, sensitivity, and warmth make them more successful in education, health care, and women's issues such as family, whereas men's rough and assertive characters make them effective politicians in military and police crisis (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993). Therefore, one can argue that stereotyping of women's and men's behaviors and nature is not only religious but also political too.

The other issue with women's participation in politics is women's deficit of resources in politics. As Lok Beyaz (Diyarkabir)'s statement "women have to work harder to show their skills and fitness into politics" support the idea of Schlozman, Burns, and Verba that, "in comparison with men, women are disadvantaged when it comes to the resources that facilitate political activity. It turns out that if women were as well as endowed with political resources as men, their overall political activity would be closer to men's." (1994: 963).

Diverse family backgrounds, different experience in childhood and adulthood, and also special responsibilities of women and men "shape their orientations to politics and resources they bring to the politics" according to Schlozman, Burns, and Verba (1994: 965). Also, power in the family is not only rooted to religious beliefs and morals, but also to financial power that each partner has. What all the female representatives emphasize that democracy, confidence, and freedom of action in family/private sphere,

having options, voice, economic independence, being visible in the family/private all these have huge impacts on the women and their roles in public.

Political participation of women is not limited to being in parliaments as members. The women that I interviewed with have had formal, informal, conventional or individual experiences and influenced government actions directly or indirectly. In other words, before being political leaders in the parliament, all the women have had participated activities in secular and religious grounds to make an impact, such as Memecan (Sivas), Satir (Istanbul), Dalbudak (Denizli), Sanli (Ankara), Aksit (Istanbul). Moreover, men's more likelihood of getting full time and skilled jobs, putting more hours on the job, developing more civic skills by higher education, to be in public more than women have other causes of women's less participation in politics. It is clear women who are actively involved in public by voluntary or religious organizations such as Satir (Istanbul) and Dalbudak (Denizli), or in party branches (Bayazit, Kahramanmaras) are more inclined to participate in politics. However, disadvantages such as unskilled jobs, less training and less education, and less control over money and financial issues at home decreases women's political participation and contribution.

Despite and in addition of all these difficulties that women have faced in public sphere and especially in politics, there are some arguments that "Islamic faith is important as an explanation for low levels of women's political participation in many countries" (Matland and Tezcur, 2011: 366). The religion might be one of the reasons of women's absence in public and politics but exclusion and seclusion of woman from public sphere, however, is not a practice coming from Islam or some specific geographic area. As Mernissi (1991; 1992) and Stowasser (1994) argue, women's roles in private and

family spheres do not cut women off from politics, as in the case of JDP's female representatives, and they use the term "separation" rather than "seclusion" to explain this. In other words, as Leila Ahmed puts it, when Islamic legal vision started to stifle the egalitarian vision of Islam in favor of Islamic law interpretation by male scholars, segregation became seclusion. This study projected a similar finding in its *Hypothesis V*; the female representatives highlight that there might be a separate definition for public and private chores for both men and women. However, this does not mean the seclusion of women from the public sphere or involving into politics since they believe the 'egalitarian vision' of Islam. For instance, Gonul (Kocaeli) says "in Islam, there is no difference between men and women, they were created equally. They have equal responsibilities. Also, it is not possible to change society in a day; it takes some time, education." However, one may also observe that "while major changes have occurred in the status of women in some parts of the world in recent decades, norms that restrict women to the home are still powerful in defining the activities that are deemed appropriate for women" so they exclude themselves from political life and so public sphere (Chhibber, 2002: 409).

As in the cases of Khadija, Umm Salama, and Aisha, social and individual characteristics of a person, socioeconomic backgrounds, and also negotiation for independence from household loads increase women's participation in public and politics significantly. Chhibber argues, "women who can exercise autonomy in and from the household are more likely to be active participants in political life. Political activity takes place in the public sphere and is fundamentally a public act- for men and for women." (2002: 415). She continues saying that since the public sphere and households are under

the domain of men, women have to have independent space and identity in household and to be in public in order to participate politics actively. Therefore, it can be argued that well educated, urban, and employed women with strong financial and social family backgrounds and higher social status are more active in politics. However, even in developed countries, "women continue to feel the effects of gender stereotypes and expectations in higher levels of political office, and these effects may have important negative implications for perceptions of their leadership and effectiveness" (Bligh and Kohles, 2008: 381).

Politics has been perceived as a predominantly male profession. Similar to many countries, the previous elections results confirm that Turkish political life is still the domain of men. Moreover, traditional, religious and cultural biases against women's leadership in politics and female politicians are primarily based on gender and gendered roles. But, it is crucial to remember that not only religion but also gender, higher family income, education, state regulations, age control political participation of women. As Bligh and Kohles (2008) say, all levels of political office, whether it is local, states, or national political offices, are ranked as more stereotypically and naturally masculine than feminine. To put it differently, because of the gendered characteristics of institutions such as culture, religion and politics and gender discrimination is in practices, values, images, histories and ideologies and more importantly in minds, women are thought to be unfit to being political leaders. However, as Inal argues, "using gender as a determining factor for good or bad leadership endangers future leadership opportunities for women." (2015: 1).

Similar to Inal's (2015) argument, emphasizing gender as a characteristic and showing gender as a superior and different characteristic make women and women's

leadership denounced. As in the case of Aisha and interpretation of Aisha's involvement in the first civil war in the history of Islam, "their mistakes will stick on to their gender (and all members of their gender) stigmatizing potential women leaders. One leader's mistakes are framed as all women leader's mistakes casting doubt on all future women leaders in the eyes of the electorate" (Inal, 2015: 3) –such as the case of Tansu Ciller, the first and only female prime minister of Turkey.[31] However, as Calik (Malatya) says in her interview, seeing Ciller as a prime minister changed her image of women in society and made her to believe that women can be visible in politics.

The public-private dichotomy and political and religious ideologies are interrelated. In Turkey, "new faces of Muslim actors using both secular and religious idioms are appearing in public life; the terms of public debate are being transformed by the eruption of religious issues. Islam carves out a public space of its own as new Islamic language styles, corporeal rituals, and spatial practices emerge and blend into public life. Public Islam challenges the borders and the meanings of the secular public sphere" (Gole, 2002: 173) and its own traditional space in society. Gole (2002) describes this changing borders and meanings as "a transformation from a radical political stance to a more social and cultural orientation" (174) as a result of individuality rather than mass mobilization.

Social formation of gender is related with religious institutions and hierarchies, political and legal structures, political parties, political culture, educational systems, and economic development. They all are interactive and construct gender and gender consciousness. This can be applied all the societies no matter what the religion, governmental system, culture is. The only difference in constructing gender

[31] For more information on Tansu Ciller: Kesgin B (2012). Tansu Ciller's Leadership Traits and Foreign Policy. *Perceptions* 17(3): 29–50 and Inal, T (2015) Gender and Political Leadership: Turkish Experience. *Leadership*, early view, doi:10.1177/1742715015606512.

consciousness among societies is nothing but only how it is experienced and interpreted. Put it differently, the magnitude and forms of the consciousness make the difference. As Moghadam argues, “the gender configurations that draw heavily from religion and cultural norms to govern women’s work, political praxis, family status, and other aspects of their lives in the Middle East are not unique to Muslim or Middle Eastern countries” (2003: 5), and Turkey is not an exception. As is the case in other Muslim countries, in Turkey “the public visibility of Islam and the specific gender, corporeal, and spatial practices underpinning it trigger new ways of imagining a collective self and common space that are distinct from the western liberal self and progressive politics” (Gole, 2002: 174). Although one can argue that religion, in this case Islam, has impact on construction of gender and gender consciousness in a society, “this overemphasis on the role of Islam not only prevents us from looking at the more fundamental social contradictions, which often foster religious requirements, but also implies hope for change, because Islam is regarded by its followers as inherently absolute since it is the ‘literal word of God’” (Erturk, 1991: 307).

In terms of Turkish women, the construction of women’s identity has been problematic since the establishment of the Republic because “while the Turkish modernizers took measures to eliminate physical segregation and integrate women into the public domain, crucial aspects of gender relations (sexuality, domestic division of labor, and so on) and the sex bias of the public/private domains remained untouched” (Erturk, 1991: 311). Another important detail about gender construction is that it is in every aspect of society, in the law, politics, religion, family, culture, workplace, language, etc. The impact of gender construction differs and it reveals itself on each

aspect differently; however, it is important to remember that "contemporary gender systems are often designed by ideologues and inscribed in law, justified by custom and enforced by policy, sustained by processes of socialization and reinforced through distinct institutions" (Moghadam, 2003: 17) such as religion. Therefore, although religion is one of the factors that affect legal status and social positions of women, structurally it is state ideology, economic development, and class that determine women's roles in public and private significantly. The state's policies determine stability and change in women's roles in society. However, in Turkey, religion has been the reason of oppression on and invisibility of women in both public and private spheres through such as veiling, seclusion, and segregation. Contrary to this argument, many scholars such as Kandiyoti (1989) claims that one can put transformation and mobilization of Turkish women has been, mostly and significantly, the product of nationalist state ideology. Although the state has all social, economic, cultural and religious resources, the process of constructing a new female identity; millennium women are self-conscious and oriented.

Women, as a group who could be either visible or invisible easily by ideological, political, and religious choices, have been at the center in Turkish politics since the establishment of the Republic. The main actor in the empowerment process of women has been the state. During the times of the national independence, the main cadre worked hard to give women a voice in the struggle and state process after. However, all the reforms and efforts did not spread nationwide, and the effects of the reforms limited only to the urban areas. Moreover, the ideal woman in the minds of the main cadre was who has chastity and honor, the characters which conservative and religious people had their

minds too. Apparently “there appears to be one persistent concern which finally unites nationalist and Islamist discourses on women in Turkey: the necessity to establish that the behavior and position of women, however defined, are congruent with the ‘true’ identity of the collectivity and constitute no threat to it” (Kandiyoti, 1989: 143).

Summary

In this chapter, I related my findings in the interviews to the historical context that discussed earlier in the dissertation, and the associated literature in Turkish politics and gender studies. With the objective of situating Turkish women in politics in a broad spectrum, I elaborated on women’s status in politics in contemporary Turkey. Here, I claim that Turkish women politicians realize women’s status in society and have used social, religious, and political constraints into their advantages. Based on the Turkish case, in this part of the chapter, I developed a profile of Muslim women in political power. According to my argument, a woman political leader in predominantly Muslim societies has a higher chance of accessing political power when she has socially and financially powerful family background, a good education, work experience, financial independence and effective network in politics.

The findings of this research suggest that the female representatives who are members of a conservative party, the Justice and Development Party that I interviewed with, are ‘a new female political elite group’, with high consciousness and full of agency. On the contrary to the idea of Islamists trying to keep women in their religiously sanctioned traditional roles and to keep an Islamic social order on track, the women I interviewed with are everything but traditional or ‘symbolic pawns’ (Kandiyoti, 1989).

Through observation and ethnographic interviews with the women who are assigned leadership positions in the party and/or in the parliament, in my discussions in this chapter, and the previous, I showcased the public and private lives of Justice and Development Party's women members of the parliament. The women that I interviewed with prioritize faith and commitment to the religion even in the public realm even though not all of them are religiously observant public actors. The women are good examples of denying the idea of being victims under 'Islamic patriarchy,' since patriarchy has been centuries older than all believing systems. However, there are still arguments about the Justice and Development Party's women such as 'being Erdogan's women' or 'the party's effort into incorporating women into the public political sphere without actually intending to empower them more generally' (Turam, 2008: 488).

Although the Turkish Republic, in the beginning, had a modern ideology in terms of women, it did not give women an independence from the state. To put it differently, the Turkish state has been regulated and led women's movements in the republic as a result of the patriarchal mindset. The interviews show that all the women from the government party reject the idea of being submissive or passive actors both in their public and private lives. Although most of the women are identified them as pious or religious, they have (been) transformed and strengthened female agency and female subjectivity by using religious vitality. Here, I argue that the emancipation of Turkish women cannot be separated from the religion in the Turkish case. Instead of submission, women have empowered by piety and religious morals and values that they believe in.

Being visible in public has been difficult for women from all different ideologies because even though women feel public and political responsibilities, male leaders and/or

party cadres select them as Hotar (Izmir) argues in her interview. Similarly, as Bayazit (Kahramanmaras) and Satir (Istanbul) state, ‘it is a men’s arena and since women violate men’s arena, men try to decide where they put women in.’ Therefore, as Binnaz Toprak (MP Istanbul, Republican People’s) argued, it gets impossible for women to be visible and ‘free’ in public. In her interview, she also added that it is a fact that Turkish political and social structures marginalize women. Moreover, when she criticized policies of the Justice and Development Party, she said that the party does see women representatives as family members, sisters. This undermines potential and female subjectivity and agency of women as individuals. This idea might come from the separation of the spheres and roles even in the parliament.

The interviews suggest that Turkish women who play leading roles in politics have transformed their gendered and religious identities into something that gives them emancipation, liberation, vitality and strength both in religion and politics. In other words, in the history of the relationship between Islam and Turkey, women have had agency, which is traditional, pious, modern, consistent and capacitated with the realities of the country. In terms of the relationship between Turkish women and religion, I can argue, as opposed to what Smith (1979) says, that Turkish female politicians have support from their male constituents and family members. However, there are still discussions about being legislators are against the nature of women (Ghazzali: 1953) or they are different physically, mentally, and emotionally (which all women I interviewed accept the difference but they use these differences for their advantages in their public role and office) and other liberal thoughts saying, women should not neglect or sacrifice their home life and familial responsibilities while being in public as professionals (Smith,

1979: 525), which I believe this is what some male representatives believe in the party. Also, I should say that some representatives, such as Aksit (Istanbul) and Hotar (Izmir) highlight that “women have to protect female identity in politics. They should not act as men.”

In conclusion, after I listened to female representatives of Turkey in order to understand how they define themselves, their roles in public and private and their relationship with the religion, and based on existing research in related literature about women and religion, I find that women who have strong personality, elite background, high qualifications such as education, network, income were able to access leadership positions in politics. However, it is still evident that women still need men’s support in order to be in politics.

It is also a relevant argument that “yet as long as the domestic sphere remains female, women’s societies, however powerful, will never be the political equivalents of men’s; and as in the past, sovereignty can be a metaphor for only a female elite. If the public world is to open its doors to more than the elite among women, the nature of work itself will have to be altered, and the asymmetry between work and the home reduced” (Rosaldo, 1974: 42). Therefore, it is not just religion, but cultural norms, traditions, values, and metaphors that subordinate women in public and private.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Research on women in Islamic societies, gender and women's political and leadership position in Islam is limited. This dissertation is a contribution to the efforts dealing with this deficit in critical research on these subjects. In this dissertation, I illustrate in the example of Turkey's women members of the parliament how Turkish women, as members of a society and religion, define their roles in public and private spheres and how they see the limits of public sphere and how they create their definition of publicity and visibility in public by using their private powers and roles.

In reviewing major women figures in early Islam, I argued that studying discourses about women in Islam throughout the history is the most appropriate, objective way to understand cultural and social differences in women's position within Islamic societies. For there appears a puzzle in oft-made references to the Qur'an regarding its 'degrading status of women' in public and private spheres is inconsistent with the idea of full conscious human agency of woman and her responsibility and potential on earth as the caliph of God.

Three major women leaders during prophet Muhammad's time, Aisha, Khadija, and Umm Salama, illustrate the roles and status of women in the then emerging Muslim society. For instance, in the example of Aisha, one finds a woman's ability in leadership and strength in personality to gather men for a purpose in early Islam. These examples, I

argue, must inform any discussions about women's public and political leadership in Muslim societies.

Herein, I also established, based on the Qur'an and the Hadith, how Islam situates women in life. Accordingly, this dissertation approached the Qur'an, and gender roles in Islam from a 'just' perspective since justice is one of the essential messages in the Qur'an and in the examples of the Prophet. In my earlier discussion, in Chapter 2, I first looked at the gender issue according to the Qur'an, and with examples, I illustrated differences between the Qur'an's sayings and practices –or, commonplace understandings, in Muslim societies.

Based on this reading, I claimed both women and men have to use their agencies as free, rational and conscious human beings to build a society. Since God says, according to the Quran (4:1), men and women were created from the same soul and there is no difference between the two except moral consciousness and piety; both men and women have the same capacity as free agents by moral choice, responsibility, and ethical individuality.

Following this background, this dissertation's major premises are that examples of women in power in Muslim societies and the association of the public and private spheres of life discussions with such examples can help Muslim women draw ideas for expanding women's status in politics of predominantly Muslim countries. In my application of the public v. private spheres of life to women's status in Muslim societies, I claimed that this framework may help explain how women, as members of a society and religion, define their roles in public sphere, how they see the limits of public sphere, and how women create their definition of publicity and visibility in public by using their

private roles and spaces. The separation of spheres of life to public and private is a useful framework to problematizing gendered aspects of society. Discussions of gender and public and private spheres primarily focus on issues of visibility, mobility, and voices of women. Not only the state and religion but also women themselves redefine and change the frameworks of public and private. Women, by creating their own visibility and publicity, change the meaning of private by using their role in the public sphere, and vice versa. Gender characteristics and gendered structures are indeed at the center of the public and private dichotomy. Gendered rights, responsibilities, and roles draw the lines of this separation. Since the two spheres are separated as women's and men's, the words that define these worlds are also different such as freedom v. obedience, hierarchy v. equality, autonomy v. dependence, self-determination v. self-consciousness. In Islamic law, I argued, public sphere is organized according to human interests and social harmony and stability, not different sexes.

Rereading religion from a perspective of equality of all human beings, social justice, and focusing on local and global meanings of being women, and self-realization of women's identity transform the concept of agency by creating a fresh analysis of power and knowledge. Therefore, it is important to remember not only fundamentalism but also modernity has helped in the exclusion of women. Patriarchal and male dominant views have existed since the formative ages of Islam, men are in power and women are exposed to power. Women have to realize and reconstruct their identities and social justice by pushing the limits of the relationship between knowledge and identity. That leads to a transformation of knowledge, change of mindset, and focus on human dignity (Souaiaia, 2008; Stowasser, 1994). Knowledge transformation, though, is dependent on

time, sociopolitical circumstances, and institutions. The interviews with the Turkish women MPs suggest that some of that transformation is taking place for Turkish women in general and for the Turkish women in politics. For instance, Memecan's (Sivas) anecdotes with her electorate are telling in this respect: Sivas women learned how they can make a difference in the public sphere and then after they 'can no longer be confined to their homes.

The intertwining of Islam and politics, traditional and patriarchal religious values have restrictive impacts on roles for women in the public sphere. In Turkish case, although Turkish modernization was comprehensive and radical and the state defined new roles to women in public, gender inequality persisted due to traditional, patriarchal, and religious values promoted and these restricted women's roles to private.

In the case of Turkey, the history of modernization was imagined and dictated by the state: the meanings of the public and private have changed with the evolution of the society and society has changed because with change in cultural meanings and social practices. In the Muslim world, where modernization and public-private dichotomy could not find exact and clear definitions, women have been more visible in public sphere. Although women have redefined their own public space in society, roles in this sphere cannot be more than private ones, since the state actually determines these roles through family regulations. Therefore, public sphere is a place where women bargain with state patriarchy through policies, legislations, and practices by using their restrictions, choices, autonomy and agency.

In the Turkish example, the government claims to be secular but manages religious affairs. This contradiction creates a special relationship between state and

religious institutions. In Turkey, especially, politics dominates and controls religion –not vice versa. Subsequently, it can be argued that religion has its own role in the public sphere and that role is determined by the state. This resulted in the introduction of new discourses, debates and histories, which causes a change in the meaning of the public sphere. New forms of the sacred are reemerging everyday and transform society (Durkheim, 1964). As a result, religion might appear to be losing power over the people but not morality and values. The sacred is social and society represents itself to its members by the sacred.

Based on the interviews conducted with the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) women members of the parliament, I found that while the women representatives of the JDP observe that politics is a challenging domain for women, they underscore the party's and Recep Tayyip Erdogan's role in integrating more women into its politics at all levels –local, provincial, and national. The JDP women MPs come from various different backgrounds: some had no experience in politics, some were involved in local branches, some were incumbents in the parliament, and some were academics. A number of the MPs were active in non-governmental (or, professional) organizations before their political careers. About a half of the interviewees had immediate family members either involved in national level politics or were well known in Turkish society.

The interviews placed Turkish women in politics based on the role of religion, gender relations, and socio-economics in their political careers. Turkish female parliamentarians acknowledge religion, and where they place it in their public and private lives: right in the center, without distinguishing between public and private. Accordingly,

for many women leaders of the JDP, religion is a "lifestyle" and cannot exist in one sphere of life and does not exist in other.

I also found that the JDP's women MPs distinguish between the role of religion and culture in patriarchal social norms that bound women to fewer opportunities in all walks of life. The MPs interviewed think that being in politics as a woman is really difficult, because of patriarchal values: "the society thinks women should be at home."

The interviewees called for gender equality in opportunities for men and women. Gender equality comes across in the interviews in the context of (a) family background and how this is instilled in the MPs family life and upbringing since then, (b) religion – i.e. in the notion of *insan* in particular, (c) legal framework, and (d) cultural norms that do not provide women the same opportunities men have in all walks life. The interviewees recognize cultural, traditional restrictions on gender equality. The Justice and Development's women MPs note that men and women are different in terms of *fitrat* (creation), but they have to have equal opportunities in all areas of life. In the meantime, the MPs mentioned cultural norms prevent both genders having equal opportunities professionally, in politics, or broadly speaking in life.

Because the political representation of women is a process of constructing an identity, the relationship between knowledge and identity has a crucial role in explaining the process of a change or transformation in Turkish social and political life in the last decade. To achieve gender justice and transform the knowledge that includes women and men on the level of conception and of practice (Barazangi, 2004), one has to ask questions socially, politically and religiously. Women representatives have significant

roles to transform the knowledge and shape “newly emerging (Muslim) male-female subjectivities in the public sphere” (Gole, 1997: 81).

Culture, history, religion and politics of a nation are the main actors to determine a nation’s perspective towards gender and gender related issues. I argue, as Moghadam (1994) and Yuval-Davis (1997) claim as well, that identity is a gendered issue, which is highly related to politics, religion and culture. These ‘imaginary’ identities and communities create ‘imaginary’ boundaries that would keep ‘some’ people outside or label as the ‘other.’ Patriotism, masculinity and morality are the key words that construct gender differences and identities in both politics and religion. Although there is a tendency that a nation is built on the idea of differentiated gender roles such as women as mothers of a nation and men as defenders of all values of a nation, these practices vary significantly across Muslim societies, and broadly speaking in the world.

Furthermore, there might very well be different gender experiences in one specific country throughout its history. As Wilford (1998) claims that even though we see women in public spaces socially and politically, it does not mean that it leads to an improvement of women’s position in society. On the contrary, there are alternative projects for women such as social welfare, health care and childcare. If one thinks of women as the mothers of a nation with the tasks of nurturance and reproduction or if women and men have assigned roles in religious scriptures (Moghadam, 1994), then one could argue that national politics have specific discourses and politics on gender.

Politics creates the otherness. It could create the sense of otherness among women too. Even in same society, women are constructed in different ways according to their ethnicity, race, class, age, ability, sexual and other social status as it happens in men’s

construction. In other words, "women usually are constructed and treated by various agencies as different to men" (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 116).

In every society, the meaning and definition of the public sphere change. Moreover, since there is a gap in the conceptualization of the public and private, it could be difficult to use the European conception of public and private because the public sphere "can take on a different meaning and form in non-western contexts" (Gole, 2002: 175) as happened in the case of Turkey. Moreover, it can be added that according to the historical development of a society, the meaning of the public and private may vary. The public sphere can be analyzed as a part of modernity, and this might be the reason why there are different meanings of both.

Religion has an important role in society. Moreover, with the positive correlation of masculinity in public life, women's existence in political life could not be accepted easily in society. Religion and the state have their own images of women. The Turkish parliament, in this sense, is the arena of the expression of imagined, constructed and instituted women. Although the role of women has been imagined and constructed, it can be argued that women's existence in the public sphere has challenged the male authority and the meaning of the private sphere. As in the case of Turkey and as an example, the public visibility of women in the parliament has created a new image of the private sphere and challenged the patriarchal hegemony in the public sphere.

The public and private spheres are formed and bargained through social transitions and "national differences as well as gender differences reveal the ways in which the concept of women was being represented in times of social transition," (Arnot, 2000: 164). In contrast to the Western understanding of the public sphere, the woman is

at the center in the making and representing of the public sphere in the Turkish context: "women are symbols of the social whole: home and outside, interior and exterior, private and public" (Gole, 2002: 185). This research showed how Turkish women have represented and more importantly negotiated and challenged their roles in the public and private spheres.

Arguably, the case of Turkey offers more puzzles, which are well worth exploring. In terms of women's status in public sphere and politics, the transformation and change take some time. To put it differently, deep changes in and about the character of society happen gradually. As Aysenur Islam (Istanbul) argues in her interview, "action, always and everywhere, takes time." So, changes and practices in women's position in social and institutional structures need time.

Customs and traditions that developed over centuries, today and even in the time and after the death of the prophet, are so powerful over each and every aspect and institutions of society. As the Turkish women made gains in accessing national political offices as MPs and beyond: Did these accomplishments break the chains of control that existed in Turkish society and politics? To reiterate, one may find examples to suggest both an affirmative and a negative response.

The Turkish example is both fitting with and going against Souaiaia's (2008: xiv) account of this process, in that "building and protecting civil society institutions is a more effective way of improving the status of women than relying on legal reforms or on increasing the representation of women in judicial, legislative and executive bodies, separation of governing powers, the initiation and safeguarding of critical public service institutions and legal protection of civic and civil entities without any discrimination"

happens in the careers of women politicians. A majority of the women leaders of the JDP MPs did gain experience in civil society institutions before they pursued politics. In the meantime, going against Souaiaia, the Turkish case also illustrates the introduction of many legal reforms, which the interviewees referred to many times. With respect to this, the MPs shared an optimistic vision for the future that 'legal amendments will make a difference in practice.'

As a conclusion, in this dissertation, based on the Qur'an and the Hadith, I discuss how Islam situates women in life. With this background, in historical examples and readings of the Qur'an and the Hadith, I claim that the absence of women in the public sphere of predominantly Muslim societies is not an outcome attributable to religion, Islam only. As I argue later, instead, women's absence must be sought in reference to understandings of the public and private spheres. My main point is to show that without looking specific historical and contextual features of identities and social structures, we cannot understand varying experiences, realities, and identities. Although the intersectionality theory brings together different categories such as race, gender, nation, nevertheless it does not say much about religion and religious identities. Although religious identity is important for women to show their agency through, it does not relate history of Islam and public-private dichotomy within it. Therefore, my work is a unique study in terms of bringing similarities of these theories to explain religious women's leadership in Turkey.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your role, as a woman representative, in Turkish politics?
2. How do you define yourself? Woman, mother, wife/partner, Muslim, Turkish, Kurdish, religious, secular, modern…
3. Who or what entity has the most influence in the construction of women's political agencies, and how is this power exercised? Religion, culture, men,…
4. What roles are currently assigned to women, as political agents, by the apparatuses of state and by the most prominent spokesmen of Islam in Turkey?
5. Why would you vote for a woman representative?
6. What is the role of women and men in public and private life?
7. Do you see any difference between a male representative and female representative as a public figure? If yes, what are those differences and where do they come from?

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO THE SUBJECTS

I invite you to participate in a research study being conducted by investigators from The University of Iowa. In this project, I explore the role of religion in women's awareness of themselves, the decisions they make, and the lives they lead. I explore the question of how female leaders see the influence of religion—specifically Islam in contemporary Turkish politics—has had on their understanding(s) of themselves, their private lives and their political philosophies and aspirations. The discussion of women's roles and capacities in the private sphere has been left to religion, and women have brought their private lives into their public lives in such terms as women, wives, and mothers. Therefore, it is crucial to determine to what degree religion influences women's roles in public. In this study, I seek to show the ways in which women have bargained with both the state and religion in order to increase their social and political competence and power.

If you agree to participate, I would like you to complete survey questions take part in an interview. You are free to skip any questions that you prefer not to answer. The survey questions will take about 15 minutes to complete and the interview will last about 30 minutes. The responses will be transcribed by the transcription services at the Turkish Parliament.

You are being recruited for this study because you are a member of Turkish Parliament. Your individual response will not be purposely identified, but there is a possibility that your responses could be connected to you.

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this study, you can return the survey without answering any of the questions and decline the interview call.

If you have questions about the rights of research subjects, please contact the Human Subjects Office, 105 Hardin Library for the Health Sciences, 600 Newton Rd, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242-1098, (319) 335-6564, or e-mail irb@uiowa.edu.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this research study.

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