Building a Pious Self in Secular Settings

Pious Women in Modern Turkey

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to explore the diverse ways in which piety is conceptualized and cultivated by highly-educated Muslim women in Turkey. These women hold active positions within the secular-public sphere while trying to keep their aim of becoming pious in their own way, in relation to their subjective understanding of piety. After a detailed analysis of the formation of the secular modern public sphere in Turkey, in relation to the questions of modernity, nation-building, secularism, Islamism, and the gender relations, it gives an account of the individual routes taken by the highly educated professional women to particular aspirations of piety. The individual stories are designed to show the arbitrariness of many modern binary oppositions such as modern vs. traditional, secular vs. religious, liberated vs. oppressed, individual vs. communal, and etc. These individual routes are also analyzed within a collective framework through an analysis of the activities of two women's NGO's addressing at their attempt of building a collective attitude toward the secular-liberal conception of gender and sexuality. Finally the dissertation argues that Turkey has the capacity to deconstruct the aforementioned binary categories with its macro-level sociopolitical experience, and the micro-level everyday life experiences of ordinary people. It also reveals that piety cannot be measured with outward expressions, or thought as a socio-political categorization. Because just like secularism, piety has also the capacity to penetrate into the everyday lives of people from diverse socio-political backgrounds, which opens up possibilities of rethinking the religious-secular divide, and all the other binaries that come with it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PREFACE

The names of people in this research, except for the facilitator of the Women's Studies seminars at the WP, are pseudo-names in accordance with the request of confidentiality by my interlocutors.

The field site of this research is Istanbul, Turkey, where the native language is Turkish. In order to protect the authenticity of the realities of my field site I decided to use the Turkish characters instead of using their English transliterations. For some Islamic terms that have their origin in Arabic but adopted by Turkish characters, I kept using the Turkish words with the Arabic original in parentheses.

Turkish alphabet is a modified form of Latin alphabet since 1928. There are eight extra letters that signifies the specific sounds to Turkish:

C, c is pronounced as j in jungle

Ç, ç is pronounced as 'ch' as in chimpanzee

Ğ, ğ only serves to lengthen the preceding vowel

I, ı is pronounced as the o in women

J, j is pronounced as in French

Ö, ö is pronounced as in German or eu in French

Ş, ş is pronounced as sh in shield

Ü, ü is pronounced as in German or u in French

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Prologue

Either appear as you are, or be as you appear. —Rumi

It was a cold November afternoon in Istanbul. I was in a hurry to give a
presentation at the Women's Platform (WP) that day, and I ended up wearing all
black because I did not have time to think matching colors, to which I am usually
attentive while dressing up. So, in my black coat, long black skirt, black boots and
black headscarf, I got on the bus, and was lucky to find a seat next to an old man.
The man had a long beard and was wearing an Islamic cap (*takke*), which gave the
impression that he was a religious or at least a conservative man. As soon as I sat
by him, he started mumbling some words. I thought he was saying a prayer by
himself. Occasionally he was looking at me and then his mumbling was becoming
more enthusiastic. When I started to catch the word "*maşallah*"[1] repeatedly
among his mumbling, I grew suspicious of his intent. It was not unheard of old
men using the word "*maşallah*" as a lustrous verbal harassment toward women.
Then he turned to me and asked "Are you a *hoca*?"[2] I said "yes" thinking that it

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[1] *Maşallah* is a very commonly used expression in Turkish to praise someone or
something. It means "God willed it" but in common usage it is meant for saying
"Magnificent, may God protect him/her from evil." The blue and white beads
called evil-eye are also called as *maşallah* beads.
[2] The binary of *hoca* vs. *öğretmen* is one of the foundational creations of the
Kemalist regime. In this binary, the *hoca* represents the old, *ancien regimé*,
because it is an Arabic word, and it stands for the Ottoman era religious teachers.
Öğretmen, on the other hand, is a Turkish word, meaning "teacher", which refers
to the teachers of the secular modern schools. In the Republican regime, these

would be pointless to explain to this old man that I was a graduate student and a teaching assistant. His next question, "Are you a *hafız*?"[3] however, made me understand what he meant by "*hoca*." I responded: "No, I am not that kind of *hoca*, I am *öğretmen*." Then he replied: "Don't worry. That's still fine" and again repeated: "*maşallah*, *maşallah*!"

I saw a clear happiness in this old man's face. Simply from my outfit he had concluded that I was a pious woman. He was happy to see a pious woman who is also a teacher. The fact that he asked me whether I was a *hafız* implied an expectation as well. From the way I was dressed, I was seen so pious to this old man that he expected me to know the entire Qur'an by heart.

The stark difference between how I looked to this man and who I really was made me so deeply sad and ashamed of myself, for I realized that I could neither appear as I was nor be as I appeared, as the most popular teaching of Rumi known by Turkish people suggests.

When I got off the bus after a few stops I was already filled with remorse at my failure to meet the naïve expectations of this old man. Besides, this realization added more to my constant self-mortification for not being able to routinize the basic markers of piety such as five daily prayers, reciting the whole Qur'an at least once a year, fasting besides the month of Ramadan, etc. These

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teachers were glorified as carrying the beacons of enlightenment, which is still the emblem of the National Education Ministry. In common usage, however, *hoca* is still used as an informal way of addressing at teachers by those who are not actively endorsing, or uninformed about this Republican ideology.

[3] *Hafız* means someone who has memorized the entire Qur'an, and knows it by heart.

were the things I was taught as the basics of piety. Yet I was far from implementing them, let alone being a *hafiz* as this old man had assumed me to be.

But then I thought to myself that perhaps I was misreading piety. My piety was obviously quite different from the form of piety ascribed to me by that old man. I was definitely lacking in piety according to his mind's standards. But did anyone who fulfilled all the required and expected practices was necessarily as much connected to God in her everyday life as I was? My connection to God may sometimes be in the form of gratitude, sometimes request, sometimes seeking refuge and sometimes complaining, but one thing was certain that I was always in connection with God. As this experience with the old man showed me, the conventional understanding of piety was not sufficient to express my experience of piety. There was certainly a mismatch between how I looked and who I was, and I needed to learn if this mismatch was shared by other women like me — meaning that trying to be pious in non-traditional secular settings. I wondered to what extent this sense of disillusionment that I felt was repeated in other people's everyday life experiences, and yet how my experience was unique to my conditions of existence.

In one sense, this feeling of disillusionment was part of my life starting at the age of four, when my family moved to the city of Ordu, on the north of Turkey, from a village forty miles away. None of my parents were educated beyond the secondary school level; actually my mother was almost illiterate. I therefore I had no guidance from them in adjusting to the secular school I was

attending. I can say that I was living in two different worlds, one at the school and one at home; one with secular, modern, urban values and the other with religious, traditional, rural values. My brother had a harder time with his accent, while I was not exposed to the rural accent that much. But I was always aware that I had to behave like a *şehirli* (a city dweller), because being a *köylü* (a village dweller) was disgraceful at the school. And I gradually learned that being a religious person was part of this *köylü* identity and not "cool" at all.

So, I faced a serious dilemma from the age of ten when my mother insisted that I cover my head outside home, while I knew no one among my peers who wore the headscarf. I knew that my mom was genuinely afraid of my punishment in the Hereafter, as we were made to believe by the imams in the village that, a snake would be hanging down from each hairpiece that is left uncovered. At least, we both believed that not covering the hair was a sin. I was nevertheless delaying the avoidance of this sin due to the fear of being mocked by my friends at school.

When I finally made my decision to wear the headscarf outside of the school, I was already fourteen and at seventh grade at a school attended mostly by the high class families' kids. I was literally the only one wearing the headscarf in the whole school which had around seven hundred students. Of course, I was paying extra attention to prevent anyone from my school to know that I was covering my hair. I was hence never wearing the headscarf when I had my school uniform on. In other words, I made an agreement with the secular authority —i.e. the school, to keep my religion invisible in its realm which was embodied in my

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school uniform, therefore my uniform and my headscarf could never be worn together.

This mutually exclusive binary of religion and the secular in my mind was totally shaken during the occasions at school when they allowed civilian clothing, as I had weeks of excruciating inner struggles trying to evaluate the risks of each decision in my mind: If I chose not to wear civilian clothing and went with school uniform I would be the only one with school uniform there; if I wore the civilian clothing my friends and teachers would see my headscarf and mock me; if I wore the civilian clothing without the headscarf I would betray myself and the self-agreement I had made in my mind between the religious and the secular realm. And each time I tried one of these options and things turned out exactly as I imagined in my mind. I finally dared to enter school with my headscarf on one of these occasions when I was at the ninth grade. They still mocked me by saying things like "What have you done to yourself?" or "What is that thing on your head?" etc. But I did not take them seriously, for, by then, I considered them immature kids, while I saw myself a full subject, an adult: aware of my identity *with* the headscarf, and waiting to finish high school to declare it as the indispensable part of my subjectivity. I was hoping to be rescued from this fragmented subjectivity when I started higher education in Istanbul in 2001.

However, the headscarf ban at universities, which was put into effect after the military forced the Islamist party to resign from the government in 1997, was even a greater obstacle to the defragmentation of my identity. This was because I

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no longer had the school uniform to hide behind when I had to uncover my hair. In secondary school and high school, I rarely questioned the reasons for the headscarf ban; I did not even need to be told that it was prohibited to wear headscarf at school, because somehow I had internalized this idea that school is not a place for religion —or to tell the truth, not even religiosity though we had religion classes every year.

But university was different: I was fully aware that I was a *başörtülü* (one wearing the headscarf) young woman. I had to be carrying the headscarf on my head even when I was not physically wearing it. How could this be possible? By the time I started the university, the headscarf ban had been in effect for two years, and people had already found various ways of wearing the headscarf without actually wearing it. In other words, you could tell that a person was *başörtülü* outside the campus by simply looking at their hair (either wearing a wig or hair tied up clumsily with no style nor any coloring). Most of them were wearing long coats and had no make-up on their faces. I could never wear the long coats, but I could do the rest in the beginning. However, as time passed we all started to observe gradual changes in our outfit and hairstyle and finally began putting on make-up.

The struggle to maintain the *başörtülü* identity without wearing the *başörtüsü* (headscarf) was too intense and painstaking for all of us, as we were constantly warned about the value and importance of the headscarf for a Muslim woman while we were also encouraged to have a college degree in order to be

able to lift this ban for the future generations, or at least not let the future generations remain at the hands of the secularist elite. In other words, we believed that we had to take off our headscarf in order to be able to put the seal of Islam at the current Western disciplines of science.

On my part, I had a hard time figuring out how I could make a difference in English language and literature, as I laughed in my sleeve at my classmates' naïve attempt to try to proselytize our native British instructor who was an agnostic —actually he was the first non-Muslim person I had ever met in my life, let alone a non-believer. I had never talked about religion with a non-believer; therefore my ideas about religion and faith were never tested before. I still remember the shock I had when he told us that he stopped reading the Qur'an at the third page when he saw the verse "Indeed, those who disbelieve —it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn the—they will not believe. Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and hearing, and over their vision is a veil. And for them is a great punishment.[4]

That experience at the beginning of my undergraduate education and the later classes I took on literary criticism gave me an idea about the importance of hermeneutics and reading with a context; it also made me venture into the realm of religion and gender in order to make sense of my existence as a Muslim woman in relation to God and to the society I lived in. The collective mission encumbered on my physical appearance was now disturbing me as I started to see

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[4] Qur'an 2: 6-7.

it as an imposition of the patriarchy instead of God's real demand from me. And I knew that I could not study about religion in Turkey outside of the theology faculties, the very place where those "disturbing" norms like veiling, gender segregation and submissive female roles were being reproduced.

Besides, the headscarf ban in Turkey would still not let me attain a full sense of subjectivity, and my relationship with religion was quite shattered because of constantly shifting between the modes of being religious and being secular in my everyday life. I was clearly seeing that the path of religiosity which I was taught to walk on since my childhood was now fading. Because I was now seeing it similar to playing a computer game: collecting reward points by ritual prayers, fasting, reciting the Qur'an, giving charity; and avoiding punishment points by staying away from *haram* things like uncovering the body parts, mingling with the opposite sex, drinking alcohol, eating pork, backbiting, telling lies, etc.; and finally reaching at the Heaven at the end of the game. What it lacked was the sense of piety, a sense of connection with God beyond the expectation of reward and the fear of punishment.

The progressive feminist interpretation of the Qur'an, and the tendency to disregard the non-progressive Prophetic traditions on the grounds of having a week chain of transmission were new and attractive to me. Thus, I devoted my MA study in London, UK to explore modes of being pious in a liberal-progressive framework. Since the focus of both Western feminist theology and Islamic feminism was on the deeper connection with God rather than the specifics of

behavioral and bodily norms of the organized religion, I found Sufism, and especially Ibn 'Arabi's formulation of becoming a perfect human being as the most helpful tool to combine Islamic piety with the feminist theology's desire to construct ways of becoming a full subject as a woman. In other words, I tried to embrace a particular kind of feminism that allowed a conversation with the discipline of building a deep connection with God.

Despite my focus on the issue of belief versus practice, and trying to find ways for true belief rather than true behavior, I always had a feeling that I did not want to abandon the traditions that did not fit into this progressive framework. Carving up my individual pious self was incomplete without a meaningful framework to establish my relationship to my community, and without the bodily tools that would help me in my self-disciplining.

In that sense, coming to the USA for a doctoral degree in religious studies became a new step stone in my configuration of piety both as an analytical tool and as my personal quest. My exposure to scholars mainly as Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and Judith Butler helped me to have a different look at the classical scholars of Islam, like Al-Ghazzali, whom I had thought of quite negatively due to his unfavorable comments about women in his treatise on marriage. Mahmood and Asad provided me with a whole different understanding of the concept of ritual and bodily practices in religion, allowing me to appreciate al-Ghazzali's detailed formulation of cultivating a pious self through an exquisite study of

proper conducts and behaviors, which used to seem trivial to me compared to his lack of understanding of the feminist values that I embraced.

Judith Butler, on the other hand gave me a significant hint in configuring how community is involved in the creation of this subjective performativity outlined by the classical Islamic scholars. As she says, the main mistake I made, as did the other Islamic feminists like Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Fatima Mernissi and others do in their search for a woman-friendly Islam, was equating religion with belief, and thinking that we could reform religion by reforming the belief (i.e. The Qur'an and the Sunnah) through reinterpretation of the text. Seeking a certain ideology in a religion necessarily leads to a simplistic understanding of religion, which is much more complex than a belief system: "That effort to distinguish the cognitive status of religious and nonreligious belief misses the very fact that very often religion functions as a matrix of subject formation, an embedded framework for valuations, and a mode of belonging and embodied social practice."[5]

In one sense, the ethnography of piety conducted by Saba Mahmood opened up a new path for me in my academic career and my personal quest for piety. However, it was just a beginning, and far from translating my experience of piety as it was restricted to a specific Islamist movement in Egypt. Whereas, my context was much more complicated and overlapping with multiple

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[5] Judith Butler, "Is Judaism Zionism?" in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds. E. Mendieta & J. Vanantwerpen. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 72.

categorizations above the binary of liberal secular versus the Islamist realms. In that sense, I set out to conduct the ethnography of my own piety story by comparing it to the stories of other women who have gone through similar stations in their journey towards piety. In other words, I am both the subject and the object of this study.

About the research

This research aims to explore women's piety in the context of the modern secular public sphere in Turkey, which was established at the beginning of the twentieth century with the claim of being freed from religion. Today's public sphere, on the other hand, is inhabited and reconstructed by a great number of pious people, especially with pious Muslim women, who are actively involved, and participate in that public sphere. Considering the conditions that made this transformation of the public sphere possible, this research seeks to understand the self-cultivation process of these women in their everyday life experiences at the secular public sphere, i.e. the school, the workplace, the streets of the modern city, etc. In other words, my main research question is "how is it possible to build a pious self in a setting established on secular-liberal values?"

The second concern of this research is to explore the effects of Turkish secularism on the process of making a pious Muslim self. There have been lots of studies on Turkish secularism especially after the rise of Islamism in all over the Middle East, most of which were restricted to political analysis and the study of the secularist and Islamist elites acting on a kind of higher ground. I, on the other

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hand, wanted to look at the ground itself, and try to understand how secularism penetrated into the everyday lives of ordinary people, not like politicians, not like well-known families or elites, but regular, ordinary people that you see on the street. So, my aim was to understand to what extent secularism was able to penetrate into people's everyday lives. Because secularization is usually thought in the way that people take secularism and leave religion behind. But that's not how the situation goes. People keep both of them. And they transform each of them: religion is transformed by the secular and the secular is transformed by religion. This research aims to look at this process of mutual transformation.

Another aim of this research is to test the limits of conventional understandings of piety. What I understand as piety, what I experience as piety is not the same as what it means, and how it is used in political language. For example, in recent months the PM of Turkey said that "we want to raise a pious generation,"[6] which created a huge debate on whether the prime minister of a

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[6] The debate started when the secularist opposition party CHP (Republican People's Party) opposed a regulation in the undergraduate placement exam (LYS) that aimed to remove the obstacles for the vocational high school graduates and imam-hatip school graduates. Erdoğan uttered these words in his parliamentary group meeting on January 20, 2012: "Why do imam-hatip schools disturb you so much? Why are you disturbed when the graduates of these schools pass university entrance examination and study at a university? Why shouldn't a pious generation come?" When the CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu accused him for dividing people on the basis of pious and non-pious, Erdoğan quickly responded him by saying that: "There is no reference to people as pious or non-pious in my statements. There is the ideal of raising a pious generation. I stand behind my words. Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu, do you expect us, the AK Parti [Justice and Development Party], which has a conservative-democrat identity, to raise an atheist generation? This could only be your work or goal." Interestingly, Erdoğan's statements did not receive a widespread appreciation among the

secular state can aim to raise a pious generation. But besides that, the reactions of

people in the mainstream and the social media were directly against the very

concept of "pious" (*dindar*) and "piety" (*dindarlık*) which were used

synonymously with politically loaded terms like "Islamist" "fundamentalist" and

"reactionaries" and such.[7] To my experience, piety has nothing to do with these

concepts, and it definitely is not something to be afraid of. In that sense, I want to

see the ways in which we can extend or expand the scope of the definition of piety

conservative circles, for they asked for religious freedom instead of more state intervention in raising their children.

For a detailed analysis of the entire debate, see Fatma D. Zıbak, "Not State's Job to Raise People According to Religion," *Today's Zaman*, February 12, 2012, accessed May 21, 2012,

http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=271162
Also see Simon Cameron-Moore, "Turkish School Reforms Raise Debate on Islamism," *Reuters*, March 20, 2012, accessed May 21, 2012,
http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/03/20/uk-turkey-education-idUKBRE82J0GB20120320

[7] In the Turkish political terminology all of these terms are corresponded with a single word: *dinci*. It literally means "religionist" indicating that religion is equal to Islam in Turkish popular imagination, whether secularist or not. This word is used by the secularists to mean "utilizing religion for political ends" –a common feature of all the right-wing political parties according to them. An equally popular word they use is *irticacı*, meaning reactionaries for any opposition displayed against the Westernist elite and their reforms from the late Ottoman period to the current day. They use this word synonymously with *dinci* because the only remarkable opposition to the Kemalist reforms came from the (mostly Kurdish) religious leaders in the formative years of the Republic. So, in this political economy, piety is strictly restricted within the private realm, and it is totally deprived of its public manifestations. For the Islamists, then, the main struggle would be to emphasize the public manifestations of piety, at the expense of reducing it to forms and appearances.

with which also the secularists[8] too identify. Because I believe that piety is not the monopoly of Islamists, or the conservatives.

Furthermore, I believe that this limited and even distorted understanding of piety creates a fault line between two constructed lifestyles, one as conservative and the other as secular, while a brief observation of everyday life would show that neither conservative people are always pious, nor secular people are always impious. In other words, with this research, I hope to feature a brand new conceptualization of piety in the Islamic context, which can create the possibility of thinking about piety beyond politics and political categorizations disconnected from everyday life realities. Such a conceptualization of piety is only possible if we start from the very beginning —i.e. the establishment of a relationship with the divine (God) and the construction of a self in relation to the nature of this relationship between the human and the divine, and the society.

In search of an Islamic care of the self

Michel Foucault is certainly very important to the scholars of humanities and social sciences, and he has been referenced a million times in countless number of academic studies so far. However, what has been least highlighted among his theories is his analysis of the care of the self, which he deals with in the last volume of his History of Sexuality series. The book was actually a

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[8] The secularists I mean here are those who believe in the idea of the Divine, but defend secularism as a social-political principle, i.e. considering belief as a private matter, and not displaying public manifestations of religiosity. Those who do not believe in the divine or simply those for whom seeking a relationship with the divine is not a goal are not in the scope of this work.

rewriting of his lecture series at the Collége De France from 1981 to 1982,

compiled under the title of *Hermeneutics of the Subject* in 2005. In these lectures

he digs into the Antiquity and uncovers the ancient concept of the care of the self

(*epimeleia heautou*) in addition —and sometimes in contrast to, the concept of

knowing the self (*gnothi seauton*) which is better known in the history of

Christianity, as well as Islam:

> Throughout the period we call Antiquity, and in quite different modalities, the philosophical question of "how to have access to the truth" and the practice of spirituality (of the necessary transformations in the very being of the subject which will allow access to the truth), these two questions, these two themes, were never separate. … Now, leaping over several centuries, we can say that we enter the modern age …, when it is assumed that what gives access to the truth, the condition for the subject's access to the truth, is knowledge (*connaissance*) and knowledge alone….I think the modern age of the history of truth begins when knowledge itself and knowledge alone gives access to the truth. That is to say, it is when the philosopher (or the scientist, or simply someone who seeks the truth) can recognize the truth and have access to it in himself and solely through his activity of knowing, without anything else being demanded of him and without him having to change or alter his being as subject. [9]

The care of the self, therefore, used to be the prerequisite for knowing

oneself as the knower was required to transform his/her self in order to acquire the

knowledge of the truth. Foucault describes the care of the self as "an attitude

towards the self, others, and the world"[10] so as to become a full subject in relation

to one's self, one's society, and one's position in the cosmos. It "implies a certain

way of attending to what we think and what takes place in our thought [and]

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[9] Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982,* ed. Frédérick Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 17.
[10] Foucault, *Hermeneutics*, 11.

designates a number of actions exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself."[11]

The concept becomes especially useful in configuring one's relationship to the others in the subjectivation process. Foucault recounts the story of Alcibiades —a young and restless candidate of politician in the city of Athens, and his lover and teacher Socrates, who tries to prepare him for his future career. In other words, the context of the subjectivation is not a divine one here, but it includes the employment of the divine in cultivating a self that is worthy of governing the city and its people. In this story that Foucault tells us, Socrates establishes the ground for self-knowledge through the existence of the other, which is identical to the self. He uses the analogy of the eye seeing itself in the eye of someone else instead of a mirror. What the eye sees in the eyes of the other is nothing other than itself, meaning that "the soul will only see itself by focusing its gaze on an element having the same nature as itself, and more precisely, by looking at the element of the same nature as itself, by turning towards and fixing its gaze on that which is the very source of the soul's nature, that is to say, of thought and knowledge."[12] Hence, the soul must turn towards "the divine element" which is "the part that ensures thought and knowledge", and in this way "the soul will be able to grasp itself."[13]

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 70.
[13] Ibid.

Socrates explains it to Alcibiades that attending to one's self means turning one's soul to the divine, and one cannot know oneself without knowing the divine because: "Just as true mirrors are clearer, purer and brighter than the mirror of the eye, so God is purer and brighter than the best part of our soul…It is God, then, that we must look at: for whoever wishes to judge the quality of the soul, he is the best mirror of human things themselves, we can best see and know ourselves in him."[14]

So, what is the meaning of this information for Alcibiades, whose main concern is to learn the principles of governing? How will this information help him to care for his self and cultivate his self to be worthy of the truth of governing? When he grasps the knowledge of the divine, and thus knowledge of his self by caring for himself, his "soul will be endowed with wisdom as soon as it is in contact with the divine" and will "think and know the divine as the source of thought and knowledge." Then his soul will turn back to the world with this divine wisdom which teaches him how to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad; and "at this point the soul will be able to conduct itself properly, and being able to conduct itself properly, it will be able to govern the city."[15]

I see this piece of information very helpful in understanding how the subject formation was handled by the mediaeval Islamic scholars, mainly by Ibn 'Arabi and Al-Ghazzali, who authored the majority of the texts that established the Islamic conception of the self and the care and the disciplining of the self.

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[14] Ibid., 71.
[15] Ibid.

While Ibn 'Arabi configured the position of the human self in relation to the

Divine and the cosmos, Al-Ghazzali elucidated the technologies of the self that

one must employ in order to reach up to that position pointed at by Ibn 'Arabi.

The similarity between how Socrates and Ibn 'Arabi define the divine as mirrors

to human self-knowledge and perfection, is clearly a sign to the link between the

Ancient Greek wisdom and Mediaeval Islamic wisdom which revived the former:

> In your seeing your true self, He is your mirror and you are His
> mirror in which He sees His Names and their determinations,
> which are nothing other than Himself.[16]

According to Ibn 'Arabi's formulation of the human-the cosmos-and the

Divine triangle, The Real/The Absolute created the Cosmos "as an

undifferentiated thing without any of the spirit in it" that manifested the Names

but separately in each object, which he calls "an unpolished mirror" that cannot

reflect the whole Names at once. So He created the Human being, *insan,* which

has a dual meaning in Arabic, being the human being and the pupil of the eye. Ibn

'Arabi takes this second meaning as a major reference to his point that *insan*, who

in his/her perfect form, encompasses all the Divine Names in him/herself, "is as

the pupil is for the eye through which the act of seeing takes place." So the Real,

the unknowable Absolute, in some way stoops to the state of being God for the

human being that He created in order to see the essence of His Names, which at

the end of the day, is nothing other than Him.[17] Unlike the angels and the Cosmos,

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[16] Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom (Fusus al-Hikam)*, trans. R.W.J.
Austin (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1980), 65.
[17] Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus*, 51.

which display a limited manifestation of the Real, the Perfect *insan* is given the skill to unite "the polarity of qualities" in him/herself, which allows a perfect reflection of the self-manifestation of the Real. Hence, *insan*, or Adam who symbolizes the human species as a whole, "is the mirror that reflects the ontological level of Divinity [the Real as the 'God'] and acts as a receptacle for the manifestation of all the Divine Names. Nothing else possesses such receptivity."[18]

Ibn 'Arabi asserts with a certain commitment that the Perfect Man is the only one among existents who can contain God "through receiving His image" or "being the locus of God's self-manifestation."[19] He explains this self-manifestation by the analogy of mirror, saying that just as God is the mirror for human being to see his own essence, human being is also the mirror which reflects God's attributes. He points at the relationship between the image and its reflection on the mirror by explaining the removal of the mirror which separates the actual image from its reflection:

> Try, when you look at yourself in a mirror, to see the mirror itself, and you will find that you cannot do so…In your seeing your true self, He is your mirror and you are His mirror in which He sees His Names and their determinations, which are nothing other than Himself.[20]

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[18] William Chittick, "The Chapter Headings of the *Fusus,*" *the Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 2 (1984): 7. accessed October 7, 2012, http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articlespdf/fususchapterheadings.pdf.
[19] Ibn 'Arabi, *Futuhat al-Makkiyya*, *Vol. 2*, ed. O. Yahia (Cairo: Al-Hay'at al-Misriyyat al-`Amma li'l-Kitab, 1972), 464.
[20] Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus*, 65.

Being a mirror to God might seem like a given status to every human being, but Ibn 'Arabi makes it clear that this is a potential that can only be realized through perfection, i.e. self-disciplining.

This is where the bodily practices and subjecting the self to the Islamic law becomes essential, and Al-Ghazzali serves as one of the best teachers in the Islamic scholarship of the ways of this perfection of the self. In fact, he uses the exact word Foucault chooses for explaining care of the self: attending to one's self: "Man (*sic*.), until he descends to his grave, must always watch over his soul (*nafs*) with attention, to discover in what degree it is obedient to the holy law and in harmony with knowledge. Whoever does not thus watch over and guard himself, is most surely in a delusion and in the way of a just destruction. It is the first step in Islamism[21], that a man should keep his soul subject to the law."[22] He introduces the position of human being in regards to the cosmos and the Divine, long before Ibn 'Arabi, by referring to the mirror analogy, or the ancient "Imago Dei" conception, and claiming the human body to be a kind of microcosm:

> "God created man in his own image." What does this mean, and how is it known to be true? Know, beloved, that the sovereign recognizes no other person except the sovereign himself. If the Lord had not appointed you to be sovereign over the body as over a kingdom, if he had not confided to you the affairs of its government, and had not given you this brief copy as model, how would you have been able to comprehend the sovereign, who is independent of reasoning and of

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[21] Islamism means here the system of Islam, not the political meaning it gained in the twentieth century.
[22] Mohamed Al-Ghazzali, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, trans. Claud Field (London: J. Murray, [1910] 2011), Kindle edition.

place, and who cannot be known by argument or by hypothesis or in any other way? Thanks and praises be given to him who is without beginning and eternal, to him who is unceasingly beneficent, to him who made you sovereign over yourself, who subjected your body to you for a kingdom, who made your heart to be an empyreal throne, and made the animal spirit which is the fountain of the heart, to be a seraphic messenger. He appointed the brain to be the throne, and the treasury of the imagination to be the Preserved Tablet. He made the cupola of the brain, which is the source of the nerves and the mine of the faculties, to be like the vault of heaven and the stars. He appointed the fingers and the pen to serve the elemental qualities of nature, and subjected them to your order. He made you more excellent and noble than all other creatures, and to exercise rule over all possible things.[23]

However, Al-Ghazzali draws the limits of this self-governmentality very quickly by reminding the human subject that "He has bidden you to beware and not to be heedless of your soul, which is your kingdom and dominion: for to be regardless of your soul is to be regardless of your Creator and Benefactor."[24]

Piety as a matter of becoming

How is this conception of the care of the self, related to my analysis of piety? This is directly related to the question of what kind of a piety I am trying to discover and cultivate. In fact, the reason for my search for a new definition of piety is the double meaning attributed to the same word in Turkish, *dindar*, which simultaneously means piety and religiosity. Before starting to think about piety as an analytical category, I did not differentiate my experience of being *dindar* as being either pious or religious. This was simply because I used to cultivate my

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[23] Al-Ghazzali, *The Alchemy*.
[24] Ibid.

relationship with God in my native language —i.e. Turkish, which in and of itself, says a lot about the role of language in the self-cultivation process. I did not have the linguistic tools to identify the kind of relationship I wanted to establish between myself and God: *dindar* was already too much politicized and reduced into practices and appearances without carrying the spirituality in it. The word *takva* (Ar. *taqwa*) which is translated as righteousness as well as piety, was the closest one to the ideal relationship between Allah and His servants, as Allah declared in the Qur'an that "Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you."[25]

There is not a Turkish word corresponding with the word *taqwa*, so we just gave it Turkish characters, and the meaning of *takva* was determined by the dominant voices in the interpretation of the Qur'an.[26] In the end, *takva* came to

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[25] Qur'an 49: 13.

[26] The concept of *taqwa* has recently been redefined by some Muslim feminist scholars in different terms. Amina Wadud, for instance defines it as righteousness. It is moral personality for Asma Barlas and equilibrium for Nimat Barazangi. Despite these different terms they use to talk about *taqwa*, all these scholars share the goal of attempting to reread the Qur'an from a feminist perspective. They suggest that the goal of this rereading is to reveal the egalitarian essence of the Quran that they argue was buried under centuries of patriarchal interpretation. But in Turkish society, this Arabic term remained within the realm of the scholarly elite, and could not make into the popular usage as the Turkish word *dindar* could. In the Turkish context, understanding *takva* as piety or any of these translations would not work, because it is a term that is rarely attributed to someone, and thus not as accessible as piety which is translated as *dindarlık*. In the popular usage, there has been no category of "muttakiler" (those who have takva) outside of the realm of theology, while "dindarlar" (those who are *dindar*) has a very common usage albeit with different meanings attached to it. In that sense, tracing *takva* in the everyday lives of people is much less possible than tracing *dindarlık*, which corresponds to both religiosity and piety in the Turkish context.

mean being the most of everything the classical Sharia wants a Muslim to be, and being the least of what it forbids a Muslim to be. The most righteous woman was then the one with the largest veil with the darkest color. She certainly had no contact with the opposite sex, and stayed at home, and was extremely careful about what ate, how she talked, how she looked, and etc. In short, being the noblest in the sight of God was equated with being the most obedient to the Islamic law, without any implication of a deep connection with God other than seeking His reward (Heaven) and fearing His punishment (Hell).

Now that I have the language which provides me with two different words for being *dindar*, I would name this approach as religiosity, the outward manifestation of appertaining to a religious tradition, which is usually thought to be sufficient for salvation from eternal punishment. However, this is certainly not what Ibn ʿArabi means when he talks about the Perfect Human (*insan-ı kâmil*), who is the noblest of all creatures. Heaven and Hell are not the concerns of Ibn ʿArabi or Al-Ghazzali, as their main concern is to establish a relationship between the servant and God that would lead to the unification of both at the ultimate point. Even when Al-Ghazzali warns his reader against eternal torment, he makes clear that the reader should recognize "that God's design in creating you was, that you should know him and love him, you should never cease for one moment to walk with humility and prayer in the path of obedience."[27] Pious would be the one

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[27] Al-Ghazzali, *The Alchemy*.

Al-Ghazzali calls as the "traveler on the way and seeker after the love of God."[28] Being a traveler and a seeker is a sign of becoming, a process in which one constantly strives for the next station ahead, to the point of letting the self go to become united with God, as Ibn 'Arabi describes in his mirror metaphor.

Seeing piety as becoming, as an ongoing process, allows space for a broader definition which would be inclusive of each ways of building a relationship with God within a religious tradition. It also implies a whole new conception of the divine as immanent and the ultimate potential of the human being at the end of a process of self-cultivation. The concept of becoming is also glorified by the French feminist thinker Luce Irigaray, who sees it as the complementary step of women's becoming subject on their own terms without having to imitate men or fulfilling roles ascribed to them by men. The horizon of becoming is the key for creating a harmonious relationship between women and men, if each knows the value of what is given to them by God and strives for the perfection of those parts:

> God forces us to do nothing more except *become*. The only task, the only obligation laid upon us is to become divine men and women, to become perfectly, to refuse to allow parts of ourselves to shrivel and die that have the potential for growth and fulfillment.[29]

In that sense, piety as becoming is not possible with the conception of an utterly transcendent God, which would not provide the constant motivation for continuing the journey for perfection; as Ibn 'Arabi warns the traveler:

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 69.

If you insist only on His transcendence, you restrict Him,
And if you insist only on His immanence you limit Him.
You are not He and you are He and
You see Him in the essences of things both boundless and limited.[30]

Ibn 'Arabi says that the Real *(al-Haqq)* is in constant self-manifestation which never repeats itself. Therefore, the heart of the Perfect Human should be ready for recognizing infinite types of God's self-manifestation, which requires him/her to be in a constant mode of fluidity and change. The Perfect *insan*, in Ibn 'Arabi's terms is never rigid or fixed; he/she should be always in the course of becoming, his/her heart being "as the setting of the stone of the ring, conforming to it in every way, being circular, square, or any other shape according to the shape of the stone itself, for the setting conforms to the stone and not otherwise."[31]

In that sense, I approach piety as an ongoing process, hence immeasurable with the conventional tools of dress (pious if wearing the headscarf, more pious if she is wearing a face veil), participation in rituals (pious if performing the five daily ritual prayers, more pious if performing extra prayers), political views (pious if demanding the secular government to abide by the Sharia, more pious if striving to be governed by a caliph under a Sharia regime), or lifestyle choices (pious if stays away from the luxuries of modern life, more pious if lives in total asceticism), and so on. I aim to problematize all these conventional understandings of piety, particularly in the current Turkish society, with the case

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[30] Ibn Arabi, *Fusus*, 75.
[31] Ibid., 149.

studies I will present in the following chapters. And I will show how different

conceptions of piety exist and aspired by the subjects I worked with.

Disciplinary approach

I came to know anthropology of religion quite recently, and ever since I

have admired its sensitivity to the complexities of the human beings in their

individual, social, and spiritual settings. A particular sociological approach which

finds its survival in generalization and erasing of unique human differences did

not appeal to me as much as the way anthropology pays attention to the

uniqueness of the human being. Similar to Saba Mahmood's understanding, I

found "anthropology's commitment to thinking critically about difference unique

in the human sciences and worthy of engagement and exploration."[32]

As Mahmood also says in the same interview, it was Talal Asad's short

article called "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam" that initiated the

anthropological turn in my interest in learning about religion in general, and Islam

in particular.

Islam as a discursive tradition

In this short article, written in 1986, Asad focuses on the complexity of

understanding the categories of Muslim and Islam. If anthropology is about

studying human beings then what we can study about Islam is basically the

category of Muslim, and Islam to the extent of its effect on the life of the Muslim:

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[32] Nathan Schneider, "Religious liberty, minorities, and Islam: An interview with Saba Mahmood," *The Immanent Frame*, August 17, 2011, accessed June 10, 2012, http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/08/17/religious-liberty-minorities-and-islam/.

"A Muslim's beliefs about the beliefs and practices of others are his own beliefs. And like all such beliefs, they animate and are sustained by his *(sic)* social relations with others."[33] In other words, knowing about the Sharia —i.e. the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the other basic Islamic texts— is not equal to knowing about Muslims, or Islam as an anthropological category. Because, there has never been a time when a Muslim society had the Shariah governing the whole social life; comparing to the modern states, indeed, one sees that "the administrative and legal regulations of such secular states are far more pervasive and effective in controlling the details of people's lives than anything to be found in Islamic history."[34]

If Islam's foundational texts are not giving us the definition of Islam, then should we abandon this concept altogether and go after the various islams, as some scholars have suggested,[35] in the ways they are manifested in each Muslim society? If anything can be studied as Islam, then how do you study Islam as an anthropological category? Against this idea of many islams, Asad gives a helpful conceptual tool which approaches Islam as a singular, albeit diverse and constantly transforming discursive tradition:

> If one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith. Islam is

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[33] Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986), 2.
[34] Asad, *Anthropology of Islam*, 13.
[35] Talal Asad's interlocutors in this article were Ernest Gellner and Clifford Geertz. They were trying to show the diversity in Islam but they went to a point of erasing the commonalities.

neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition.[36]

As Asad says, there is a single corpus of Islam that Muslims all share; and an anthropological category of Islam should be understood as historical, i.e. there is a point it starts (not eternal). In other words, the idea that "Islam means submission, and everyone who submits to God is a Muslim" cannot be an anthropological category. We must recognize the centrality of the sacred sources in the everyday lives of Muslims, while being attentive to the diverse ways of interpretation and appropriation of these sacred sources.

We must remember that Islam is a living tradition which includes people, power, politics, gender dynamics and geographical conditions. As a living tradition, it constantly changes, goes through rapturous moments, and yet keeps some kind of continuity. And as a religious tradition, it has to have a claim for the sacred —in other words, it cannot be simply studied as a secular category. An anthropological study of Islam must take different living practices and realities of Islam into consideration, and it must be able to capture transformations of the subjects in their relation to this discursive tradition.[37]

Building on this view, I claim that piety occurs in the context of the sacred sources and the secular factors that shape one's relationship to these sources. Considering that piety is happening within a living, discursive tradition, one

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[36] Asad, *Anthropology of Islam*, 14.
[37] As can be seen in my own example that was mentioned in the Prologue.

cannot see piety as a fixed matter. It is a becoming that takes place over a variety

of discursive grounds overlapping each other.

Studying the everyday life

The everyday life analysis shows these multiple and overlapping loci of

power. As Lila Abu-Lughod suggests, one cannot understand a Muslim's life

simply by looking at the religious texts:

> In popular and much scholarly thinking in the West, Islam is perceived as
> all-determining. This view corresponds to that of many Muslims who
> believe that they should indeed be guided by the ideals of Islamic faith and
> practice… However, I want to show to both groups…that not all events or
> utterances can be explained by reference to Islam.[38]

The everyday life, indeed, reveals that there is much more than Islam, and

even Islam is quite plural within itself. Focusing on the everyday life is like

walking in the city, a *tactic*[39] in Michel de Certeau's words, through which the

pedestrian appropriates the topographical system of the city in ways unknown to

the owners of the *strategy,*[40] the city planners.

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[38] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's World: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 23.

[39] de Certeau defines tactic in this way: "I call a "tactic"…a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance." Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xx.

[40] "I call a "strategy" the calculus of force relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment". A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clienteles",

The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered. At the most elementary level, it has a triple "enunciative" function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian…; it is a spatial acting-out of the place…; and it implies *relations* among pragmatic "contracts" in the form of movements…It thus seems possible to give a preliminary definition of walking as a space of enunciation.[41]

What this metaphor kindles in my mind is the possibilities of different ways of appropriating piety, as in the case of space, and language. This seems contrary to Lacan's totalistic account of symbols, which

envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him 'by flesh and blood'; so total that they bring to his birth...the shape of his destiny; so total that they give the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and even beyond his death...[42]

However, even this totalistic account does not override the possibilities of appropriating these symbols in the moment of happening, as shown by De Certeau, as well as Mikhail Bakhtin, whose ideas on the question of language and discourse open up the possibilities of multiple ways of being a subject, if we follow Lacan's idea that subjectivity occurs within language. His conception of "dialogized heteroglossia," in particular, highlights the complexity that language is never completely one's own, but also one's language is always unique:

The authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as

language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance.[43]

An example to this concept of heteroglossia would be the word "modern" in Turkish. Although its Turkish equivalent "çağdaş" and the Ottoman-Turkish equivalent "asrî" are also available in the language, the French derivative "modern" is the most commonly used word. However, it takes on different meanings in different environments: among the Republican women, being modern means dressing up in Western outfit, while the conservative women I worked with used that word to mean highly-educated and liberal-minded. Among the youth, being modern means literacy of technology, while for the urban older generation (Republican generation in particular) being modern means being Kemalist.

Similarly, the concepts of religion and piety do take on different meanings for individuals who have certain relationships to those concepts, even though there exists a general meaning for them in their social usage. Hence, while Islam and piety have common meanings in collective imagination, individuals might employ unique meanings for these concepts depending on their relationship to the divine, to the sacred sources, and to their society.

Diverse forms of piety

This question of unity vs. uniqueness should also be considered in studying Islam. Carl Ernst, for example, brings a good point in interpreting Islam

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[43] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 272.

in his book titled *Following Muhammad*. He refers to the dialogue between
Gabriel and Prophet Muhammad in the Islamic tradition, where Gabriel comes to
the presence of the Prophet and his companions in the form of a man, and asks
him "What is Islam?", "What is Iman?" and "What is Ihsan?" After he answers all
these questions, he confirms about receiving the correct answers, and leaves.

Then the Prophet turns to his companions and asks them: "Did you
recognize that man?" When nobody answers affirmatively, he says: "He was
Gabriel. He came to teach you your religion."[44] "This striking dialogue," Ernst
says, "indicates a structure of religious values that proceeds from the outer to the
inner."[45] Submission (*islam*) [46], the practical aspect being the "first and most
external step," followed by faith (*iman*)[47] and spiritual virtue (*ihsan*)[48] which "are
affairs of the mind and heart, creating the basis for religious consciousness."[49]
Through telling this story and the depth of meaning it entails, Ernst comes to the
conclusion that current interpretations of Islam which exclude the faith and

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[44] Carl Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 63-64.
[45] Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, 63-64.
[46] These are: uttering the phrase "There is no deity but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger"; performing the ritual prayer (*namaz*); fasting (*oruc*) during the month of Ramadan; giving a certain amount of your property for charity (*zekat*); performing the pilgrimage (*Hac*) to the Ka'ba in Mecca.
[47] These are faith in the existence and unity of Allah; faith in the previous revelations; faith in the existence of angels; faith in the existence and righteousness of all the prophets from Adam to Muhammad; faith in the existence of the Hereafter and the Judgment Day; faith in the Divine plan (*kader*) and the realization of that Divine plan (*kaza*) and that Allah is the creator of good and evil.
[48] Having the consciousness of seeing Allah and being seen by Allah all the time.
[49] Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, 64.

spiritual virtue and reduce Islam to its practices "present an impoverished picture of this religious tradition."[50] In other words, there are always possibilities of different ways of being pious, and the practical aspects should not be the only criteria for measuring piety.

The story of Moses and the shepherd in Rumi's *Mesnevi*[51] is also a striking example of how different layers of relationship to God and understanding God are possible. Here is an excerpt from the story, which ends with God's declaration that He does not care about the wordings and phrases as long as His servants come to Him with a burning heart:

> Moses saw a shepherd on the way, who was saying, "O God who choosest (whom Thou wilt), Where art Thou, that I may become Thy servant and sew Thy shoes and comb Thy head?
> That I may wash Thy clothes and kill Thy lice and bring milk to Thee, O worshipful One;
> That I may kiss Thy little hand and rub Thy little foot, (and when) bedtime comes I may sweep Thy little room,
> O Thou to whom all my goats be a sacrifice, O Thou in remembrance of whom are my cries of ay and ah!"
> The shepherd was speaking foolish words in this wise. Moses said, "Man, to whom is this (addressed)?"
> He answered, "To that One who created us; by whom this earth and sky were brought to sight."
> "Hark!" said Moses, "you have become very backsliding (depraved); indeed you have not become a Moslem, you have become an infidel.

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Mevlana Celaleddin Rûmî, as is known in Turkish historical accounts, is a famous Sufi master who lived in the city of Konya in the 13th century. He is world-famous with his exquisite poems of wisdom and divine love, which he wrote in Persian, and are compiled in his most famous work *Mesnevi*, or the Masnavi. He is the founder of the Mevlevi order, who are well-known for their particular form of worship called *sema*. Detailed information about Rumi and the Mevlevi order can be found at the website prepared by his descendants: http://mevlana.net/mevlana.html

What babble is this? What blasphemy and raving? Stuff some cotton into your mouth!

The stench of your blasphemy has made the (whole) world stinking: your blasphemy has turned the silk robe of religion into rags.

Shoes and socks are fitting for you, (but) how are such things right for (One who is) a Sun?

If you do not stop your throat from (uttering) these words, a fire will come and burn up the people.

If a fire has not come, (then) what is this smoke? Why has your soul become black and your spirit rejected (by God)?

If you know that God is the Judge, how is it right for you (to indulge in) this doting talk and familiarity?

Truly, the friendship of a witless man is enmity: the high God is not in want of suchlike service.

…….

He (the shepherd) said, "O Moses, thou hast closed my mouth and thou hast burned my soul with repentance."

He rent his garment and heaved a sigh, and hastily turned his head towards the desert and went (his way).

A revelation came to Moses from God—"Thou hast parted My servant from Me.

Didst thou come (as a prophet) to unite, or didst thou come to sever?

……..

I have bestowed on every one a (special) way of acting: I have given to everyone a (peculiar) form of expression.

In regard to him it is (worthy of) praise, and in regard to thee it is (worthy of) blame: in regard to him honey, and in regard to thee poison.

…….

O Moses, they that know the conventions are of one sort, they whose souls and spirits burn are of another sort."[52]

I quoted almost the whole story in order to highlight the importance of

remembering to look beyond the embodied practices while conducting an

ethnographic study on the piety of Muslim women, as previously, and

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[52] Rumi, *The Masnavi, Book 2*, trans. Javid Mujaddedi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 101-105.

successfully done in recent years by Saba Mahmood in *Politics of Piety*,[53]Lara

Deeb in *An Enchanted Modern*,[54]and Sylvia Frisk in *Submitting to God*[55] on the

contexts of Egypt, Lebanon, and Malaysia respectively. In addition to works on

women's piety in Muslim societies, many other successful accounts of the public

piety of these Muslim societies have been introduced by Charles Hirschkind,[56]

and Amira Mittermaier[57] (Egypt), Stefania Pandolfo[58] (Morocco), Mandana E.

Limbert[59](Oman), and many others if we include the non-ethnographic ones.

Ethnographies of Islamic piety

Many of these works have shown to me the value of studying embodied

practices and zooming in everyday life to understand the global Islamist current in

various Muslim societies.[60] Not only as a scholar but as a Muslim, I learnt a lot

regarding the diversity of being a pious Muslim. At least, they broke the

mechanistic account of Islamist movements which described them, as Saba

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[53] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 2012).
[54] Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).
[55] Sylvia Frisk, *Submitting to God: Women and Islam in Urban Malaysia* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2009).
[56] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
[57] Amira Mittermeier, *Dreams That Matter: Egyptian Landscape of the Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).
[58] Stefania Pandolfo, *Impasse of the Angels: Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
[59] Mandana E. Limbert, *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory, and Social life in an Omani Town* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).
[60] This does not mean that they have neglected the importance of internal belief (*iman*), for there is a strong emphasis on *iman*, especially in the works of Mahmood, Deeb, and Mittermeier.

Mahmood says, "largely in functionalist and reductive terms…a displacement of something more fundamental –economic frustration, lack of democracy, and so on."[61]

For years and years, I had read many works on the veiling and headscarf issue which became suffocating after a while, but only with Saba Mahmood's approach to bodily practices and especially veiling that I was able to give a new and a more personal meaning to my insistence on covering my hair despite my growing suspicions on its religious justifications. This kind of approach to bodily practices in religion helped me to develop a new understanding of piety that recognized the interconnectedness between the individual, the community, and the Divine in creating a pious subject.

Mahmood's help was more on my conception of the human-divine relationship, which gave an explanation about Islamist women's acceptance of the norms that are reproducing gender inequality in the society: they cared more about being a pious Muslim than having equal rights with men in the world. And she was right that understanding these kinds of "misogynist" bodily practices as a symbolic act would not help in grasping the real nature of this practice for the people who actually perform it, whereas "an understanding in which a bodily act is both an expression of, and a means to, the realization of the subject"[62] would do

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[61] Schneider, "Interview with Saba Mahmood."

[62] Saba Mahmood, preface to *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [2005] 2012), xi.

more justice to the inner motivations of these pious Muslim women in maintaining and valuing those practices.

On the other hand, she makes so little reference to the involvement of the society (the others) in this process of subjectivation, which cannot be disregarded since, in Judith Butler's words, "…the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent on these social norms."[63] Or, "A subject becomes a subject primarily by recognizing its relationship to and separation from others and the surrounding world," as Shahla Talebi suggests.[64] This social self is more carefully considered by Lara Deeb, as in her context, piety had to be public as a manifestation of the resistance to the Israeli occupation; and

> in order to fully enact public piety, women had to participate in the public arena, most obviously through their community service activities, but also through participation in Ashura commemorations and engagement with changing religious discourses in the authentication process. As such, public participation was crucial to both their piety and the spiritual and material progress of the community as a whole…[65]

Amira Mittermaier's ethnography of dreams, on the other hand, opens up the possibility of non-self or the collapse of the self as a manifestation of piety, as she analyzes the effects of the Prophetic dreams seen by pious people in Egypt, and argues that these dreams "matter in the sense of having significance in

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[63] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004), 2.
[64] Shahla Talebi, "Who is Behind the Name? A Story of Violence, Loss, and Melancholic Survival in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 7 (2011): 45.
[65] Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern*, 213.

people's lives and more literally, in the sense of having an impact on the visible,

material world."[66]

Like Mahmood and Hirschkind, she attempts to understand the Islamic

Revival in Egypt in relation to the experiences of the ordinary people and their

embodied practices in everyday life situations. However, her work diverges from

theirs in terms of its field site and arguments. Instead of working with mosques,

preaching, sermons, or study groups, she relates her field study to the "saint

shrines, the dead, and the *barzakh*."[67] In this way, she complicates the very

concept of the real on which subjectivity and agency are built whether in the

context of a secular-liberal subject or an Islamist subject. She brings up "a

barzakhian perspective" which

> ...ruptures binary outlooks and invites us to think beyond the present and
> the visible. It invites us to dwell on the in-between. I believe that a serious
> consideration of this in-between as an ethnographic object -one of
> discourse, practice, and contestation- and as an analytical tool can offer us
> insight into modes of being in the world that might not easily be
> intelligible from within rationalist, secular vocabularies but are
> nevertheless of political and ethical relevance to my interlocutors.[68]

This strategy of dwelling on the in-between, takes her to a further

approach towards agency and subjectivity employed by Mahmood, who is

interested in the ways in which exterior practices shape the interior states, and

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[66] Amira Mittermeier, *Dreams That Matter: Egyptian Landscapes of the Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 2. *Barzakh*, in Islamic terminology, is the liminal space between this world and the afterlife. It is the name given to the form of life spent in the grave until the time of the Judgment Day comes.
[67] Mittermeier, *Dreams*, 4.
[68] Ibid.

Hirschkind, who looks at how the sound from the cassette sermons cultivates an ethic of listening. For Mittermaier, "in both ethnographies the believer's self still figures as a central locus, or repository of agency." However, her research portrays Talal Asad's argument that "...contrary to the discourse of many radical historians and anthropologists, *agent* and *subject* (where the former is the principle of effectivity and the latter of consciousness) do not belong to the same theoretical universe and should not, therefore, be coupled."[69] Because, as she explains, "while dream-visions are agentive in the sense that they affect actions, [her] interlocutors simultaneously understand them as mediums because, for them, agency ultimately belongs to God.[70] From the way her interlocutors express their visitational dreams as some kind of a spirit possession, as something falling on them, she seeks out the possibility of a spiritual world that is not completely controlled by the subject.

"Romanticizing difference" and the insider/outsider question

What has not been done in any of these ethnographies is to look beyond the Islamist or organized networks to "anthropologize" —in other words to draw attention to the difference of these groups from the mainstream and the dominant liberal-secular view in Western academia. In other words, I, as a Muslim reader, get the impression that Western anthropologists are more interested with what is different and marginal, at the expense of overlooking the mainstream majority in

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[69] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 16.
[70] Mittermeier, *Dreams*, 242.

those societies. In some sense, I could describe this approach as "a tendency of romanticizing difference,"[71] or seeing difference as more valuable than similarity in producing an anthropological work.

It is a striking fact that all these everyday life ethnographies in the Islamic world arise from the context of Islamization, where the dominant life-organizing power is Islam, while in my own case as a Muslim in a nation-state with a predominantly Muslim population I have only felt that power in very limited and encircled spaces. Even during the years when Islamism was on a rise synchronously with other countries in the region, I, as a mere secondary school student from a non-politicized[72] family, never felt the strength of it in the air I breathed in my actual environment. I could see the numerical increase in the number of women covering up their head, and the sudden abundance of Islamic publications on the streets and the annual book fairs; yet I could not sense any moderation in the secularist and nationalist indoctrination at the school, where I spent two thirds of my day. I was still a strong fan of Atatürk, still proud of being

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[71] This is a reference to the phrase of "romanticizing resistance" mentioned by Lila Abu-Lughod in "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women," (1990): 42; Talal Asad in *Formations of the Secular* (2003), 71.; and Saba Mahmood in *Politics of Piety* (2005), 8.

[72] Having no political affiliations other than voting for the mainstream right-wing parties which appealed to them more than the anti-religious left-wing parties. Still my parents did not have a consistent choice of political views as they had voted for the social-democratic party in the early 1990s, but they opted for the Islamist Refah party in the next elections. In other words, their voting choices are still determined primarily by economic concerns instead of a certain ideology, which is the case for the majority of voters in Turkey (See the conclusion for a more detailed analysis of this voter behavior).

a Turk, and had no favor for the Islamist political party which had just been ousted by the military regime by the time I finished high school in the year 2001.

The political language, though, totally ignored this experience of mine as the headscarf I was wearing had already been defined as a political symbol of the opposite of everything I mentioned above. For all these years, both in Turkey and abroad, I felt the pain of being seen as different simply because of my headscarf. I was different, as everyone is in their own way; yet it was not only because of the headscarf I was wearing. This also implied that I was the same with all the women who wore the headscarf, as we were lumped into the category of *başörtülü*[73] or more pejoratively *türbanlı*[74] within Turkey. In the West, though, this took place in the form of filling us all in the jug of "veiled women" or even "Muslim women" in a more sloppy way; making me feel like being in a zipped folder.

Therefore, all the talks about multiculturalism and respecting differences miss the target as they serve to the process of polarization instead of dialogue. Whereas, I believe that knowing the other should lead to knowing one's own self and appreciating the similarities between them instead of building culture walls between them. With its capacity of being a mirror to diverse human societies to see and know each other, I believe that anthropology should also be able to create

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[73] *Başörtülü* means "those who wear the headscarf" which is preferred by conservative, Islamist and liberal people in order to refer it as a religious practice or symbol.

[74] *Türbanlı* means "those who wear the turban" the name attributed to the headscarf worn by young women in order to separate it from the traditional way of covering the head, which had a social connotation rather than a political one for the secularists. In other words, *başörtülü* meant simply a lower class woman, while *türbanlı* meant an Islamist.

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dialog and mutual sharing, instead of promoting difference between the researcher and the research field.

What is clearly seen in these ethnographic accounts on Muslim piety by Western scholars, who lack nativeness to their field sites in terms of affiliation and shared experiences, is the openness of their interlocutors to remove the barriers. In most of these ethnographic accounts, the natives' desire to turn these outsider researchers into insiders can be sensed, while the researchers are always self-aware that they are "guests" in the "foreign land" which they came to explore. It is even possible to feel a subtle sense of superiority in some of these researchers' mentioning of how their interlocutors were trying to impress and thus convert them to Islam, an offer which they kindly refused. I could not help getting this kind of feeling while I was reading Sylvia Frisk's account of her relationship with her interlocutors in Malaysia:

> As friends, these women have a deep concern for my personal religious beliefs. Firdaus, my adopted sister and dear friend, has ever since we met the first time in 1995 nurtured a hope that I would see the beauty and truth in Islam the same way that she does. She has explained the verses of the Koran to me hundreds of times, she has introduced me to female sessions of devotion, always making me aware of the spiritual aspects of everyday life and how the words of God may be experienced in any small detail. She does not give up on me and has never shown any disappointment or frustration over my personal inability or ignorance to see the world as she does. "You are simply not ready yet," is her calm comment to my lack of personal commitment. Other women have worked equally hard to guide me both as an anthropologist trying to understand the meaning of religious practice in this particular context, but also as a friend, who, as they see it, is in need of guidance from God. ...I know that they have hoped and desired that I, personally, would discover the truth in Islam along the way. While I have disappointed them on that point, I have written this book

with deep respect for the religious lives they lead and for their willingness to open them up to me.[75]

Because their starting point was an "illiberal realm" from their perspective, these accounts of piety by secular Western scholars, particularly those ones by women who were distinctly different from the communities they analyzed, might have contributed to an understanding of Islamic piety as a distinct category peculiar to these illiberal realms.

Therefore, a great concern to me in conducting this research was to explore the diversity of experiencing piety under and beyond all the veils of categories such as pious, Islamist, conservative, or membership to such and such pietist community or Sufi order. I believed that in my research, my difference would be an obstacle to me, as my interlocutors would either try to proselytize me or impress me (as they did to the Western, and especially, female researchers), or they would think I was more pious than them, so they would try to prove their piety to me. I know this, because this is what I have been experiencing in my daily life in Turkey. If there is an insider-outsider position in ethnographic research, I knew that the outsiders always had an easier access to the local community, but only with the risk of accessing to the kind of data to which the local people desired to allow access.

Especially in the conservative circles, men respect and desire to impress the uncovered, Western looking women more than covered women, as the covered women are in no way different to them than their mothers, wives, or

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[75] Frisk, *Submitting to God*, vii.

daughters at home. For conservative women, on the other hand, these Western looking women are usually a potential field to plough (to proselytize as they are thought to be less pious than them) and also a window to a world which they cannot access. In that sense, I did not want to be in either position of insider or outsider. I rather chose to do my research in a field where I would be both and none at the same time.

The vanishing of the line between insider and outsider position is also the case for my interlocutors in this study. Living in a secular world as a pious person necessarily complicates this position of belonging, as one finds herself in a nomadic situation where she has to walk between two lands the borders of which are already drawn by a dry political language: liberal or illiberal, secular or religious, modern or backward.[76] Being forced to play in an undefined space with a desire to build their own place takes them to the "juncture from which critique emerges" as defined by Judith Butler, "where critique is understood as an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living" which does not mean "to celebrate difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation."[77] This research aims to show how difference can be appreciated without necessarily building walls of

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[76] Even the recent literature on Islamic modernity, or alternative modernity adds to this notion of distancing or othering the Muslims while they are right in the heart of Europe and the US for a couple of centuries; or as if those who carried out modernization in Turkey were not Muslims (i.e. it was *Islamic* from the beginning).

[77] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 4.

separation, and how proximity and similarity can be appreciated without leading to assimilation and the erasure of human uniqueness.

Methodology and "Subjects" of concern

Believing that one should not be necessarily performing on a different framework than the Western liberal-secular one in order to be the subject of anthropology, I aimed to expand my fieldwork to multiple frameworks that become a setting for piety.

The fieldwork for this research took place within a time span of fifteen months in Istanbul. I ended up choosing three institutions to conduct my research through participant observation. I found my interlocutors within and through these institutions. In fact, it was not completely me choosing these institutions as I needed to be chosen by them as well. I was mainly located in Women's Platform (WP), which is under the Journalists and Writers Foundation established by the largest pietist movement in Turkey. The founder of the movement is Fethullah Gülen, an Islamic scholar who attracted the support of a large population within Turkey through his educational philantrophism. The WP was established as a representative of this movement in 2009. It aims to build dialogue with women from different backgrounds, such as secularists, non-Muslim minorities, or with Alevi or Kurdish backgrounds. Thus, their main goal throughout the six months I spent there, was trying to meet with as many different people as possible.

The other field site I found useful for my research was the Meridyen Circle, a supportive network of pious women seeking academic career. Most of

them had to pursue their graduate career abroad because of the headscarf ban in universities. After getting their degrees and moving along in their fields, they decided to form a network and help each other in their academic endeavors inasmuch as provide guidance on finding an authentic voice in already said things in the Western academia.

The third and the final institution was a private university where I found a job with the help of my connection with the pietist Gülen network. It was founded by the members of this network. The academic staff did not necessarily have a connection with the network, but everyone was recruited according to the criteria of not being hostile to the visibility of religion in the public sphere, as they had to work together with pious people in that institution. Besides that, they were not forced to claim any affiliation with the Gülen movement at all.

My aim in this research was to compare my story of piety as a highly educated professional woman with the stories of other women having gone through similar settings to the ones in my story. Therefore my subjects of concern were directly related to the challenge faced by highly-educated professional women who desire to cultivate a pious self within the secular everyday life settings —also in relation to the changes they made to this secular space in Turkey. I focused specifically on those who experienced this challenge to a more significant extent than those who have little contact with the secular public sphere.

In other words, my concern was not directly about the class issue, nor about financial status, but more about the level of engagement with the formative ground of secular-liberal values and the public sphere itself, mainly the areas of higher education, non-governmental organizations, media and publicity, and some professions like psychology and psychiatry, where there is no space for religion and piety thereof. One thing common to all these subjects is their exposure to secular education at least beyond high-school level (they all have college degrees), and their preoccupation with their related professions (in other words, they are pursuing their career in relation to their college degree, rather than relying on their family business).

I imagined this work as a collection of multiple travel stories, the destination of which is the cultivation of a pious self. Even though each of these travelers started their journey from a different point, and probably heading towards different stations of piety, one thing is common for all of them: that they have to pass through the same stations of the secular-liberal public sphere, which has transformed a lot in recent years as each of them left their own marks on this station.

The next chapter aims to give a historical trajectory of this secular-liberal public sphere, and introduce the main actors that had a role in its transformation. The individual stories of my interlocutors in chapter three will give a more detailed itinerary of this journey of becoming a pious Muslim woman in Turkey from 1970s to the year 2011. After discussing the various context these journeys

take place, I will devote the fourth chapter to the ways in which the technologies of self, such as veiling and ritual prayer are utilized along the way. The fifth chapter will try to look at the process in which the secular-liberal ethics is critiqued by these women in the context of conceptualizing womanhood in a pious modern context. Lastly, chapter six, which is designed as the concluding chapter, will discuss how the stories of these women can take the scholarship on women, Islam, and Turkey beyond the boundaries presented by the binary oppositions such as traditional-modern, religious-secular, conservative-liberal, Islamist-secularist, and etc.

Chapter 2

SECULARISM, ISLAMISM, AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

This is a micro-level study of piety, regarding a group of highly-educated professional women who want to cultivate piety while actively taking roles in the secular modern public sphere of Turkey. However, a macro-level analysis of that public sphere and its history of formation are essential to be laid out before talking about the micro-level experiences.

There is an interesting and long story behind the current picture of Turkey as a model for a successful Muslim democracy, with an ex-Islamist Prime Minister and President, whose wives are both wearing headscarves. Their story is embedded with the collective story of Turkey within the last two centuries, which includes the collapse of a six-hundred year old empire, the end of the twelve-century old Islamic caliphate, the birth of a nation-state, a civilizational conversion, and the rise of globalization and a return of religion into the public sphere.

Hence, this chapter will take you to a journey to the recent history of Turkey, before telling you about the individual journeys of the women who emerged out of this recent history. While learning about the historical background, you will also get an idea about the major concepts that rise up throughout this study, such as modernity, secularism, Islamism and Islamic revival, the Hizmet movement, and finally, the gender issue.

At the end of the chapter, I will present the most recent picture of the Turkish public sphere after all the transformations it has gone through with the deprivatization of religion and the impacts of the Islamist movement.

The Islamist movement and deprivatization of religion

The modernization efforts of the Muslim states beginning in the nineteenth century were accompanied by secularization of the public sphere, thereby leaving religion with no valid official space within these states and thus relegated to the private sphere. This corresponded with Enlightenment theories of progress and secularization, which saw religion in the public sphere as irrelevant and dysfunctional at best, and harmful and worthy of being destroyed at worst. However, during the second half of the twentieth century this enlightenment theory of secularization has failed in its prediction that religion would remain exclusively in the private sphere.

Jose Casanova named this process as the "deprivatization" of religion, meaning that "religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them."[78] Casanova was actually trying to save secularization theory that was claimed to be a myth because of the increasing public visibility of religion since the 1980s. He claimed that secularization theory has three components: religious decline, structural differentiation, and privatization of religion. And only the second one constitutes the valid core of the

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[78] Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.

secularization thesis because "the differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms remains a general modern structural trend."[79] In this sense, deprivatization of religion does not render secularization theory invalid, since religions can act in the public sphere without disturbing the structural differentiation of the secular public spheres.

Talal Asad discarded this argument as invalid because, he said, once religion−even in its least ambitious form−enters public discourse it cannot remain "indifferent to debates about how economy should be run, or which scientific project should be publicly funded, or what the broader aims of an education system should be."[80] In other words, it is a false argument to see religion as an agent which enters into the public sphere with a specific purpose; as if it would go back to its private sphere once that purpose is fulfilled.

As Asad says, the power relations in the public sphere make it necessary to be heard as well as being able to speak. In a modern secular public sphere, religion "may have to disrupt existing assumptions to be heard."[81] Hence, religion will need to create a space for itself in the modern public sphere, by influencing the existing institutions or by forming its alternative ones in order to create a setting where its message can be heard by the public. Above all, "religious institutions and norms" can be embodied in the public sphere through individuals, who practice the values of those institutions and norms in their daily lives despite

[79] Casanova, *Public Religions*, 212.
[80] Talal Asad, *Formations of The Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 182.
[81] Asad, *Formations*, 185.

fulfilling a public role in a secular setting. Therefore, a religion which is carried to the public sphere –even with a single individual– has the potential to disrupt the structural differentiation.

This process of deprivatization has been more distinctly observed in the case of Islam, especially in the areas previously governed by the Ottoman Empire, which had a long tradition of integrating religion and politics. Once they lost their "sacred canopy"[82] in Peter Berger's terminology, the previous Islamic elite returned to Islamic sources to empower themselves and the "innocent masses" that had little chance to resist the official secularizing ideology.

This empowerment came about in mainly two modes of action, as explained by the famous Turkish sociologist Nilüfer Göle, "one associated with political Islam, the other with cultural Islam."[83] While political Islam gives priority to seizing power and seeks for a "top-to-bottom" change, a process that enjoys a great popularity in Western media and academia, cultural Islam does not get that much attention. Whereas, this study will show that it is the main driving force behind the deprivatization of Islam as it focuses on cultivating religious and pious individuals who would transform the public sphere through their everyday actions and thus create a space for Islam in the public sphere.

The secularization process where religion was pushed back to be a private matter is tightly connected to the modernization projects in the post-Ottoman

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[82] Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).
[83] Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Harbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 109.

lands, as well as in Turkey. And the story of the initial encounter of Muslim societies with Western modernity and secularism must be known understand the deprivatization process, and the marching of religion back to the public sphere along the two lines of political and cultural Islam.

Encounter with modernity

Modernity, as it originated in Europe as a result of various developments, is described by Anthony Giddens in the *Consequences of Modernity* as having four institutional dimensions: Capitalism (capital accumulation in the context of competitive labor and product markets), Surveillance (control of information and social supervision by the nation-state), Industrialism (transformation of Nature: development of the "created environment"), and the Military Power (control of the means of violence in the context of the industrialization of war).[84]

These institutions cover numerous new paradigms in themselves, which developed in response to specific social, cultural, economic, and political experiences in European societies. The first encounter of Muslim societies' encounter with modernity took place in the form of modernism, which meant the transfer of these institutions to their societies, accompanied with other projects such as secularism and nationalism with the hands of the ruling elites.

For all Muslim majority societies, the encounter came as a direct threat to their political and economic sovereignty, as well as their socio-cultural dignity. Especially in the Middle East, the Western attacks on their lands were quickly

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[84] Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 55-63.

associated with an attack on their religion because of the living memory of the Crusades -also because these military attacks were co-happening with the flow of Christian missionaries in Muslim lands with an open aim of refuting the credibility of Islamic faith. Therefore, the attempted import of Western modernity started on a ground of conflict and threat, rather than peace and negotiation. This tells us a lot about the emergence of "Islamic revivalism" and also the militant secularism and modernism of some rulers like Atatürk in Turkey, Reza Shah in Iran, and Nasser in Egypt.

Islamic modernism first appeared in the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century in response to the subsequent military defeats against the Western powers. The basic aim of the Ottoman rulers was to save the state rather than create a social change. The young intellectuals they sent to Europe, on the other hand, realized that more needs to be done than simply modernizing the army to save the state, because the threat was not restricted to military realm. Called by Europeans as the Young Ottomans, these intellectuals criticized the cosmetic reforms of *Tanzimat* (1839) that was mostly dictated by the European powers, and called for an authentic modernization by synthesizing Islam and European technology and science.

Chief among them was Namık Kemal, who harshly criticized the blind imitation of the West in his novels and writings. However, Namık Kemal was not able to get his due credit as the pioneer of Islamic revivalism because he wrote in Ottoman Turkish that was not read as much as Arabic at that time. As Nikki

Kedie suggests, Namık Kemal developed the idea of pan-Islamism much before Al-Afghani, against the wave of nationalism which was tearing the multinational empire apart in a great pace.[85]

As the ethnic groups kept cutting their ties with the Ottoman state, the new generation of reformists who graduated from the Western type schools (who were named as the Young Turks in the West) gradually adopted the idea of Turkish nationalism rather than pan-Islamism as the only way to save the state. Since the Turkish identity was not solidified at any time during the history of the Ottoman Empire, they had to "imagine" the community. Ziya Gökalp was the main ideologist of this newly formed Turkish nationalism, which aimed to show people that they should seek for remedy to the social and political ills in the empire in their Turkic origins rather than Islam.

Another group was arguing for the need to completely adopt the Western ways of life, led by Abdullah Cevdet who claimed that Western civilization should be adopted "with its thorns and roses." He believed that Western modernity was coming to the Muslim lands like "mighty flood…utterly demolish[ing] every obstacle it finds on its way." Therefore, he argued that "the Moslem people must refrain from resisting this flood of civilization. They can preserve their national existence only by following this current."[86]

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[85] Nikki Kedie, "Sayyid Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnama (London: Zed Books, 1994), 19.

[86] Şerif Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 178.

By the time the WWI was lost and the Ottoman Empire saw its end in 1920, nationalism and modernism had superseded their rival ideologies and became the state ideology of the new Republic of Turkey. Most of the ideas put forth by Abdullah Cevdet in his periodical *Ictihad*, became part of the official ideology of the Kemalist state, including

> …the education of women, a basic suspicion toward the institution of the monarchy, an emphasis on the education of the masses, a materialistic-biological approach to the universe, a hostility toward Islam insofar as it was believed to inhibit progress, an admiration for the "classics" of Western literature, and a belief that modernization was primarily dependent upon changing one's pattern of thought.[87]

The (re)formation of the public sphere in the Republican era

Although the official history of Turkish modernization prioritizes a clear break with the Ottoman past, the emergence of alternative histories in the second half of the twentieth century shows significant connections between the Ottoman practices and the formation of the founding principles of the Turkish Republic.

The official state ideology of Turkey was given a concrete body in 1937, fourteen years after the establishment of the new nation-state. They were formulated into six principles based on the political, social, and economic reforms of Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) during his lifetime presidency of the Republic of Turkey. These six principles, -republicanism, nationalism, secularism, populism, etatism, and revolutionism- were made into the official ideology of the state when they were added to the constitution during the single-party regime. Although Kemal Atatürk showed the Western civilization as the ideal to achieve, his

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[87] Mardin, *Religion,* 173.

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principles were a selective reading of the West, as he excluded democracy, liberalism, and most importantly capitalism[88] from his principles. The reason for this exclusion should be sought in the historical context and ideological and sociopolitical grounds on which Kemalism and the Kemalist state were established.

Alev Çınar suggests that it is a Eurocentric approach to see Turkish modernization as an external imposition from the West or the Westernized elite with no indigenous grounds for modernization. She sees the Turkish case as clearly showing that "modernity is neither exclusively Western nor Eastern, neither foreign nor local, neither universal nor particular, neither historical nor atemporal, neither old nor new, but at times it can be all at once, or emerge in between these binary oppositions."[89] Although she affirms that official Turkish modernity was based on the negation of the *ancient regime*, and the adoption of Western mode of modernization, she rejects the idea that "it represents a blind submission to Westernism" or "totally imitative and inorganic adaptation from Europe."[90]

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[88] The exclusion of capitalism was a necessity rather than a choice for Atatürk, for the new nation-state lacked a bourgeois class after the deportation of the non-Muslim elements from the country. Because, the Armenians, the Jews and the Greeks constituted the middle class in the Ottoman Empire, while the Muslims generally took up positions in the bureaucracy in the urban areas, and farming in the rural areas.

[89] Alev Çınar, *Modernity, Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 5.

[90] Çınar, *Modernity*, 14.

Similarly, Ibrahim Kaya defines Turkish modernity as "later modernity," a term he developed to refer to projects of modernity that happened where direct colonization was absent –like the socialist project of modernity, or Japanese modernity, and Turkish modernity in contrast to the forced modernization of Algeria by the French.[91] Both Çınar and Kaya believe that together with the Ottoman state tradition, Turkish society had its own ground for modernization that is utilized by the modernizing elite.

Furthermore, the modernization process of Muslim states, including Turkey, should not be considered as "failed attempts at creating an endogenous modernity" but as an effort of transforming their selves in the structural conditions of modernity, "an effort that is always painful and never fully successful."[92]

During this painful transformation, Atatürk tried to replace the spiritual capital of Islam with that of nationalism and modernism. However, as Şerif Mardin says, what Kemalist modernization deprived people of was a value system, "a fund of symbols"[93] in which they found meaning for their lives. Many other scholars[94] supported Mardin's claim that secular nationalism of the

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[91] Ibrahim Kaya, *Social Theory and Later Modernities: The Turkish Experience* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 7.
[92] Armando Salvatore & Mark LeVine, *Religion, Social Practice, and Contested Hegemony* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 46-47.
[93] Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).
[94] Richard Tapper, *Islam in Modern Turkey* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 1991); Sinan Ciddi, *Kemalism in Turkish Politics: The Republican People's Party, Secularism, and Nationalism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009).

Kemalist ideology could not fill in the spiritual void that religion was fulfilling in people's everyday lives. Even though Kemalism turned itself into a religion-like entity through creating its own times and spaces,[95] presented itself to the public in the form of a cult[96] or a civic religion,[97] it was not successful in replacing religion totally, which was most clearly seen in the Islamic revival that gained prominence in the 1980s.

The Islamic revival in the public sphere

The second half of the twentieth century proved wrong the secularization theory's assumption that religion would become "ever more marginal and irrelevant in the modern world."[98] The secularists in the Islamic world saw quickly that expelling Islam out of the public sphere resulted only in the return of Islam to the public sphere more radically, now called "Islamism," as seen in the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the National View (*Milli Görüş)* movement in Turkey.

Seeing that various secular ideologies such as socialism and nationalism failed to solve the chronic problems in Muslim countries, these "Islamists" turned Islam into a political discourse as an alternative to secular ideologies. Although their views and methods vary greatly, Islamists, as Talal Asad says, "relate themselves to the classical theological tradition by translating it into their

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[95] Çınar, *Modernity*.
[96] Ciddi, *Kemalism*.
[97] Tapper, *Islam in Modern Turkey*.
[98] Casanova, *Public Religions*, 5.

contemporary political predicament,"[99] therefore claim the political, economic and social arena in the name of Islam. Although Islamism is often related to fundamentalism or the aim of implementing the Islamic law (Sharia) as a regime, in the context of a strictly secular country like Turkey, the word "Islamism" refers to any attempt to pull Islam into the public sphere, which was denied to it by secularism.

Since the Kemalist state adopted the French version of secularism as one of its fundamental principles, it tried to get religion under its control gradually and present an official Islam to the public. Hence, the public or popular Islam, which was the product of a long Sufi tradition, sought for new and alternative ways to survive especially during the harsh single-party regime between 1923 and 1950.

Because of this strict dominance of the official Islam, which was defined by the secular state, the popular Islam had to follow a path that was compatible with the modernist and secular policies of the state. So, it found mainly two ways to express itself within the secular state. On one hand, the *tarikat* orders that had to go underground when they were banned in 1925, cemented their secret networks and solidarities and carried out their social activism through the foundations (*vakıf*). On the other hand they participated in politics —only after the introduction of multiparty system in 1945—either actively by joining the Democratic Party (DP), which came into power in 1950 with an overwhelming

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[99] Asad, *Formations,* 198.

majority, or by simply supporting the party as a group. In this period between 1950 and 1960, the marginalized sector of the Turkish society, those who were outside the urbanized bureaucratic class, were empowered by the urbanization, industrialization and education policies of the DP government; and thus Islamists started to participate in the system with educational and social activities in an attempt to carve up a space for themselves in modernity.

Although, this religious activism and the first revival of Islamism was ended by the Kemalists and the military in 1960 coup, internalizing modernity according to its own norms appeared as a distinctive feature of Turkish Islamism in this period. In this context, the *Nurcu* movement that was named after the Kurdish Islamic scholar Said Nursi was becoming more and more influential in the country despite all the repressive actions of the state against the members of this movement. What made this movement so influential was Nursi's attempt to reconcile science with religion, calling for cooperation between these two in order to protect their faith, and progress at the same time.

Political Islam

In politics, first organized in the Justice Party (AP), (successor of the DP), Islamism sought for a new platform through the end of 1960s, because of the "proindustrialist and state-centric policies" of the AP.[100] The National Order Party (MNP) which was founded by Islamists in 1970, with the support of the

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[100] Hakan Yavuz, "Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey," *Comparative Politics* 30 (1997): 67.

Nakşibendi[101] order and the leadership of the famous Islamist politician

Necmettin Erbakan, became the initiator of the "genesis of political Islam in the

1970s."[102] With the leadership of Erbakan, Islamism was represented in Turkey

with this political movement that named itself *Milli Gorus* (National View).

Although MNP was banned by the constitution court two months after the 1971

coup, the Islamists founded a new party in 1972, and Erbakan carried out the

leadership of this party which was named National Salvation Party (MSP), until

the last military coup of 1980 closed down his party again.

On 12 September 1980, the military decided to intervene in the long

lasting chaos in Turkish society, which "was shattered by ideological polarization

and strife-ridden communal violence."[103] It was a very important date for

Islamism in Turkey, giving birth to the Welfare Party (RP) that became an

important actor in political Islam, as well as enabling the *tarikat*s and new Islamic

movements to flourish economically and politically in the last two decades.

Although the junta was expected to adopt a harsh policy towards religion

after closing down the MSP claiming that it was following an anti-secularist

policy, it regarded Islam as a guard against communism, a tool of legitimization,

and a means of making people more obedient. Under the leadership of the

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[101] *Nakşibendi* order is one of the oldest and most powerful Sufi orders in Turkey, having a tradition of influencing politics since the Ottoman era, in addition to the *Bektaşi* order.
[102] Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu "Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28 (1996):241.
[103] Yavuz, "Political Islam," 67.

military, the number of Qur'anic schools and Imam Hatip High Schools (the

schools that combined religious and secular education) increased; religion was

made a compulsory course in the curriculum.[104] Furthermore, "mosque-building

activities increased steadily both by the state and by conservative groups and

individuals;" and "religious foundations and *tariqa*s began to rise both in number

and in influence."[105]

These examples clearly show that, the generals introduced a Turkish-

Islamic synthesis rather than the strict secularist Kemalist ideology. In order to

prevent communism and radical Islam and to protect the secular state,

> the leaders of the military coup, ironically, depended on Islamic
> institutions and symbols for legitimization; fusing Islamic ideas with
> national goals, they hoped to create a more homogenous and less political
> Islamic community. Islam, in this radical departure from the military's
> past practices, offered a way to reduce or even eliminate the cultural
> differences that led to the polarization of Turkish society. Moreover, the
> leadership of the 1980 coup considered Islam a pacifying and submissive
> ideology preferable to the threat of communism.[106]

When all the pre-coup leaders disappeared either by imprisonment or by

expulsion, the political arena was left to Turgut Özal, a former MSP member,

former chief of privatization in AP government, and a member of the *Nakşibendi*

order. He founded the Motherland Party (ANAP) and won the 1983 elections, in

which none of the former parties were allowed to participate. His leadership

changed the face of Turkey in many ways, like the "steady increase in the

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[104] It was optional before the coup.

[105] Sefa Şimşek, "New Social Movements in Turkey Since 1980," *Turkish Studies* 5 (2004): 121.

[106] Yavuz, "Political Islam," 67.

standard of living" going in parallel with "the increase in the obvious symbols of adherence to Islam."[107]

Özal encouraged Islamic movements during his time in power, by encouraging the foundation of Islamic banks, and allowing religious press and publications, as well as radio and TV channels to be opened.[108] This expansion of mass communication for the Islamists "played a critical role in the public emergence of an Islamic identity in the late 1980s" which was "consolidated and promoted to the policymaking level by the formation of a new elite and the processes of democratization…by the Motherland Party of Özal and the Welfare Party."[109]

The process of economic liberalization and democratization in Özal period created an Islamic bourgeoisie, which financed the Islamist organizations, the *tarikats* and the RP in turn. Consequently, Islamism was carried "from the periphery to the center of the political forum."[110]

Turgut Özal has been the most important factor behind the rise and flourish of Islamism in Turkey in the last two decades, both in public and in politics. Soon after his death in 1993, the RP, which was founded after the 1980 coup as a successor to the MSP, came to power to carry on Özal's mission.

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[107] David Shankland, *Islam and Society in Turkey* (Huntingdon: Eothen, 1999), 40.
[108] Şimşek, "New Social Movements," 121.
[109] Yavuz, "Political Islam," 70.
[110] Ibid.

Unlike the conservative MNP and MSP which addressed to only the small business owners in the rural areas and the followers of *tarikat*s, the RP also managed to get votes from the poor people of the urban areas —formerly who voted for the socialist democratic parties— the newly emerging Islamist business community and young Islamist professionals.[111] This was a result of the evolution of the political Islam from a marginal and radical conservative movement to a mainstream and moderate liberal movement after the 1980 coup, which created an atmosphere of Islamic awareness and identity.

As a result of its liberalization and the popularity of its call to return to traditional Islamic values, the RP, which was the major representative of political Islamism, saw that its electoral fortune had changed in the 1994 local elections in which it gained 28 mayoral seats including Istanbul and Ankara; and 1995 general elections which made it the biggest party in the parliament with 21 percent vote rate and 158 seats out of 550.[112] On 28 June 1996, the RP leader Necmettin Erbakan became the first Islamist prime minister of modern Turkey, by making a coalition with Tansu Çiller, the leader of the pro-Western, secularist True Path Party (DYP). It seemed that Islamism finally succeeded —partly at least— in holding the power at the end of its thirty years of political struggle. As Yavuz suggests,

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[111] Jenny B. White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press; Chesham: Combined Academic, 2002), 114-115.

[112] White, *Islamist Mobilization,* 116-118.

The electoral success of political Islam [was] an outcome of the state policies of Turkish-Islamic synthesis introduced by the 1980 military coup, of political and economic liberalization compounded by the emergence of a new conservative bourgeoisie…and by a new class of intellectuals based in the print and electronic media, and of the party's internal organizational flexibility and ideological presentation of the 'just order' (*Adil Düzen*). [113]

However, after they came to power, the Islamists showed tendencies towards giving up their moderate ideas and started to put forward projects such as building a great mosque in the Taksim Square, "a symbolic center of Kemalism, the focal point of which is a statue commemorating the founding of the Republic."[114] Some hypothetically proposed projects also included "banning the charging of interest" and "replacing the Turkish lira with an Islamic dinar."[115] Furthermore, Erbakan declared the Imam Hatip Schools to be their backyard, which mounted the criticisms of the secularist part against these schools. His foreign visits to Arab countries and his ceremonial pilgrimages to Mecca with all his family members were too much for the Kemalist elite. A "Jerusalem Night event" in the Sincan municipality of Ankara, during which anti-secularist and pro-Islamist words were chanted, caused the military tanks to pass the streets of Sincan as a warning. So many religious symbols and explicit displays of Islamism led the military and secularist state to take steps against the rise of Islamism in Turkey. Consequently the resolutions of 28 February came in 1997.

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[113] Yavuz, "Political Islam," 67.
[114] White, *Islamist Mobilization,* 117.
[115] Ibid., 133.

The generals did not overtake the government, but forced Erbakan to sign the document which contained extremely heavy precautions against all Islamist organizations; that's why it is called a soft or post-modern coup. Three months later, a case for the closure of the RP was opened in the constitutional court, and on 18 June 1997 Erbakan resigned from his post as prime minister with the expectation that the duty of forming the government would be given to his coalition partner Tansu Çiller. However, the President Süleyman Demirel, most probably by the influence of the military, gave the duty to the Motherland Party leader Mesut Yılmaz.

After their party was banned, the ex-Welfare Party deputies were permitted to retain their seats as independents, and soon they formed a new party as a successor to the RP, by naming it Virtue Party (FP). As political Islam was taking its power from a social movement, it was not difficult for them to form a new party; no matter how many times the secular state closes them. The new party entered the general elections on April 18, 1999 and came third despite all the repressive actions of the military against the Islamists since February 28, 1997. However, the chief prosecutor Vural Savaş wanted this party to be closed, too, because of the headscarf that was banned in all public areas without any written law. Having elected as a deputy from FP, Merve Kavakçı refused to put off her headscarf as she entered the new assembly for the parliamentary oath

ceremony, and therefore was banished from the parliament, and later from the country as well.[116]

It was during the FP period as the main opposition party that Erbakan, who was banned on politics for five years, started to lose control of the ropes within the party leadership. He continued to try to run the new party from behind the scenes through the figurehead party leader, Recai Kutan; but Kutan lacked the charisma that could attract masses, unlike the younger, and popular leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was the mayor of Istanbul at that time.

Moreover, when Erdoğan was imprisoned for reciting a poem from a leading nationalist poet Ziya Gökalp, his popularity among the public grew increasingly, which was contrary to what the secularists aimed at imprisoning him. The last congress of FP, before being closed down in 2001, witnessed the separation of the *Milli Görüş* movement into traditionalists and reformists. The reformists with the leadership of Erdoğan directed towards the urban, educated, middle class Muslim voters and adopted democratic reforms and EU membership as their main goal instead of political Islam. They abandoned Islamist policies and gave priority to improving democracy for the Muslims to enjoy their long-time existence in the public sphere. While their AK Parti[117] (Justice and

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[116] She lost her citizenship on the pretext of holding a US citizenship at the same time. Although the Turkish constitution and the citizenship laws allows for holding double citizenships, it is required to inform the Turkish authorities while accepting citizenship of another country. Kavakçı lost her citizenship rights, and her benefits of parliamentary membership on this basis.

[117] "Ak" means "white" in Turkish, implying purity and lack of corruption; therefore the opponents of the AK Parti prefer the abbreviation of AKP (standing

Development Party) gained 35% of the votes, the traditionalists' SP (Felicity

Party) could only get 2% in the 2002 elections. This electoral success was

repeated twice in 2007 with 47% and in 2011with 49% in the face of the rising

counter-pressure from the constituents of the Kemalist establishment such as the

military, the judiciary, and the bureaucracy, which had to go through profound

transformations and reforms as AK Parti solidified its rule with the consecutive

electoral victories.

Cultural Islam (the pietist movements)

Contrary to political Islamists, pietistic movements are based on positive

action rather than simple reaction to the modern norms. Instead of being

oppositional, reactionary, and conflictual, these movements promote positive,

altruistic, and peaceful action. The difference can be clearly seen in the case of

the Egyptian *da'wa* movement as described by Saba Mahmood[118] and Charles

Hirschkind[119] which stands in contrast to the militant wing of the Muslim

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for the capital letters of Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) as a pejorative statement. This is also preferred by many academics and intellectuals who claim that using the AK Parti abbreviation implies support for the party, while the other one implies an unbiased and independent position. I have doubts about the possibility of attributing unbiasedness to that term in the current political climate of Turkey, as it implies an opponent position rather than being impartial. Since I see no difference between a supporter and an opponent position in terms of intellectual and scholarly analysis, I prefer to call the AK Parti in the way they name themselves in their official documents.

[118] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[119] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

Brotherhood, or the Malaysian piety movement as described by Sylvia Frisk[120] in contrast to the Jihadists in South East Asia. In other words, these are driven by individuals who want to participate in the public sphere to create opportunities for being a pious Muslim, rather than establishing an Islamic state, or imposing the implementation of traditional Shari'a law.

The practices of these pietistic movements, as Mahmood says, "are provoked by a specific problem, namely, the concern for learning to organize one's daily life according to Islamic standards of virtuous conduct in a world increasingly ordered by a logic of secular rationality that is inimical to the sustenance of these virtues."[121]

Contrary to Casanova's contention that in going public, religion would/should not disturb structural differentiation, these movements do disturb the differentiation by claiming a say in matters of economy, politics, science, education, and so forth. This is not because pietists set out to do so, but because their very existence in the public sphere as religious people affects how these issues are handled in the modern secular societies in which they actively participate. In this case, religion is not acting as an agent in and of itself, but rather, its influence is propagated by individual agents whose like-minded actions will invariably affect practical outcomes in the public sphere.

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[120] Sylvia Frisk, *Submitting to God: Women and Islam in urban Malaysia* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2009).
[121] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 56.

The Hizmet (or Gülen) movement stands out as the most effective cultural Islamic movement in shaping the public sphere in its own setting when compared to the *da'wa* movements in other Islamic countries, which primarily seek the cultivation and dispensation of individual piety in society without much concern for state legitimization. The Hizmet Movement is different from other movements in the sense that it is actively involved in modern secular institutions, and thus seeks legitimacy with respect to the official ideologies of secularism and modernism. In other words, the participants of Hizmet have a much more intricate relationship with the norms of the secular modern public sphere, which requires them to do more than gathering in mosques and disseminating Islamic pedagogical materials. The Hizmet participants follow a more "modern" methodology in order to act piously in a modern secular setting by developing a work ethic that can be compared to Weber's ideal type of inner-worldly asceticism, something which he saw as the catalyst−if not the foundation−of the capitalist mode of production in the West.

The Hizmet movement is led by the Islamic scholar, Fethullah Gülen (1938-), who now acts as the spiritual head of a loose network of millions of people, including active volunteers and sympathizers. The case of Gülen's followers provides a perfect example for the transformation and social change achieved through cultural Islamism, rather than political Islamism; and also for the ease of seizing political power after achieving the widespread dissemination of Islamic values in the public sphere. In other words, the Hizmet, which started

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as a humble quest for achieving piety in modern life, ended up with the accumulation of an immense amount of power, almost enough to create its alternative public sphere with media institutions, schools, financial institutions, marketplaces, and living areas.

The followers of Hizmet are not the only representatives of religious tradition in the Turkish public sphere. But the influence they created among the public grew remarkably as they adapted themselves well into the structural differentiation of the public sphere in three decades. The political Islamist group in Turkey, the National Outlook (*Milli Görüş*) movement, struggled simultaneously to gain political power against the secular elite, for thirty years, and lost four of its political parties to the official secular system each time increasing their vote rate fairly. The gradual growth in the vote rate of Islamist parties corresponded with the growth of the Islamic middle class. In the year 2002, the Islamic alternative public sphere was developed to such an extent that the Islamic-oriented Justice and Development Party gained the majority of votes by addressing at the demands of the new public. What has made followers of Gülen so influential in the public sphere is the work ethic defined by Gülen, who packed it in a religious frame and presented it to his audience within the concept of *hizmet* (altruistic service) as the highest form of worship.

Born in Erzurum on April 27 1941[122], Fethullah Gülen received an

education untouched by the harsh secular laws of the new nation-state. He was

born in a religious family, and he received his religious education from his parents

and from the renowned Sufi masters in the area. He did not become the disciple of

a specific Sufi order, but he read extensively from early and modern Sufi thinkers

of Islam, as well as from Western classics. There were three major thinkers whose

writings were especially influential for Gülen's ideas: Ahmad Sirhindi (the

importance of following the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad in the cultivation

of spiritual endeavors), Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (the importance of

incorporating Sufi learning into the framework of traditional Islamic teachings)

and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (the compatibility of science and religion and the

importance of education to cultivate and spread knowledge based on the marriage

of faith and reason).

When he became a preacher in the 1960s, he already had the ideal of

educating students who would combine scientific and religious thought, follow the

Sunnah of the Prophet and the ideals and principles of Sufism in their modern

daily lives. In other words, he believed in the necessity of a "golden generation" as

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[122] This is his official birth date. However, a rumor circulates among his followers
that his actual birthdate is November 10 1938. the same day when Atatürk, the
founder of the modern Turkey, died, Neither Gülen nor his adherents openly
affirm this date, except for a brief info on the Turkish website about Fethullah
Gülen that only affirms the year 1938 as Gülen's actual birth year (See "Hayat
Kronolojisi: 1941-1959 (His Life Chronology: 1941-1959)," *Fethullah Gülen*,
June 10, 2006, accessed 21 January 2011,
http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/3502/128/). Despite the lack of any open
affirmation rather than the year of 1938, this rumor functions as a mythical feature
in the minds of the followers to add to Gülen's innate charisma.

opposed to the "lost generation" which was driven towards increasing anarchy and communism. As he became more popular, and as more and more people came to listen to his Friday sermons, he used his oratorical skills to cultivate a deep love for the Prophet and his Companions in people's hearts, and make them believe in the importance of creating a "golden generation" which would be the projection of Islam's golden age in the twentieth century:

> The world is to be saved by that 'golden' generation who represent the Divine Mercy, from all the disasters, intellectual, spiritual, social and political, with which it has long been afflicted…In order to awaken the people and guide them to truth, the awaited generation, those young people who implant hope in our hearts, enlighten our minds and quicken our souls, will suffer with the sufferings of humankind and 'water' all the 'barren lands' with the tears they shed over centuries-old miseries. They will visit every corner of the world, leaving no-one not called upon, and pour out their reviving inspirations into the souls of the dumbstruck people.[123]

This ideal implied doing more than observing the five principles of Islam, or being the disciple of a Sufi order for personal spiritual development. Gülen was redefining piety in a way that allowed individuals to take responsibility for the enlightenment of other souls as well as their own souls. Creating a golden generation required actual work to be done in the public sphere, which had been used by the nation-state to create its own generation. Therefore, Gülen had to direct people around him to an urban, modern piety, which carried great similarities with the inner-worldly asceticism of Protestantism as defined by Max Weber as a religion which

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[123] Fethullah Gülen, "The Awaited Generation" in *Towards the Lost Paradise*. September 13, 2001, accessed March 12, 2009, http://www.fethullahgulen.org/gulens-works/towards-the-lost-paradise.html

demanded the believer, not celibacy, as in the case of the monk, but the avoidance of all erotic pleasure; not poverty, but the elimination of all idle and exploitative enjoyment of unearned wealth and income, and the avoidance of all feudalistic, sensuous ostentation of wealth; not the ascetic death-in-life of the cloister, but an alert, rationally controlled pattern of life, and the avoidance of all surrender to the beauty of the world, to art, or to one's own moods and emotions. The clear and uniform goal of this asceticism was the disciplining and methodical organization of the whole pattern of life. Its typical representative was the "man of a vocation," and its unique result was the rational organization and institutionalization of social relationships.[124]

The concept of *hizmet* (service) comes out as the essence of Gülen's ethic, urging the believer to take up a role, a "vocation" in the public sphere, and do it as best as he/she can in order to show others that one can be a good Muslim and a good teacher, engineer, businessman, etc. at the same time. This entails serving fellow human beings —Muslim or non-Muslim—purely for the sake of God.

In this sense, Gülen entails the idea that participation in the public sphere is essential for the ideal Muslim; it is even preferable to the Sufi dervishes who attain spiritual perfection through isolating themselves from society. When his followers asked Gülen whether it is correct for a Muslim to isolate himself/herself from society, he quoted this verse from the Qur'an: "Men (of great distinction) whom neither commerce nor exchange (nor any other worldly preoccupations) can divert from the remembrance of God, and establishing the Prayer in conformity with all its conditions, and paying the Prescribed Purifying Alms; they are in fear of a Day on which all hearts and eyes will be overturned."[125] Then he

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[124] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, [1963] 1991), 183.
[125] Qur'an 24: 37.

continued with a *Hadith*, which set the essence of piety: "The most favorable of human beings is the one who is most beneficial to people."[126] The inner-worldly ascetic of Weber becomes the "human of willpower" —*irade insanı*— in Gülen's formulation, meaning a human who can use this faculty in the best way to give up any worldly desire in his service to other people. He lists five obstacles for this person, which are stunningly similar to Weber's description of the demands of inner-worldly asceticism: "self-indulgence, hankering after fame, erotic desires, glory and pride, and fear."[127]

However, he always bases his arguments on examples from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. In other words, Gülen sets this notion of piety parallel to Weberian Protestant ethic right within the most sacred sources of Islamic discourse, thereby securing it from any claims of imitation of the West, or Protestantization of Islam. Although the socio-economic process that gave rise to the Islamic middle class came with the adoption of the Western liberal economy model, the response of Anatolian Muslims to this process was derived from the main sources of Islam through the charismatic leadership of Fethullah Gülen.

From the beginning of his preaching career, Gülen focused on reforming the souls of individuals and therefore reforming the normative order through these reformed souls instead of capturing political power. He did not meddle in politics, but instead, he created a work ethic for individuals to seek for piety in

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[126] Al-Suyuti, *al-Jami` al-Saghir,* 2: 9, in Fethullah Gülen, *Yol Mülahazaları (Contemplations on the Road)* (Istanbul: Nil, 2008) 22.
[127] Gülen, *Yol Mülahazaları*, 47.

that secular setting, and named that policy as *hizmet* (service). Because his focus has been on the public sphere, and the public roles fulfilled by his supporters, Gülen's movement still constituted a threat to the established structural differentiation of the secular public sphere in their attempt to create their own space.

Similar to the motivation provided by the Protestant ethic in the rise of capitalism as explained by Weber, the Islamic ethics of *hizmet* formulated by Fethullah Gülen motivated the channeling of newly emerging Islamic capital to reshape the secular public sphere into a more accommodating one. In other words, although the followers of the Hizmet movement do not aim for a large-scale transformation of the secular state, with their individual acts, and their very human desire to create their own space within the secularized public sphere, to "make itself heard" in Asad's terms, they have disturbed the structural differentiation of the modern public sphere by forming their alternative institutions parallel to the secular-modern ones.

Starting with schools, their media institutions, banks, social aid foundations, hospitals, universities, research centers, and business organizations transformed the structure of the Turkish secular public sphere into a more diverse one. The result of participating in the public sphere while seeking for piety and Allah's consent has been a profound transformation in the structure of the public sphere. With their simple life choices, like performing ritual prayers during work hours, wearing modest dresses, etc., Gülen's followers holding public roles,

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gradually transformed and challenged the monopoly of the official secularist discourse on religion and modernity, and created a discursive space within the secular-modern public sphere for the pious modern subjects.

The questioning of secularism

The rising middle class, the influence of the Hizmet movement and other religious communities in the public sphere, and the successive election victories of the AK Parti created a huge anxiety among the guardians of the Kemalist state, which was established on the principle of secularism, the definition of which has only been able to be questioned with the rise of the new Islamic middle class that wanted to share the public sphere. Actually, as Çınar suggests, "the growing popularity of Islam served to reveal secularism as an autonomous movement rooted in the society."[128]

The presidential elections in 2007 became the battleground for determining Turkey's identity, and also determining the content of the principle of secularism —whether it meant freedom *for* or freedom *of* religion. The desire of the AK Parti to see Abdullah Gül as the next president of Turkey, after the staunchly secularist Ahmet Necdet Sezer, received a backfire from the secularists because of the headscarf worn by his wife Hayrünnisa Gül. The public rallies against Islamism were followed by an online statement by the army on April 27, 2007, reminding the government that they are the guardians of secularism. Erdoğan's party had no chance but to reaffirm its popularity among the masses through declaring an early

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[128] Çınar, *Modernity,* 20.

election, which was held on July 22, 2007. The 47% vote rate clearly reestablished the legitimacy of the AK Parti government, and they passed a legislation removing the headscarf ban in universities with the support of the nationalist party in the parliament. However, this triggered the opening of a closure case against AK Parti by the secularist Chief Prosecutor, who reiterated the same claim made against the previous Islamist parties: being a focal point for anti-secularist activities.

Secularism is clearly the fundamental aspect of Turkish modernization and the ultimate determinant in the formation of the modern public sphere in Turkey. Despite its enormous importance in the nation-building process of the Kemalist regime, there has never been a consensus on the proper definition of secularism, or how it should be implemented in a Muslim society. In the first half of the twentieth century, the Kemalist ruling elite was sharing the certainty of the Western secularization theory, that it was a universal process and that religion would be erased from the public sphere totally and be a private matter instead. However, a quick genealogy of secularism and the concept of the secular suffices to display their Western and Christian origin and the complications of transferring it to a Muslim body.

The basic definition given for secularism is the separation between Church and state—or, in a country where there is no Church, it is the separation between religion and politics. More and more recent scholarship on the category of religion, however, indicates that the very differentiation between "religion" and "politics" and various other categories, is the production of a specific context of

Western Christianity.[129] Thinking that secularism is based on the public/ private

binary of human social world, many scholars have recently come to recognize that

non-Western and/or pre-modern cultures did not carve up the world according to

this binary.

This important attempt to historicize, or in Talal Asad's terms, to

"anthropologize" Western secularism both stems from and contributes to the

debates on the definition of religion, as it helps us to understand that the very

attempt to define religion "is founded on a secular Enlightenment approach."[130]

However, this does not mean that the secularists were the only ones

promoting the definition of religion to keep it in the margins of the society. The

differentiation between religion and politics was also of interest to liberal

Christians or Protestants, who wanted to protect their new religion from the

intervention of the state. Asad calls it "a happy accident" that secularism which

pushed religion out of "politics, law, and science —spaces in which varieties of

power and reason articulate our distinctively modern life" actually started as part

of "a strategy… of the defense of religion." [131]

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[129] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and the "Mystic East"* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) and *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press,2003); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 2007)
[130] King, *Orientalism*, 10.
[131] Asad, *Genealogies,* 28.

Charles Taylor also hints at this kind of "happy accident" in his award-winning book *A Secular Age* when he puts the *modus vivendi* of secularization as a process of "religionization" −or the attempt to change the locus of Christianity from clergy to the laity.[132] For Taylor, the uniquely Western aspect of the secularization process is the disenchantment of the worldview, separating between transcendent and immanent, and seeing the world within an immanent frame, which

> involved denying —or at least isolating and problematizing—any form of interpenetration between the things of Nature, on one hand, and 'the supernatural' on the other, be this understood in terms of the one transcendent God, or of Gods or spirits, or magic forces, or whatever.[133]

Taylor thinks that what brought this form of disenchanted worldview was the "growing concern with Reform" in Latin Christendom, "a drive to make over the whole society to higher standards"[134] by making Christian doctrines available to everyone outside the borders of the Church so that the laity could attain human flourishing and beyond.

Just as its initial emergence, the concept of secularism had its later development in a uniquely Christian context, too. The four developments listed by Jose Casanova as "the carriers of the process of secularization" are distinctly of Western and Christian origin: "the Protestant Reformation; the formation of

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[132] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 63.
[133] Ibid., 15-16.
[134] Ibid., 63.

modern states; the growth of modern capitalism; and the early modern scientific revolution."[135]

Similarly, the contemporary classification of secularism is based largely on American secularism and French laicism, which is frequently accompanied by accommodationist / separationist binary, ascribed to each of them respectively. Elizabeth Hurd, for example, takes secularism in two strands: "a laicist trajectory, in which religion is seen as an adversary and an impediment to modern politics, and a Judeo-Christian secularist trajectory, in which religion is seen as a source of unity and identity that generates conflict in modern international politics."[136] She does not clearly explain why she prefers the term "Judeo-Christian" other than saying that this term was coined "later,"[137] which corresponds with Noah Feldman's statement that in

> By the 1950s, with Jews increasingly present in elite universities as students, and gradually as faculty, the time had arrived for remodeling the ideology and rhetoric of non-sectarian Christianity. Not long before, it had been confidently said that America was a Christian nation. Now in the 1950s, our heritage was reinvented as inclusive: America had been built, it was now increasingly said, on Judeo-Christian roots.[138]

Even though "the laicist trajectory" and "the Judeo-Christian secularist trajectory" are "not mutually exclusive … [and] there is no strong or necessary

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[135] Casanova, *Public Religions,* 21.
[136] Elizabeth S. Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 23.
[137] Hurd, *Politics of Secularism*, 6.
[138] Noah Feldman, *Divided by God: America's Church-State Problem —and What We Should Do About It* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 166.

dividing line between them,"[139] Hurd still makes a clear distinction between them. She claims that while the laicist trajectory seeks to force religion completely out of politics and confine religion to the private sphere, the Judeo-Christian secularism seeks to accommodate Judeo-Christian values within its political system arguing that "Western political order is grounded in a set of core values with their origins in (Judeo)-Christian tradition."[140]

The usage of the term "Judeo-Christian" is peculiar to Hurd, but the dualistic categorization is not. Joan Wallach Scott compares the American and French model of secularism as such:

> In America, home to religious minorities who fled persecution at the hands of European rulers, the separation between church and state was meant to protect religions from unwarranted government intervention …. In France, separation was intended to secure the allegiance of individuals to the republic and so break the political power of the Catholic Church …. In France, the state protects individuals from religion; in America, religions are protected from the state and the state from religion.[141]

Whether we take secularism as for or against religion, one thing always remains that secularism is directly linked with Christianity, and especially Protestantism, which has been used synonymously with "Americanism" in a way to indicate "how a simplified narrative of secularization may in fact work to strengthen the hold of a particular strain of conservative Christianity in American

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[139] Hurd, *Politics of Secularism*, 23.
[140] Ibid., 38.
[141] Joan W. Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 91-92.

public life."[142] Even in the USA, which is known commonly as "the land of freedom" elsewhere, the religions that are accommodated —even at varying degrees—are quite limited. Fessenden gives a rough map of religious accommodation as "broadly accommodating of mainstream and evangelical Protestantism, minimally less so of Catholicism, unevenly so of Judaism, much less so of Islam, perhaps still less so of Native American religious practices that fall outside the bounds of the acceptably decorative or 'spiritual'."[143]

Seeing this implicit Christian bias in the theory of secularization, admitted by all these scholars and many others, how should the process of secularization in Turkey —a country with an overwhelmingly Muslim majority—be seen? Is it simply an importing of French laicism? Does it fall into the category of accommodationist or separationist form of secularism? What kind of "local appropriations, contestations, transformations, and even head-on collisions"[144] took place during the vernacularization of the secular/religion divide in Turkey?

The Turkish secularism

The Turkish case of secularism shows that these two models are not mutually exclusive but exemplary models to choose at necessary situations. Furthermore, the secularization case in a Muslim country cannot only be described

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[142] Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 3.
[143] Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, 3.
[144] Linell Cady & Elizabeth S. Hurd, eds., *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 9-10.

or understood with these ideal types which have clear Christian bias in their conceptualization as the above analysis indicates.

The most important characteristic of Turkish secularism is the fact that it has been implemented in a Muslim society with a six-century history of Islam-state relationship that built elaborate theories on Islamic governing. Keeping this fact in mind, one should not expect a full adaptation of secularism —either in the French model or American model— in the context of Turkey. And yet, it can be definitely claimed that what was aimed by the founders of modern Turkey corresponded to the separationist model of secularism in France, which was named *laïcité*. The abolishing of the caliphate, the closure of all *medrese*s (Islamic higher education institutions) and *tarikats* (Sufi religious orders), and the adoption of European codes of law were all designed to serve this aim of separation between state and religion.

On the other hand, the establishment of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, and the state project to offer an "official Islam" to the public by cutting off the power of autonomous religious organizations, and educating all the religious officials by the state's hands do not fit into the separationist paradigm, as it includes a direct intervention of the state on religion– specifically Islam.

Having said that, it cannot either be claimed that this model fits into the accommodationist paradigm as in the USA. Yes, the Turkish secularism, or *laiklik*, is not separationist either in theory or in practice; but the alternative paradigm that can replace a separationist account is not an accommodationist, but

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rather a "control account" as proclaimed by Andrew Davison.[145] In the control

account, the state does not aim to reduce religion into an affair of the individual,

because it needs religion as a tool in the process of nation-building. Besides,

Islam in the post-Ottoman context was "too intrinsically institutional and operated

within a framework in which the distinction between public and private and

between religious and cultural was much less evident" than in Western

Christianity.[146] Therefore, the primary policy of Turkish secularism was not

privatizing religion, but instead laicizing the clergy and putting it under direct

state control.

   According to Davison, "secularism in Turkey did not result in a structural

differentiation as separation between political and religious spheres."[147] This is

the key point where Turkish secularism diverges from the Western account of

secularization, as explained by Casanova (1994). For Casanova, religious

decline, differentiation, and privatization constitute the trivet of the secularization

thesis; and even though the first and third items can be refuted, the second item

—structural differentiation— will be enough to keep the secularization thesis

alive.[148]

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[145] Andrew Davison, *Secularism and Revivalism in Turkey* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 140.
[146] Massimo Introvigne, "Turkish Religious Market(s): A View Based on the Religious Economy Theory," in *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti*, ed. Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006), 37.
[147] Davison, *Secularism and Revivalism,* 158.
[148] Casanova, *Public Religions,* 214-215.

From this perspective, one can conclude that the secularization thesis in Turkey was born dead, as it has always lacked these three characteristics since its introduction to the country by the Kemalist regime. Just as the Kemalist state did not aim to repress religion all at once, neither did the religio–political forces "inevitably assume their place in the private sphere."[149] In other words, as long as the clerics "accepted the Kemalist terms of laicism," they "were allowed to assume a new place within the state's religious institutions."[150] Thus, the differentiation and privatization accounts of secularization theory do not work in Turkish secularism. As for the religious decline, it was largely limited to the elite urban class without any profound effect on the rural areas. According to Davison, the expectation of structural differentiation as the founding principle of secularization theory is part of "modernization prejudgments" (like privatization and religious decline) which do not adequately "capture the institutional frame of power that shaped Kemalist possibilities."[151]

And yet, this does not mean that Turkey has never gone through a process of secularization– a process of "the transformation of persons, offices, properties, institutions, or matters of an ecclesiastical or spiritual character to a lay, or worldly position" as defined by the famous Turkish sociologist Niyazi Berkes.[152] However, this process of transformation is not limited to the Republican era (1923–) as the

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[149] Davison, *Secularism and Revivalism,* 154.
[150] Ibid., 158.
[151] Ibid., 142.
[152] Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964), 5.

secularization process had already started in the Westernization policies of the late Ottoman governments.

Indeed, even the pre-modern Ottoman era cannot be claimed to lack the idea of secularism. Although the official secularist discourse defines the Ottoman State as a theocracy governed by Sharia, the Ottoman model of governing did have room for secularism. The Islamic world never had a Vatican; the religious leadership was at the hands of the Sultan as he carried the title of the Caliph[153], and he appointed the Sheikh al-Islam who checked the compatibility of Sultan's decrees with Islamic law. The Ottoman state system was a synthesis of pre-Islamic Turkish, Persian, and Byzantian models, and the Sharia law was practiced in local courts mostly in family affairs rather than being the constitutional law of the state. Furthermore, the *millet* system, which categorized the subjects of the Empire in religious terms, allowed for the relatively peaceful existence of different religious communities in the Ottoman lands, as each community was free in practicing their religion and pursued their own religious law in their private affairs.

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[153] In fact, according to Egyptian al-Azhar scholar Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, who published his work about the Islamic justification of secularism in 1925 (one year after the Turkish parliament abolished the caliphate), the institution of caliphate was not even a religious concept, since in his view, Islam in its essence endorses secularism, i.e. the separation of religion and the state. For a detailed and close reading of his ideas, see Souad T. Ali, *Religion, Not a State: Ali 'Abd al-Raziq's Islamic Justification of Political Secularism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005).

In a more general sense, the formation of Islamic law itself was mostly the product of human reasoning, and it strictly repelled magical elements from the Islamic religion. Therefore, the case of disenchantment that paved the way towards secularization in Western Europe did not take place in the Islamic world. Neither did they have the binary of the clergy (religion) vs. the laity (secular) because of the lack of clergy in Islam. So, secularism in the case of Muslim Ottomans did not develop at the same conditions with Europe where it was originally theorized.

However, the decline of the state against the Western Europe was interpreted as a civilizational decline by the intellectuals who were sent to Europe for education starting with the eighteenth century. These intellectuals brought the ideas of democracy, equality, progress, and science to the Ottoman capital. It was during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1785-1839) that European-modeled secular institutions, including the professional army were introduced in the Ottoman State. However, it must be noted that even though the reforms towards secularization were made with European influence, the Ottoman administration was very careful to present those reforms to the Muslim people within an Islamic framework. In other words, the institutions ensuring flexibility in the Shari'a such as *örf* (custom), *maslahat* (public interest), and *zarûret* (necessity) were utilized to justify the reforms made in, for example, family law, the secular schools opened for girls, women's holding professional jobs, and finally making Muslims and non-Muslims equal citizens with the Tanzimat reforms in 1839.

This reveals, first of all, a cavity in the progressivist thesis that Islamic law became stagnant after the twelfth century —a thesis that reflects in Asad's words, "the more general notion that 'the traditional' is opposed to 'the modern' as the unthinking and unchanging is to the reasoned and new."[154] It also explains the relative smoothness of the secularization process during the late Ottoman era, as it was justified to the people within Islamic terms. That is why secularization has mostly been associated with the Republican era, because the transformation in the Ottoman era had been much smoother, allowing the accommodation of both traditional and modern worldviews within the borders of the empire.

In contrast to the accommodationist model of the Ottoman State, the Republican regime followed a separationist model in its policy of secularization, and thus modernization. The Republican era started in the context of a nation state that turned its face to the West; therefore, no Islamic justification was needed in westernizing the country. However, the new state was still built upon the Ottoman state tradition and the symbiotic relationship between religion and politics was not abandoned altogether. Even though the new state followed a harsher policy of transformation of the society with the abolishment of the caliphate, the closure of Sufi *tarikat*s and *medrese*s, the replacement of Arabic script with the Latin script, the abolishment of the Shari'a law in favor of Swiss civil code, and the translation of Islamic call to prayer into Turkish, Islam was

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[154] Asad, *Formations,* 221.

still needed as a nation-building tool, but only in the official version put forth by the Directorate of Religious Affairs.

Performative secularism

The never-ending debates on secularism in Turkey are usually thought of a struggle between secularists versus anti-secularists. However, the debates, especially in the last decade, are not about whether we should have secularism or not. Instead, the debates take place around the proper definition and practice of secularism and the role of religion (i.e., Islam) in the public sphere. There seems to be two general options or ideal types to choose: the French *laïcité* adopted by the Kemalist establishment and the Anglo-Saxon secularism proposed by the ruling AK Parti. In other words, the Kemalist interpretation of religion seeks freedom from religion, while AK Parti —representing the conservative and devout people of Turkey—seeks freedom of religion that would allow religious people to share the power that had been denied to them by the Kemalist bureaucratic elite. Therefore, the contemporary polarization around religion in Turkey is caused by a disagreement over the definition rather than the necessity of the principle of secularism.

One thing common for both sides of the argument is that neither do want a "passive secularism" as coined by Ahmet Kuru, where the state completely retreats

from religious affairs or imposing "any established doctrine that defines the 'good' for its citizens."[155]

As I have mentioned before, the Turkish state tradition has a very long history of symbiotic relationship with religion, which would render the hopes for shifting into a "passive secularism" in Turkey unrealistic. Neither the Kemalist state nor the conservative democrats of AK Parti would prefer to completely withdraw from religious affairs whether their intention is to control or serve the people through religion. Thus, Turkish secularism defies any categorization within the separationist/accommodationist paradigm, as it is both. In fact, the only element that makes Turkish secularism seem accommodationist is the existence of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, and the Imam-Hatip schools established by the Kemalist party in the single party era. The rejection of Alevi gathering houses (*cem evi*) as legitimate worship houses, the prevention of non-Muslim minorities from being state officers, the banning of Islamic headscarves from all public institutions are examples of a separationist and assertive paradigm.

This assertiveness not only shows itself in barring religion from the public sphere, but also pretentiously displaying what are commonly accepted as secular symbols such as drinking alcohol, mixed-sex social gatherings, unveiled women, etc. In this sense, assertive secularism can also be described as a performance, while passive secularism is more about indifference and non-action. Performative

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[155] Ahmet Kuru, "Reinterpretation of Secularism in Turkey: The Case of the Justice and Development Party," in *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti*, ed. Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006), 137.

secularism is peculiar to Muslim societies as the visible symbols of drinking

alcohol or unveiling women do not constitute any distinctive point as to whether

one is secularist or anti-secularist in a Western society. These symbols are

preferred by people who want to assert their secularist political view in a way

similar to the headscarf preferred by Islamists to show their political identity.

"The woman question"

All Turkish feminists agree upon the fact that the Kemalist state saw

women's emancipation at the core of its modernization, secularization, and

nation-building process. Deniz Kandiyoti claims that starting from the Ottoman

era, the attempts of "liberating" women by the modernizing elite did not result

from their concern with gender-equality or women's rights per se, but from the

need to create "the new woman" who would accompany "the new man" that was

already modernized. She gives an account of the debates among leading male

intellectuals of the late Ottoman era regarding the issues of veiling, polygamy,

and women's public roles, emphasizing that in these debates women "remained

surprisingly passive onlookers."[156]

The Kemalist reforms aiming to encourage women to appear in the public

sphere with their Western outfit were largely internalized by women especially

around the network of military-bureaucratic elite, who accepted the role of being

the representatives of Kemalism in the public sphere. Atatürk personally glorified

this new Republican woman by adopting girls and raising them as the ideals of

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[156] Deniz Kandiyoti, ed., *Women, Islam, and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 38.

emancipated women: one of his adopted daughters is Afet Inan, a history teacher who established the Turkish History Thesis, under the direction of Atatürk, which claimed that the supremacy of Turkic nature was deteriorated by their conversion to Islam. And another one among his adopted daughters is Sabiha Gökçen, who is the first female combat pilot in Turkish history, whose first mission was to bomb the Kurdish city of Dersim (which was given the Turkish name Tunceli by the Kemalist state) in order to suppress a Kurdish uprising. Ayşe Gül Altınay reveals that Atatürk gave Sabiha his gun to kill herself if she is caught by the enemy. She sees this case as a manifestation of Atatürk's consideration of Sabiha's vulnerable female sexuality as the vulnerability of the honor of the nation-state, showing that Atatürk carried the traditional mentality against women's sexuality despite his claims in favor or women's emancipation.[157]

According to Nilüfer Göle, for the Republican women, emancipation came with the cost of "desexualization" in a way to hide their femininity, and have a gender-less appearance in the public sphere:

> the cost of women's liberation may be witnessed in the repression of her "femininity," which is perceived as a threat to the existing social order, and even of her "individuality," in both urban and public realms (education, labor, and politics).[158]

She talks about the formulation of the ideal "Anatolian woman" in contrast to the "Ottoman woman" whose experience of Westernization was criticized for being purely cosmetic and based on selfish interests. The Anatolian

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[157] Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 39.
[158] Göle,*The Forbidden Modern*, 79.

woman, on the other hand, was self-sacrificing, motherly, and eager to embrace modernism to serve her nation.[159] Therefore, the Sabiha Gökçen example was an exception to the idealized professional roles for women, which were more commonly teaching and nursing (a continuation of the Ottoman educational reforms for women which was limited to teacher and nursery colleges).

Esra Özyürek comes at a similar conclusion about the desexualization of Republican women in her interviews with some women from the first generation of the Republic, as they narrate the official Republican history instead of their personal stories. In her ethnography on the devout Kemalists in the 1990s, *Nostalgia for the Modern*, Özyürek explains how these women from the first generation of the Kemalist Republic see the single-party era as a Golden Age where they, as "daughters of the Republic" were sitting to close to "their father (Atatürk)", creating the imaginary of the early Republic and the nation as the children of the loving father Atatürk (which literally means father of the Turks), which totally contradicts with the emergent alternative accounts of history told by Islamists and Kurdish nationalists.[160]

Women and their headscarf

The iconic role of women in the official modernization project was mirrored in the Islamist project, making the women's headscarf the most explicit symbol of the Kemalist vs. Islamist rivalry. The headscarf of Merve Kavakçı in

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[159] Ibid., 64.
[160] Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

1998 brought the end of the FP, and its modernist successor AK Parti came to the brink of closure ten years later after passing the legislation in the parliament that removed the headscarf ban for university students.

The reason why headscarf is considered such an enormous threat can be found in Asad's description of the type of religious freedom that is allowed in secularism. According to Asad, a "public expression of religious belief and performance of religious ritual…[that is] a probable cause of a breach of the peace…[and] as a symbolic affront to the state's personality"[161] cannot be considered within the framework of religious freedom. In other words, by secularists, headscarf is loaded with a symbolic meaning that undermines the very founding idea of Turkish secularism, which is, the invisibility of religion in the public realm.

Furthermore, the headscarf stands out as the greatest puzzle for secular feminists in Turkey, who decided to side themselves with secularism, to prevent the Islamist wave that threatened women's emancipation accomplished through Kemalist reforms and also the newly forming independent women's movement in the 1980s.

The latest feminist movement that was able to challenge the state-led feminism was headed by scholars like Şirin Tekeli, Feride Acar, Yeşim Arat, Ayşe Saktanber, and Binnaz Toprak, who by and large saw the Islamist movement as a threat to women's emancipation –and their efforts of constructing

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[161] Asad, *Formations.* 205.

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an independent women's movement- as they considered Islam inherently

misogynist. Yeşim Arat and Binnaz Toprak, for example, argue that Islam's

misogynist status cannot be changed because it is based on Holy Law, while

secular law respects individual autonomy, and based on choice.[162]

On the other hand, Nilüfer Göle argues that Islamist women "are

empowered by an Islamism that assigns them a 'militant', 'missionary', political

identity, and by secular education, which provides them a 'professional',

'intellectual' legacy."[163] This double empowerment, however, is bound to be

transformed in time, as the secular wing of the empowerment would put the

religious wing into questioning. In other words, the missionary role given to

Islamist women would be questioned as veiled women go through individual

experiences under the secular professions they take at the end of their secular

educations.

Kenan Çayır's analysis of the Islamist novels in the 1980s and 1990s

indicates this transformation quite clearly. In *Islamic Literature in Contemporary

Turkey*, Çayır distinguishes between the collective identity in the "salvation

novels" of the 1980s and the individual identities in the "self-reflexive and self-

critical novels" of the 1990s.[164] He interprets this difference as a transformation

from the Islamist identity toward a Muslim identity, as the Islamism of the 1980s

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[162] See Şirin Tekeli, ed., *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1995).
[163] Göle, *The Forbidden Modern*, 21.
[164] Kenan Çayır, *Islamic Literature in Contemporary Turkey: From Epic to Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

loses its revolutionary fervor and the Islamists in the professional life come to

terms with real life and focusing on the individual conflicts of being a Muslim in a

secular modern ground. The veil, or headscarf, and the "militant" and

"missionary" role given to Islamist women, which are considered to be

"empowering" by Göle, becomes a great burden for the female protagonists of the

self-reflexive novels in the 1990s.

Furthermore, the commodification of Islamist symbols, from the

perspective of an Istanbulian Jewish anthropologist Yael Naravo-Yashin gives a

larger picture of the conflicts and concerns that arise when Islamism becomes a

mainstream phenomenon in the modern public sphere rather than a marginal

revolutionary ideology. She draws attention at the transformation of the headscarf

from being a symbol of religiosity to being a signifier in-and-of-itself, being

made into an object of commodification with the proliferation of a fashion

industry built on the veil:

> The headscarf has been interpreted by Islamists as a representation of
> Islamic chastity, the holy past, and Turkish local culture. That the
> representation does not neatly pair up with the ideal is obvious to many
> women who cover....The veil has a 'social life,' a different one, now, as
> signifier. It does not simply refer to female religiosity or belief. Now the
> veil has gained meaning in-and-of itself, it refers to politics of identity in
> relation to secularists and the secularist state.[165]

The commodification of the headscarf and Islamic apparel has come to

such a point that an Islamic fashion magazine was published for the first time in

Turkey, in 2011. The *Âlâ* magazine has quickly become the best-selling fashion

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[165] Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*
(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 110.

magazine in Turkey, indicating the extent to which "the new elite" has actually created a space for itself in the public sphere, making themselves comfortable in the secular public sphere, which was a foreign land for them three decades ago. The ten-years of AK Parti rule in the country witnessed the appropriation of the secular sphere by the Islamic elite, who were not "newcomers" anymore.

The post-Islamist condition

The political power Islamists gained in the 1990s becomes also the testing ground for the assertive claims of Islamism, which they finally are forced to negotiate with the secular state. As Berna Turam (2008) argues in *Between Islam and the State*, the experience of Islamists in the political arena and other parts of the public sphere brought the self-criticism and self-reflexivity to Islamists who gradually chose to engage with the secular state rather than confront it.

The current political party in power since 2002 (the AK Parti) and the most powerful Islamic movement in Turkey with a transnational network (the Gülen movement) are the results of this politics of engagement which softened the sharp edges of the secular state and the Islamist movement.

However, neither Islamism nor the state is a fixed and monolithic entity in this context. As mentioned earlier, the Islamist movement was comprised of at least two different modes typified by the Islamist and non-Islamist scholars. Named as "political Islam" by Nilüfer Göle, this form of Islamism believes in the primacy of capturing the state in order to reform the society. On the other hand, there is the other form of Islamism that aims to reform the society by spreading

individual piety, and taking the socio-cultural realm as the acting ground, what Göle called "cultural Islamism."

In this case, while the AK Parti can be considered the modified form of political Islamism, the Gülen movement can be considered the modified form of cultural Islamism. However, this does not mean that AK Parti has no interest in the socio-cultural morality or the Gülen movement totally excludes the political realm. It is more about the primary ground of action through which Islamist actors try to provide solutions to modern problems. In this sense, the Islamist movement is considered to be a modern movement, and a certain secularization of Islam can be claimed to have taken place as both the AK Parti and the Gülen movement gave precedence to secular global terms like human rights and democracy in order to defend their claims.

The Kemalists, on the other hand, are in the defensive position today as they found Islamism as a genuine rival to the monopoly of Kemalism on the definition of modernity, and as Özyürek (2006) and Çınar (2005) claim, the weakening of the secularist state establishment gave birth to civil claims to the protection of the Kemalist principles –mainly secularism and nationalism. It can also be claimed that Islamism unearthed a strong civilian support for Kemalism especially during the AK Parti reign after 2002.

However, I think Navaro-Yashin's skepticism about the boundaries between the state and civil society is worth being considered here:

> Even though Atatürkist officials and the mainstream secular press presented Republic Day 1994 as "a day orchestrated by civil society", as

my ethnographic account illustrates, it is not easy to distinguish empirically between the state and society on the site of this event, any more than it is difficult and unwise, I argue, in many other cases. I will suggest that this was neither the state nor society, problematizing the analytical distinction state and society. What was, however, possible to illustrate empirically, is that Atatürkist officials, like the governor of Istanbul, were attempting to manipulate the term "civil society" for their own ends. There was, then, a discourse of society, and many people did attend the celebrations. Yet those among the audience who had not come merely for a free concert were there to stand for one (Atatürkist) as opposed to another (Welfarist or Kurdist) face of the state. One should perhaps be cautious in identifying this scene as an illustration of a reified notion of a public sphere or the organization of civil society in Turkey. Here, as in other ethnographic sites, it is unclear where the state ends and society begins, and vice versa.[166]

Three years after the large-scale "Republican rallies" orchestrated in several cities of Turkey against the appointment of an Islamist president in 2007, the court cases against illegal groupings within the state organism revealed that those civilian rallies were organized by military officers by using non-state organizations as a disguise. In other words, it is not easy to distinguish between a state intervention and a non-state opposition when the Kemalist state is today embodied by people on the street who act as the state, just like the first-generation republican women who equated their private life stories with the official history of the Republic of Turkey.

Or, to put it differently, we can say that where there is so much politicization of people's mundane activities (such as drinking alcohol, clothing preferences, the words they use, their ways of entertainment, not to mention the books and newspapers and websites they read), it is impossible to draw a line

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[166] Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*, 152.

between state and society, or individual and the community. The everyday life of each citizen in Turkey is a site of political analysis, which is more so for the highly-educated professional Muslim women who carry the traces of all the foretold processes in their everyday life conditions.

Chapter 3

INDIVIDUAL ROUTES TO PIETY

This chapter is designed to give an account of the diverse ways in which piety is conceptualized and cultivated by highly-educated Muslim women in Turkey. These women hold active positions within the secular-public sphere while trying to keep their aim of becoming pious in their own way, in relation to their subjective understanding of piety.

I will start this chapter by talking about my own story of getting to the field site, and making myself comfortable in the field, even though I chose the sites I had some affiliations with. My experiences with readjusting to my old places after five years of living abroad for my graduate study, turned out to be part of my research, the reasons of which will be reveled in the following pages.

After explaining how I started and conducted my fieldwork, I will start narrating the stories of various journeys to piety. I have roughly organized these stories along two lines of family backgrounds: secular and religious. Among the secular families, I have identified two types of secularities: the ultra-secularist families that are hostile to religion, such as Esra's family; and the moderately secularist families that are indifferent to religion, such as the families of Rüya and Edibe. The religious families, on the other hand, were described roughly in three lines of identification: the politically active Islamist family, as told in the stories of Zeliha and Neslihan; the nationalist-religious family, like Ceren's; and traditionally religious families like that of Hilal, Buse, and Zuhal.

As you read through the stories of these different passengers on the piety train, you will come to realize that in these stories, each subject, within the particular regimes of truth and knowledge, bring their own knowledge and language of piety, as well as their own subjective relations to piety. And each story evokes major points to rethink about our conceptions of the subject, agency, freedom, and submission, without mentioning any of these words openly.

Even though I tried to capture as many diverse stories as possible, I was limited with the scope of a dissertation. Therefore, I tried to bring up the most striking examples to contribute to my aim of showing the diversity of the conception of piety, as well as the pursuers of it, contrary to the hasty categorizations of "covered women" (they are not all covered), "religious women" (they do not necessarily have the same conception of religion), or "conservative women" (they are not conservative in their worldviews). Furthermore, I believe that the stories of these pious women will add a new dimension to the understanding of a particular kind of Islamic revival in the case of the Turkish public sphere, without containing the Islamic actors in the category of Islamism or any specific Islamic movement.

With these stories, I also aim to portray different types of secularities, and religiosities, as well as the blurring of the line between religious and the secular in the everyday lives of the common people of Turkey.

The beginnings

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I was looking for a place to start –a place which would provide me a part time job so that I could get to know more women, with diverse experiences yet with a common concern to become pious. I already had a natural network from my college life that I had left behind five years ago. I also had small academic network of pious friends whom I met in London, and I managed to keep in touch with them when they also finished their studies and returned to Turkey.

Knowing that I did not have a sufficient range of stories to knit up a meaningful pattern, I wanted to familiarize myself with the contact lists of some non-governmental women's organizations that helped pious women to socialize with like-minded people. Among many others,[167] it was the Women's Platform (WP) under the Journalists and Writers Foundation that took my attention first, because I was already familiar with the foundation as the most prestigious voice of the Hizmet movement.[168]

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[167] In Istanbul only, there are over fifty pious women's NGO's in different sizes, specialized in different aspects of social work. The umrella organization called Gokkusagi (Rainbow) Women's Associations Platform (GIKAD) has been bringing together local small-sized women's associations since 1995, and coordinating their activities to bring a greater effect in society. The founder of GIKAD, Dr. Gulsen Ataseven, has been involved in the founding of many of these pious women's associations since 1964. She is also the first medical school student who wore the headscarf in Turkey. She was given the Outstanding Service Award by the Turkish parliament in 2009.

[168] It was established in 1994 with the initiative of Fethullah Gülen to promote "tolerance and dialog" within the Turkish society. The foundation became popular in Turkish media in the late 1990s with its *iftar* dinners and award ceremonies that gathered celebrities, businessmen, religious leaders, politicians, and journalists

After failing in my initial attempt to find a part time job in the media

group of this pietist movement, and having to look for a job for two months with

no success,[169] I finally went to the Journalists and Writers Foundation and asked

for a part-time job as well as permission to do my fieldwork there. We agreed, and

thus I started to work as a part-time project coordinator at the WP. But soon after,

I realized that there were too many projects for the three of us –Mualla, the

general secretary, Ceren, her assistant, and myself– and I already had started

working six days of the week from 9 am to 7 pm. It was the newest platform of

with the theme of "hoşgörü ve diyalog" (tolerance and dialog) in luxurious venues. It grew gradually to include seven platforms specialized in different aspects of building dialog (See http://www.gyv.org.tr/ for more information about the foundation and the platforms operating under it).

One might think that their idea of tolerance was the product of a specific context, when they themselves were the minority within the larger society. In that sense one might argue that they promoted tolerance because they needed it for themselves in the first place. On the other hand, this feeling of being a minority, might also have helped them to empathize with the other marginal and oppressed sections of the society, even after they have gained the mainstream dominant position within Turkish society almost a decade after their establishment.

[169] I had made a job interview with the Zaman newspaper to work at the foreign news department when I went to Istanbul for fieldwork in August 2010. I was told to provide necessary documents and start the next month, but before two weeks, they had changed their minds for some reason still unknown to me. Thus, I had to search for a job for the first time in my life, which took two months with no success. I had to find a short term, and also part-time job to be able to do my fieldwork at the same time. The best option for me was to teach English, but it was not available for me because of my headscarf. I was always aware of this fact that I cannot work with my headscarf in a secular institution, even the privately owned ones; but being told this directly to my face was much more painful than simply knowing of that fact. This two-month period of job search as a highly-educated *başörtülü* woman taught me why they were doomed to work in so-called conservative institutions with lower wages than they would get in other institutions without their headscarves (See TESEV's report on "The Headscarf Ban and Discrimination: Headscarved Women in the Labor Market" prepared by Dilek Cindoğlu in October 2010).

the JWF, and thus needed extra work for achieving to build a network similar in number to the other platforms' networks.

Our target was the prominent women in business, academia, media and press, civil society, politics, and arts. Our method was to meet these people from diverse views, either by visiting them or hosting them, or attending in events where we can meet these prominent people. The other method we were following was educating foreigners[170] about any type of misinformation or stereotype regarding Muslim women by allowing them to pose their questions directly to us.

On the other hand, we were providing informal educational settings for women to be able to listen to lectures by prominent scholars in their own fields.[171] With these reading groups, female volunteers were sought who would be sophisticated and critical thinkers, intellectually curious, and self-learned individuals, who could establish dialogue with the secular-liberal intellectuals and

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[170] The foundation was having foreign visitor groups from different countries around the world, who were brought to Turkey by the local Hizmet volunteers abroad. Each group was given a brief presentation about the foundation, and the rest of the conversation was carried out by any staff of the foundation from one of the platforms. The visitor groups from Europe and the US were mostly interested in hearing about the Women's Platform, assuming it to be an achievement in their own standards towards the "emancipation" of Muslim women. Our mission was usually trying to explain how the WP was not a feminist organization, though it did not remain indifferent to gender issues.

[171] When I started to work at the WP as a project coordinator, my main task was to organize the reading groups formed in five disciplines: Literature, History, Sociology, Science and Technology, and Women's Studies. For each of these disciplines, a professor was asked to be the consultant and prepare a reading and seminar syllabus to be followed. For these seminars, participation was free and voluntary, without any credits or grades given at the end. In this way, we could see who was really interested in learning and improving their knowledge on an area they like. The Women's Studies seminars will be analyzed in a more detailed way in the next chapter.

scholars. It was, in some ways, an attempt to prove to the secularists that people could be both pious and modern at the same time, that women who wear the headscarf are actually capable of critical thinking and intellectual reasoning.

Adjusting to the linguistic economy of the field site

In many ways, working at the WP during my pre-research period helped me to calibrate my initial plans about my research that I had developed when I was in the US. In my effort to explain my Turkish friends and colleagues –who had almost equal higher education degrees with me- I realized how the language I was using was different from the way they understood it. What Bakhtin described as *heteroglossia* was right in front of my eyes, as I was constantly struggling with the different meanings springing from the word *dindar* and *dindarlık* in spite of what I intended them to mean.

One day at the WP, for example, I was reading through an American-Jewish friend's master's thesis on the love of God, and muttering to myself:

> I personally know this person, and I would never imagine such an author for such a deep and touching text. Is this my failure in knowing people? Do I have too many prejudices? Am I taught so? How did I get to know this person? Well, she was always dressed up very indecently according to my ethical codes (almost showing her breasts and quite a large part of her legs all the time), in no way modest in our standards. But this woman is pious *(dindar* was the word I used)*, yes she is! She speaks of God as much as she speaks of sex. She has Hebrew hymns as well as one night stands in her songs. This woman smashes the "either/or" view in my mind. But how can she carry these two modes at the same time? Or how come do we think that these two (immodesty and piety) cannot go together?

"What you are talking about is not *dindarlık*," said Ceren, "that is *iman* (faith). *Dindarlık* equals to *ibadet* (religious practice)." Once again, I thought I

was unable to convey the meaning I had in my mind with the word *dindar*, as I meant "This woman is pious" but Ceren thought I was saying "This woman is religious." With *dindar*, I meant my friend's connection with God and her deep concern about God in her daily life, despite lacking the modesty standards in my own mind. And Ceren thought of it as fulfilling the prescribed practices of her religion. Suddenly I realized that we were both judging from within our own tradition: I was surprised at her deep connection with the God despite lacking the kind of modesty I was familiar with in my own tradition. Most probably, that was my moment of questioning the possibility of a universal concept of modesty and its role in cultivating piety.

For Ceren, though, it was important to differentiate between *iman* (faith or belief) and *din* (religion), as she believed that belief is only one part of religion, which is not complete without practice. But from within her own tradition, she made the judgment that this American-Jewish woman lacked religious practice. In fact, her objection was towards all forms of Protestantized religions, which, she claimed, "reduced religion into belief, while belief is only a part of religion." Her displeasure with the erasing of practice from religion "as a general trend of modernity" had made her embrace a stronger position towards practice, and come to the point of claiming that "*Dindarlık* equals to *ibadet*."

On the other hand, my own experience with the conception of *dindarlık* in Turkey had brought me to the point of exhaustion with the strong emphasis on practice, until I got into the concept of "piety" in a specific context informed by

the ideas of anthropologists like Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and Charles Hirschkind. In one sense, the line between religion and the secular was removed for me in my exposure to these works of anthropology, since they had a direct influence over my conception of my relationship to God, to the rules of my religion, and to my society. This exposure allowed me to develop a wider sense of piety that could not be reduced into any of these, while learning to appreciate any kind of connection with God in relation to the sacred sources of one's specific religious tradition. In that sense, I was able to connect my Jewish friend's relationship to God to my understanding of piety, because I had witnessed her appropriating the Torah in her everyday language and activities like songwriting. Contrary to what Ceren thought, I did not reduce piety into belief; instead, I expanded the conception of religious practice in a way that would include singing for God, and writing about God.

This experience made me realize that each person I interviewed would have their unique form of being informed about the concept of *dindarlık.* Some would emphasize the practice aspect, and some would emphasize the belief. For some, it would mean a good character, and for others it would evoke narrow-mindedness and intolerance. *Dindarlık* did not have a singular meaning, either. There were layers of this conception: *dindarlık* according to me, according to the society, according to such and such religious leaders, etc. Considering this complexity within my native language, I decided to wait and see what my interlocutors understood with the word *dindarlık,* before I asked them questions

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about their experiences that would reveal if they agreed with my conception of piety as becoming. In other words, this language problem turned out to be a useful tool in understanding whether my interlocutors' conception of *dindarlık* was faith-oriented or practice-oriented, or which was more influential than the other.

Getting to know more field sites

After spending six months at the WP, the general secretary, Mualla told me that the Hizmet volunteers are opening a new university in Istanbul, which would focus on social sciences. I went to talk with the general secretary of the university, and found it hard to say no when he offered me a position in the department of sociology. For him, I was the ideal candidate for the academic positions regarding the material qualities (BA, MA degrees and a future PhD degree from the US), and the spiritual qualities (I was recommended by a prominent Hizmet volunteer, I graduated from the first university established by the Hizmet volunteers, and I was wearing a headscarf: enough to make him think that I was a pious woman).

The way I was hired was so arbitrary and quick that I could not have a moment to hesitate and put forward conditions other than not being hired as a research assistant, but as a lecturer before I get my PhD degree. However, I ended up being hired as an RA, which, they said was a temporary action for they could not find anyone else to fill that position. They wanted to make sure that not any applicant with officially required qualifications could claim the academic positions; so the written exam for all applicants was made too hard. I hardly

passed it for sociology was not my major, and the other candidates were too far from getting the required score.

I was too naïve to know that the hiring system in Turkish universities was not necessarily based on academic references, but more on the worldviews, characters, or the ideologies of the candidates. That is why, I remembered, when we graduated from university in 2005, two of my friends went to the oral exam for the graduate school of METU[172] by dressing up in hipster clothes and wearing appropriate make-up and hairdo in order to hide their pious identities (in addition to taking off the headscarf which was banned). So, this had been the system since time immemorial, and the pietists were now utilizing that same system according to their own criteria.

Living inside that system for all their lives, nothing about this established practice seemed wrong to the people in Turkey, as they believed in their right to be able to prefer people who share their values over those who do not. In fact, the Hizmet volunteers were much tolerant than some secularists, for their fundamental criterion in hiring was seeking for people who were tolerant of their values rather than a supporter of them. This selection preference turned out to be quite beneficial for my research, as I had the chance to meet women who did not identify themselves with any movement, and yet claimed a desire for becoming a pious woman.

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[172] Middle East Technical University in Ankara, which is known to be the home of leftist and secularist ideologies, both for the academic staff and the student body.

But, I still was limited with the Hizmet framework in my list of acquaintances, regardless of their nature of relationship with the movement individually. Therefore, I decided to have a closer look at the other women's associations that WP desired to build dialog with. Among them, the Meridyen Association[173], and specifically the Meridyen Circle[174] possessed the kind of audience that was of interest to me: highly-educated, urban, professional, and pious at best, or religion-friendly at worst.

It struck me with its success in attracting the most well-known and strongest women figures of the ruling AKP, such as the wives of the president, prime minister, and other ministers in the cabinet in addition to covered novelists, columnists and authors who got popular in the Islamist and conservative circles.

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[173] The Meridyen Association is a non-governmental organization established in December 2010 with the aim of contributing "to the creation of a genuine tradition of language and thought by merging the universal heritage of knowledge with social values." "About Us," *Meridyen Association*, accessed April 23, 2011, http://www.meridyenassociation.org/?page_id=2.
In other words, it was established to promote the formation of a new intellectual tradition that would adopt "a position in society that is both comprehensive, yet independent, maintaining equal distances from all social dynamics" (Ibid). They deliberately did not use the word "Islamic" in describing their missions, for they aimed to be claiming for a mainstream position in society, mirroring the ten-year shift of Islamism from the periphery to the center in Turkish social and political life.
[174] Meridyen Circle defines itself as "a special academically supported unit that brings together Turkey's intellectual female resources. Formed with an international vision, this group aims to bring together young women who are conducting academic work abroad with female authors and academics who shape the intellectual discourse in Turkey with its goal being to collaboratively create projects." "Meridyen Circle" *Meridyen Association* accessed April 23, 2011, http://www.meridyenassociation.org/?p=956.

What was shared by the WP, the university, and the MC was a strong focus on social sciences, which was seen as the basis of development contrary to the commonly held belief in the importance of science and technology. On the website of the Meridyen Association, it is explained that social sciences is "accepted to be one of the important parameters of development at an international level" and their society aims to "contribute to subjects such as the compatibility of the established areas of study in social sciences in Turkey with the actual problems of the society, the question of which discipline has gained significance and investigating the paradigms that are dominant in these disciplines."[175] In this context, the Meridyen Circle stands out as the key constituents of this organization, which aims to promote the highly-educated part of the new Muslim elite to engage in the study of social sciences that had been established and so far maintained by the secular West outside, and its supporters inside Turkey.

The method

Attending the meetings of both the WP and the MC, and working full time at the social-science focused university of the pietist Hizmet movement, I managed to meet, become friends, and interview with around fifteen women throughout my field research.

They were academics, media members, NGO workers, authors, and clinical therapists –areas of profession that have been and are still dominated by

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[175] Ibid.

secular voices that are intolerant of religion. In addition to the diversity of their professions, I was struck by the diversity of their family backgrounds, and experiences with coming out to be who they are today.

I realized that my story was just a simple and unimportant one among many striking and interesting piety stories to be told. In the rest of this chapter, I will try to give a sense these diverse stories: how they are unique and peculiar to their protagonists and yet altogether constitute the collective story of an entire society. I will analyze the family backgrounds of my protagonists and discuss the different types of secularities and religiosities they experienced in their families as they were getting ready to get on their own piety train.

Diverse backgrounds, diverse paths

I believe that piety is a journey, and naturally people depart from different points, and follow different paths which sometimes converge with the path of the others, or diverge from the larger path at some points. In this section, I have tried to come up with some models of these departures to provide the readers a kind of map that they can follow while reading the scattered stories that have found their ways to this research.

Emerging out of secular families

The first of these models is the "secular family-religious child model," which emerges as a pattern in these stories of those who are raised in a secular family and became pious later in their lives.

There are two distinguishable patterns in this "secular family-religious child" model: two types of secular family. The first type of secular family can be described as ultra-secular, who are ideologically against any form of visible religiosity towards religion. Kemalism is the ideology they are adhering to, and they think Islam is incompatible with Western modernity and thus should be left behind in the process of modernization. This secularist ideology was already discussed in the previous chapter, with its ramifications in the political and intellectual realm. The way this ideology is manifested in the daily lives of common people is rarely talked about, except Esra Özyürek's mentioning of her own Kemalist parents and how they adopted the Kemalist ideology in their private sphere in the face of the rise of Islamism in the public sphere.[176]

Since I chose most of my interlocutors around my age, they were the children of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which happened to be the formative years of Islamism in the socio-political arena. To some extent, it can be claimed that Turkish society was not polarized as much as in the 2000s, for Islamism and pietism were still in the periphery and could still not rival the mainstream secularist view. That view was so dominant in schools, in media, in politics, and in culture politics that being a religious person inevitably carried the risk of being ostracized by the members of that circle. Being from a traditional, rural family, I always thought religion as a natural part of our life, except when I entered into the realm of the secular school. But for some of my interlocutors, religion did not

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[176] Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

exist at all–either deliberately been erased, or simply forgotten and ignored in their urban, secular, modern families.

An unlikely saint: Esra

An example to the emerging of a pious woman from a Kemalist family is Esra, my co-worker in the university. Her parents are both retired teachers, educated in the village institutes (*köy enstitüleri*) which were established by the single-party regime in order to cultivate secularist, nationalist, and modernist citizens for the new regime.[177] "My family has nothing to do with religion" she said, "I have never lived in a religious setting in my childhood."

I interviewed with Esra after knowing her for six months, and she had already been a kind of saint in my eyes, when she initially told me that she quit her job as a financial analyst in an international cosmetic company to work at this university as a research assistant in the Business department for a third of her previous salary, in addition to commuting from the west end of the European side

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[177] "These institutes emphasized learning by doing. The curriculum combined academic, agricultural, and technical subjects. The institutes would train villagers to return to their villages as teachers and community leaders, spreading new skills and improving rural life. A central goal was to elicit enthusiasm and volunteerism for the exertions that the program required. The local villagers were expected to provide land for their institute at low prices and work twenty days a year for it. The students were expected to provide labor for making improvements, cultivating crops, and tending animals. The institutes were expected to promote nationalism and Kemalism and to Turkify the peasants. Institute programs included creative efforts to appeal to young people. Reciprocal visits among institutes and group trips to other parts of the country broadened students' national awareness." Carter V. Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789-2007* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 46.

to the east end of the Asian side –a two hour travelling with normal traffic

conditions.

What could possibly have made her give up a bright career and consent to

do the chores of a research assistant?[178] I myself showed patience to all the extra

chores (extra according to what I experienced in the US) knowing that it was a

temporary position I needed in order to complete my fieldwork and eventually get

my PhD degree, which would change everything if I ever came back to that

university. For Esra, it was a permanent decision for the sake of being there at any

cost.

Esra's Prophetic dreams

Esra told me that it was a dream that made her decide to take this job. It

was the first time she shared her –what seemed like- prophetic dreams[179] with me;

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[178] Being a research assistant (RA) in Turkish universities does not necessarily entail doing research, as it is mostly seen being an "assistant" rather than a "researcher" as far as I can tell from my nine-months of experience. Particularly, a newly establishing university is the least advantageous place to be an RA. In the absence of students and classes (they must wait for the national university exam placement results to have students) the administration does not feel the need to hire more than minimum administrative staff, as they think that the RAs can work as department secretaries and even as faculty secretaries. Esra and I had to spend days and weeks trying to learn the bureaucratic language of higher-education administration, for we were responsible for the official correspondence of our entire faculties in the first five months.

[179] According to Islamic tradition, there are three types of dreams: 1) what is called true dreams, or visitational dreams, or Prophetic dreams, 2) bad dreams, the whisperings of the Devil to drive believers into despair, 3) dreams related to daily activities, i.e. secular dreams. This classification is based on this saying of the Prophet Muhammad, narrated by his companion, Ebu Huraira: "Dreams are of three types: one good dream which is a sort of good tidings from Allah; the evil dream which causes pain is from the satan; and the third one is a suggestion of one's own mind." (Sahih Muslim, 29: 5621)

she probably felt the trust with me that I could make sense of the stuff she was

going to say. She was a devout volunteer of the Hizmet, and she deeply believed

in the notion of service to humanity being equal to service to God. My previous

connection with the WP had given her the confidence that she could share this

dream with me:

> I saw this dream when I was working at the cosmetic company, and there
> was no mentioning of this school yet. In my dream, I am in a village in
> Kastamonu. I see a huge mountain and a lighthouse on top of it. There is
> an old woman beside me who is living in that village. I ask her:
> –What is that lighthouse?
> –Bediüzzaman lives under that lighthouse, she says.
> I get surprised. Then I see a well in front of us. I throw a stone into the
> well. Then I ask the woman:
> –What will come out of this well?
> –*Medresetüz-zehra* will arise, she says.
> Then Mualla abla[180] called me about the school, and I went for the
> interview. After that, I gave this not-so-rational decision and quit my job of
> 4000TL (approximately $2,500) salary and came here.[181]

The contents of this dream are very much related to the life story of

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, and very well-known among most Hizmet volunteers,

who have taken Nursi's and Gülen's works as their essential daily readings.

Kastamonu is one of the cities in the north-west of Turkey, where Nursi spent

some of his exile years (1936-1943). [182] Nursi's dream of establishing an Islamic

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[180] *Abla* means older sister in Turkish. It is used for respect for elderly women in a community, and it has a technical meaning in the Hizmet community, meaning a spiritual guide or helper for a certain group of Hizmet women. Referring Mualla as an *abla* was an informal way of showing our respect to her. The title *hanım* which we used in formal settings, on the other hand, implies no kinship or age difference.

[181] The RA's were paid approximately $1000 monthly.

[182] Nursi was arrested in Van after a Kurdish-Islamist revolt against the secular nation-state in 1925, together with all religious figures in the region regardless of

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madrasah, which he named *medresetüzzehra,* would combine the teaching of religious and positive sciences. Gülen and his followers have taken up the task of realizing this dream by establishing elementary and secondary private schools[183] as early as the 1980s. However, the main focus of the movement in the recent years has been on universities, the first of which was established in 1996. Between 2007 and 2010 more than three universities were established in different cities of Turkey with the donations of the local sponsors. This one was going to be the second university of the movement in Istanbul, and it was going to focus on social sciences in order not to impede the student enrollment of the other university.

This dream of Esra was certainly of those "that mattered" in Amira Mittermaier's words, "in the sense of having significance in people's lives and,

his involvement with the revolts. He was sent to exile to Western Anatolia, to live in absolute isolation; and yet, he managed to write his six-thousand-page collection of Risale-i Nur (The Treatise of Light) during his exile and imprisonment in the cities of Burdur, Isparta, Eskişehir, Kastamonu, and Afyon. For Nursi's biography, see Sukran Vahide, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi: The Author of the Risale-i Nur* (Selangor, Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 2011).

[183] These schools followed the secular syllabus of the Ministry of National Education, however, the teachers were trained to be pious men (and women, after the 1990s) who were to be spiritual guides to the students outside the school hours. Most of these schools were boarding schools to enable the best the spiritual guidance. In the 1940s, the Kemalist single-party regime introduced Imam-Hatip schools, the particular secondary schools to raise imams and clergy for the Directorate of Religious Affairs. Their curriculum included Islamic sciences like *kalam, tafseer, fiqh, hadith* in addition to regular national curriculum. Although the conservative people embraced these schools quite warmly, the followers of Nursi and Gülen never saw these as the fulfillment of Nursi's dream of enabling the reunion of mind and heart.

more literally, in the sense of having an impact on the visible, material world."[184] This dream made me think that Esra was very much informed about the spiritual teachings of the Hizmet, and she had a deep level of devotion its *dava*, or mission. While listening to her story, I had an angel on my right shoulder telling me how God has bestowed her with blessings, and Freud on my left shoulder telling me how she was so much into the discourse of the Hizmet, and she saw this dream because of her intensive relationship with the movement in her everyday life. This double-mode continued as she kept telling me about the other prophetic dreams she saw, making me more curious about the rational explanation behind this routinizing of "otherworldly" experience.

How could it be possible that a 14-year-old girl with no religious inspiration in her family could come up with such reasoning upon seeing a pollen flying outside the window, when she is travelling on a bus?

Even this tiny pollen has a purpose in life. What is my purpose? If I am going to die and everything will end, then why am I struggling for?

I never felt the need to question the meaning of life, as I was raised up as a believer in the existence of God, and I was told that we were created to worship God. Everything was so simple: if you worship God you go to Heaven when you die; and if you do not worship God, you will end up in Hell. My struggle was to find ways of worshipping God among all the distractions of the modern life. For a moment, I felt a subtle envy about the fact that thought was granted to Esra just

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[184] Amira Mittermeier, *Dreams That Matter*: *Egyptian Landscapes of the Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 2.

because God wished so –in other words, piety was created inside her *ex nihilo*, without the involvement of her self-cultivation. So, I asked: "how was it possible for you to come up with such reasoning? Were you reading stuff about that?" Her answer gave me some relief from a possible resentment towards God (for not choosing me for such spiritual experiences if it had nothing to do with one's self-disciplining); at least it reaffirmed my conviction that care for the self is definitely involved in receiving grants from God in the process of becoming pious:

> I was reading the booklet called "The First Word" by Said Nursi.[185] My sister's religion teacher had given it to her as a gift after she was successful in something –I don't remember now. My father was very angry at the teacher for giving Nursi's booklet; he didn't want her to read that. He was shouting "Do you know who this man is?" So, I was very curious, and I was reading that booklet secretly.

After this moment of epiphany, she starts to perform the ritual prayer once in a while, and reading more about the religious concepts she learns in the compulsory religion classes at school. In this process, she is simply on her own, because her mother was so lacking in knowledge about religion that when Esra wanted to see what the Qur'an is like, she showed her a hadith book that came as

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[185] In this booklet, Nursi talks about the importance and the meaning of the phrase "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate" which is called *besmele* and repeated as a formula in beginning any type of work. In this treatise, Nursi explains the relationship between all the creatures and God, and tells the reader how each creature acts in the name of God. See, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, "The First Word" in *The Words: The Reconstruction of Islamic Belief and Thought* (New Jersey: The Light Inc., 2005), 3-12.

a promotion of a mainstream newspaper.[186] In fact, she was not completely alone in her struggle of habituating herself for doing the prayer five times a day, for she again received divine help through a dream:

> I am in a very crowded conference hall; it is a huge closed complex. Our Prophet (pbuh) gets to the stage with shouts of applause. He fixes his eyes on me, and looks directly into my eyes. He leans his head to the right with a smile on his face. After that I started to perform *namaz*. It was a very strong reason for me.

At this point, my skeptical mind started questioning if it really was Prophet Muhammad whom she saw:

> –How did you know that it was him?
> –His face was very bright, very white, and very beautiful; I felt that it was our Prophet.

Why was I skeptical? Maybe I needed that *barzakhian* perspective that Amira Mittermaier talked about "to think beyond the present and the visible." Maybe I lacked the "insight into modes of being in the world that might not be intelligible from within rationalist, secular vocabularies"[187] even though I claim the belief in them. The fact that I had never experienced anything beyond the thick walls of the material world had made me oblivious to the intricacies of experiences beyond those walls. Furthermore, this lack had created a desire to go beyond the visible boundaries and jealousy for those who actually could do that. A subtle jealousy that stopped me from believing in the divineness of that

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[186] The mainstream newspapers are secularist in their viewpoints, however, they give out religious books as promotion every year in the month of Ramadan. This, mostly, had been how religious sources found their way into the houses of many secularist families.

[187] Mittermeier, *Dreams*, 4.

experience and led me to look for explanations to prove the constructedness, the worldliness of that experience…Thinking back now, I have a better understanding of "the notion that narrated dreams are powerful" which "is also underlined in the Quran, where Yūsuf is warned by his father not to tell his dream to his brothers so as not to evoke their envy."[188]

My concerns were not directly related to the dilemma between my researcher identity and my Muslim identity, like Abdellah Hammoudi experienced in his anthropological study of the Hajj as a secular Muslim, for he was "privileging a particular means of gaining knowledge," even though he claimed the Muslim tradition as his own, and took its discourse as his starting point.[189] There was a certain influence of my secular training in religion, language, and gender theories in my embracing of Freudian and Lacanian conceptions of dreams and subjectivity before embracing the Islamic conception that affirms the existence of a particular realm for the dreams outside the dreamer. Whereas, my conception of dreams corresponded with what Mittermaier described as "insisting

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[188] Ibid., 74. Mittermeier also talks about the reservations on narrating a visitational dream in the Islamic tradition, which recognizes dreams as powerful agents in the real life. Not telling a dream has several functions, one of which is containing "its performative potential" (Ibid.). The greater function is as is told in the Qur'an regarding the dream of Prophet Joseph: not evoking envy among people for the very blessing they have received by having a visit from the Prophet Muhammad, and also for the message of the dream that promises a good fortune. This is also related to the idea of "evil-eye" and the need to be protected from it by keeping the good things hidden from the gaze of others. In that sense, the negative power of the dream does not have to be about an absolute Other (like jinn or the Devil), but it is very much related to the immediate others surrounding the subject/object of the dream in real life.
[189] Abdellah Hammoudi, *A Season in Mecca: Narrative of a Pilgrimage* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 135.

on locating the dream's origin *inside* the dreamer" through which "one overlooks the possibility of other subjectivities, other dreams, and other imaginations."[190]

Even though I believed in the authenticity of those Prophetic dreams in theory, my lack of experiencing it had led the secular training to overrun this perception, and prevented me "to move beyond psychologizing and functionalist explanations, or at least to recognize them as historically and geographically specific."[191]

The problem also lied in my conception of the subject "as an autonomous and self-mastering subject of consciousness, or as an interiority that would be the private space of individual perception,"[192] which made me question her background information about the contents of her dream and try to make a correlation between her desires and her dreams. I was not necessarily looking for the unconscious, as I was more interested in the part of her dream when she was conscious: i.e. when she woke up. For the dream part, I could understand that she was, for that moment, "a subject inscribed in a network of symbolic debts, and defined in relation to that Other Scene, Freud and Lacan call the unconscious; a subject that speaks through the unmastered realms of dreaming, the lapsus or the joke, and manifests itself fugitively –an opening of shutters that immediately close up."[193]

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[190] Ibid., 15.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Stefania Pandolfo, *Impasse of the Angels: Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5.
[193] Pandolfo, *Impasse*, 5.

Mittermaier says that the visitational dream "exceeds and ruptures" both

models of "embodied practice" and "abstract reasoning" and, I would claim, the

above subject modals they assume. She claims that

> the dream-vision can be invited through certain communal practices and
> technologies of the self, but the source of its ethical imperative is held to
> be a locus outside the individual and the visible social realm. By way of
> the dream, an Other addresses the dreamer. Far from being the dreamer's
> unconscious, this Other is the imaginary interlocutor that the dreamer
> encounters in the dream-vision.[194]

Acting on dreams

However, this also did not mean that the person who saw these dreams

herself placed her subjectivity in that realm of non-self, for she was still

responsible for her decisions about the ways she could handle the message of that

dream in her daily life. In other words, it is her way of interpreting this dream –

even though she has her dream interpreted by someone she trusts– in deciding

how to act on this prophetic dream.

Mittermaier sees the ethics of visitational dream as a "spiritual

mechanism" described by Marcel Mauss, "that obliges a person to reciprocate the

present that has been received."[195] She claims that visitational dreams in all these

cases bring with them obligations. Each dream-visitation is simultaneously an

invitation."[196] However, this contrasts with the commonly circulated saying

among Turkish Muslims that "*Rüya ile amel olmaz*" meaning "You should not act

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[194] Mittermeier, *Dreams,* 141.

[195] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic
Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton, [1964] 2000), 7.

[196] Mittermeier, *Dreams,* 170.

on a dream." Fethullah Gülen explains that even the visitational-dreams should not be acted upon if the action they invite you is against the sacred sources:

> In Islam, the states like sleeping and fainting have been left outside the realm of responsibility (*mükellef*). Therefore, they don't have any aspects to be taken as basics for any religious rulings. In that context, one does not become an apostate if he/she utters a word of disbelief, as he/she is free from any responsibility during that state of unconsciousness. When you look at the issue from this perspective, neither the good tidings nor the warnings that come through a dream can be thought to have any objective value. Therefore, they cannot be considered as binding proof or evidence for an action. But it is possible for these dreams to give a particular message to the person who has the dream –unless that message contradicts with the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Apart from these cases, dreams have no value to themselves.[197]

Following this commonly held principle in her Hizmet community, Esra thought very carefully on her dreams, and she shared them only with a close friend and elder sister to her, not a Sufi sheikh, nor even having any religious title. She was just an editor at a publishing company. Yet, Esra thought that she had a profound sense of piety and connection with God, which gave her the confidence to share her prophetic dreams. But at the end of the day, it was still her decision that mattered, because there was no objective authority that could judge her for the way she acted on her dreams.

She could have just ignored the authenticity of her dream (that it was something totally outside of herself) and interpreted it as the manifestation of her thoughts about the Prophet, or other religious information she was receiving through her readings. But she interpreted it as a particular message to her given by

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[197] Fethullah Gülen, "Rüya ile Amel Edilir mi? (Should we act on dreams?)," *Kürsü (The Pulpit)*, August 7, 2002, accessed October 27, 2012, http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/11935/18/

the Prophet. She could have interpreted it as a message to be an appreciation by the Prophet –as that gesture normally implies, rather than a request by him to perform her ritual prayers regularly. And she would probably not directly look for a newly opening university after her dream, if someone she respected had not sent her to the job interview. In other words, she herself was in a constant mode of negotiation with the imaginary and the corporal realms, and yet she never gave up her own self in following the message of her dreams:

> –Let's assume that you have witnessed something unpleasant about the community you are affiliated with, and you want to leave. But in your dream, you saw Prophet Muhammad and he told you not to do so. Would you act according to your dream and stay inside the community despite the bad scene you have witnessed?
> –Yes, I usually see such dreams when I criticize something or decide to do something. Sometimes they are in the form of warning, and I act accordingly. Let me give you an example: I criticized someone at school in my mind. That night I saw that person in my dream. And an outside voice told me this: "I have appointed them to that position, they are *rıfat*." I did not know what *rıfat* meant, and I looked it up in the dictionary as soon as I woke up. I learnt that it means "one who is elevated." On another case, I saw the school in my dream when I expressed a criticism about it. At each floor, people are performing the ritual prayer in rows. There is a green cloth with gilded inscriptions on it, which is hung at the door of the administrative head of the school. How amazing, isn't it? Maybe this is how our school is reflected in the imaginary realm (*misal alemi*), and maybe, we are not able to see it with our blackened hearts.

3D piety: the individual-the community-the divine

It was amazing, indeed, how Esra had cultivated a totally different subjectivity than her parents had ever thought or intended for her. Her father's seeing religion as a weakness was surely not shared by this young woman. It was through religion that she got the strength to change her life for a cause she believed in. While her parents saw themselves as the carriers of the beacons of

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enlightenment –a role given to teachers by the Kemalist regime, Esra saw her role in serving God, and religion by using the same means of education. However, holding an opposite view of life with her parents did not make her turn her back towards them, as she still performs her prayers outside of their sight, and she does not wear the headscarf so as not to totally scare them off.

This is a sign of how piety stands on a three dimensional relationship consisting of the individual, the society, and the divine. In this scheme, it is not enough to engage in individual worship and prayer to get close to God, as God also requires the believers to maintain good social relationships. Given the context of a young woman like Esra, there is an *aporia* to be solved each and every moment of interaction with her parents and many of her close family members: her individual pious performances have the risk of harming her social relations, and thus hindering her overall aim of becoming pious.

A different model of secularity

Another type of secular family in Turkey, which is more common but also complicated to deal with as a pious woman, is those who are simply indifferent to religion without a significant ideological bearing on it. They are not hostile toward religion but it is not part of their life. Part of the reason is that they don't want it to be a part of their life due to the complications and controversies it will bring. It is also more based on the feeling of comfort and taste rather than being ideological. These families are usually fine with a basic level of religiosity: this religiosity rarely includes the ritual prayer except for the Friday congregational

prayer for men, and any visible marks of religiosity (i.e. clothing). Instead, it consists of fasting during the month of Ramadan, having religious rituals for birth, marriage and death, and it usually goes no deeper than that. Parents from such secular families do not want their daughters wear the headscarf because of the headscarf ban as well as the social stigma it carries.

What is common for both types of secular families is that children from those families have no religious guidance or learning in their family environment. Interestingly, the religion classes in the national curriculum which were introduced by the military regime became the only door opening to religion for these children. Many Islamists, followers of certain pietist movements and *tarikat*s criticize these religion classes to be shallow, based on memorization, and lacking any spirit in it; and their claim is that no one can be truly pious through those religion classes. However, what I have seen in the example of Esra, and many others I interviewed, is that religion entered their households through those classes. A particular political decision became a turning point in the everyday lives of many ordinary people, who barely make it to the grand narratives of political analysis. Those classes functioned as a trigger for many young people to get interested in religion and seek for more when they get to college and meet several Islamist and pietist groups. This was probably not the intention of the junta in the 1980, who simply wanted to curtail the power of communism and leftism threatening the state; and they certainly were not able to control how people would appropriate the content of those classes in their everyday lives.

Although they initially injected religion combined with nationalism and loyalty to Atatürk, these could easily be chopped off once the student was attracted to various religious groups with her interest in religion.

An unlikely passenger on the piety train: Rüya

Rüya, my other colleague in the psychology department, had her only connection with religion through those classes. She describes her family as "neither religious nor ultra-secular" just like the majority of secular Turkish families: "My father used to fast during Ramadan. We used to listen to the *ezan* (call to prayer) together. The spirituality in our family used to increase in Ramadan." Even though her mother started to perform the ritual prayers at the age of 45 after having a uterus surgery, she did not feel the need to teach her children about religion, or encourage them to start doing the ritual prayer as well. In other words, her conception of piety did not have a missionary aspect in it.

Rüya's connection with religion was limited to what she learnt in the compulsory religion classes at school, until her elder sister, who was a communist, went to college and met a follower of the Hizmet movement, whom she would marry later on.

> My interest in religion actually started when my elder sister joined the Hizmet community. She had always been my idol, both when she was a communist and when she became pious. I started performing the ritual prayer at the age of sixteen. I never quit except for a short time in college when I went into depression.

I still remember my astonishment at seeing her in the prayer room at the basement of the school, because I had got no clue whatsoever from her

appearance, her expressions, or her behaviors that she could be a pious woman. I was indeed very curious about the very process that brought her to that university, which turned out to be her sister's recommendation, for she had a respected position within the Hizmet community. But still, she did not fit the usual Hizmet type around me, she was clearly different from Esra even though they were both "non-covered": Esra would never show her arms, her legs, or her shoulders; and she would always wear a long tunic to cover her bottom. It was only the lack of headscarf that was distinguishing Esra's outfit from my outfit as a "covered" woman.[198] Rüya, on the other hand, dressed up in a more secular manner, with tight shirts, knee-length skirts, tight jeans, short-sleeve tees, and so on. She did have her modesty standards, but the divergence from the authorized Islamic clothing standards was much more than the headscarf. I wondered how she was attracted to religion:

> The answers you find to the most fundamental questions orient you towards religion. The fact that you find an answer to the question of "what is the meaning of life?" makes you attracted to religion. Maybe my sister had a small effect on me, but it was this questioning that brought me to this point. ..

The intellectual stimulus

In the lack of any social stimulus favoring religion, Rüya had clung to the intellectual stimulus, a kind of individual bond with the divine.

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[198] The Islamic rules for covering are stricter for women than men. According to the Hanafi school of *fiqh*, women should cover all their bodies except their face, hands, and feet, and they must not wear tight or transparent clothes that would reveal the shape of their bodies.

You cannot find the meaning of life from another source. I think no answer exists to these questions except religion. I believe that everything has a cause, a purpose. A purpose for our development, and for our transition to the other side (the Hereafter) as purified.

The satisfaction of her intellectual curiosity enabled her to move on with her journey on the path of piety. However, this journey was not smooth all the time, for she had new questions with new experiences she had in her daily life and mostly in her job as a clinical therapist:

I think there is too much suffering in this world, no matter how much I believe that this is a test for humanity. There is this concept of "self-actualization" that belongs to Karl Rogers, which can be the meaning of life. I made the connection in my mind with the idea of "the perfect human being," that we must suffer for perfection, and I have accepted this situation to some extent. But because of my depressive nature, I keep struggling with myself about this. I ask if there was no other way for perfection. I ask, how God bears with this much suffering with all that mercy He has. I fear to offend God, but I sometimes ask myself if He is taking those sufferings of human beings lightly, which makes me feel a little bit angry (with God)… I just want God to love us dearly. This is where I get confused the most. For example, I cannot make sense of three-year-old kids being sexually harassed. "What sort of a test is this?" I ask to myself. He is forced into this, and he is trying to live with its damage. Yes, his situation will be evaluated in the Hereafter accordingly, but why is it necessary? *Estağfirullah*,[199] but is it really necessary to go through such heavy traumatic experiences in order to be purified?

Rüya's most important connection to piety was constantly being tested, reaffirmed, and requestioned in the course of her everyday life. Furthermore, she lacked the social motivation to keep her piety, for she had never been in a religious social setting, except for her sister, and her new colleagues in this

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[199] *Estağfirullah* is an Arabic statement, used very commonly in Turkish when asking for forgiveness from God. It is also a statement of humbleness. In this situation, she feels that she has transgressed by questioning God's actions, and uses this phrase to be secured from heresy in the eyes of God, as well as mine.

university. However, she still continued her profession as a clinical therapist, and she had to maintain her social relations with people most of whom see religion as a primitive phenomenon and describe themselves as "believing in God but not in religion." And they certainly lack the kind of understanding to make sense of her aim to be loved by God:

> From all my friends around, only two of them know that I regularly do the ritual prayer. And for them, it doesn't make any difference whether I take anti-depressants, do yoga, or do the ritual prayer.

While ritual prayer is seen as the soundest indication of piety by this type of secular people, fasting is considered more mainstream, as it is tolerated within the religio-cultural atmosphere of Ramadan, and quickly forgotten and disappear after that. So, she feels more comfortable to reveal her fasting practice to those friends. Her social circle in professional life, on the other hand, is still too secularist to tolerate even to the practice of fasting.

> Almost all my friends except those in my professional life know that I fast during Ramadan. People who work in this profession have not been able to accept everything. They have prejudices, too; and the community of psychologists has a serious capacity for gossiping. Since I know that I will not be understood correctly by these people, I do not want to be labeled as a *dinci*. Most of our profession is about referral, and that's why I want to hide this as my private choice. I do not want my professors to learn that, because some of them are a kind of person that sees the prophets as psychotics. They might think that you are weak and you seek refuge in religion; so they might not refer patients to you.

The question of belonging and affiliation is part of Rüya's experience. The feeling of not belonging to anywhere has always been with her, for she has never fit into the conventional categorizations like conservative, modern, religious, or secular. She has always felt unique, sort of isolated because there was no one like

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her around. "But then you realize that everyone is unique, not belonging to any group." This is how she was able to negotiate with the question of belonging in the light of her professional learning and experience.

A conversion story: Edibe

Another colleague of mine in the political science department had a similar story of setting out for cultivating a pious self. She has a masters and doctoral degree from an American university, and she has lived in Dubai for two years because of her husband's job. She is covered, always wearing business attire, with long jackets and pants or short jacket and skirt. She is also a devoted Hizmet volunteer, who has forsaken her prestigious job at the prime ministry to become a part of the academic staff of this university.

She was the first female colleague I met, and she became a kind of mentor for me as I was struggling to motivate myself to move on with my fieldwork. Her spiritual as well as professional mentorship had made her a perfect pious figure in my head –perfect meaning everything I failed to achieve in my own process of cultivating a pious self: observant of required practices, full of motivation for work and productivity towards God's consent, having a good education and simultaneously fulfilling her roles as a wife and a mother with two kids, and being able to give up financial and social privileges for a holy mission.

When I finally got to sit for an interview with her, I realized that I knew very little about her, especially her youth. Because I respected and looked up to her so much during the nine months we spent together that I abstained from

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asking her about too personal questions. Positioning her as an *abla* in my mind had created a kind of hierarchy between us, which could only be removed when I "officially" sat down to interview her with my voice recorder. At that moment, I felt myself as a researcher seeking for knowledge, rather than a seeker of spiritual guidance from a superior guide. So, that's how I learnt about her past, which started in Germany in an immigrant family:

> My parents had no conception of religion at all. My father had graduated from a village institute and my mom's knowledge about religion was just limited to what she had learnt traditionally. We were so-called Muslims.

In her account of the past, it is clearly seen that memory is not functioning as a storage place from where you can retrieve a file which you saved before in the same way. That saved file gets manipulated, corrupted, or updated with the incoming of new processors and operating systems to the human mind. The fact that she remembers her parents having "nothing" to do with religion can be a result of having various experiences in her later life which gave her a new idea about religion; and that's how she named the nominal affiliation with Islam as being "so-called Muslims." Just from this entrance, I could see that a conversion story was coming forth:

She returns to Turkey to live with her uncle's family, because her parents want her to go Turkish schools rather than German ones.

> My first contact with religion happened when I was fifteen. I seriously believed that human beings originated from apes. My cousin was leaving some books here and there to educate me. After reading one of them, I

started to have doubts in my mind regarding evolution.[200] I was already in a mode of ennui, because of being away from my family, and some heart breaking experiences pushed me to a spiritual void. I started to ask "is that all? What is this whole thing about?" I was seeking for a meaning in my life. A friend of mine gave me the novel *Siddharta* by Herman Hesse, which became a turning point in my life. But the neo-Buddhist philosophy still did not satisfy me. The point of Nirvana was not satisfactory for me, for I needed something more real. I had this feeling of self-loathe, and I said "I must make a new path for myself." But I was afraid of Islam, too.

Her fear of Islam was to be ended when she chose the university exam preparation course provided by the Hizmet affiliates, simply because of its success in education. There, she saw "the profile of the educated pious woman" which was not scary at all. She preferred to stay in their dorm instead of living in her uncle's place. Soon after, she started praying five times a day, which changed her lifestyle totally: "When you pray regularly, you cannot do many things you did before, like drinking alcohol, or smoking pot..." she said. Here I exclaimed with a great bewilderment: "Smoking pot?" I was so naïve that the worst thing I was expecting from a non-religious high-school girl was drinking alcohol, and still that was something I had not witnessed even among the craziest girls in my high-school in Ordu. But Istanbul, apparently, was different from my small city, as Edibe said that smoking pot was very common among her school friends. Still today, I cannot imagine her smoking pot in the underground cafes of Kadıköy, with a Gothic make-up on her face. The transformation was simply unbelievable.

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[200] The idea of evolution is not totally rejected by Muslims, as they believe in the constant creation of God, which leaves space for the idea of evolution of the creatures. However, the origin story of the evolutionists is not acceptable to the Muslim belief, which accepts Adam as the first human being created by God in "in the best mould" (Qur'an 95: 4).

After she quit these habits, and stopped wearing make-up, nail polish and revealing clothes[201] because of the regular prayer, she realized that she had no reason to hold herself back from donning the headscarf. At that time the headscarf was large and covered the shoulders and the bosom, and it was paired with the long-coat called *pardesü*, and the decision to start wearing the headscarf mostly meant wearing the *pardesü* as well. She had the idea that "this is what fills the spiritual void inside me, so I must do it perfectly." She devoted herself telling others about Islam in college, thinking that "if I prevent other people from falling into sins, maybe I could be forgiven, as well."

A split of authority

"I had to show extra effort for my sins to be forgiven. That feeling of inferiority due to my past sins has always followed me, even in my marriage" she says. Her experience in marriage adds a new dimension to the question of gender relations, and gender equality. Her marriage was an extension of these "extra efforts to be forgiven" as she saw it as a religious duty: She was told that a deeply pious man within the Hizmet network was going to the US for PhD, and he needed a wife who could speak English, and drive. That was how her marriage happened, which has been happily going on with two kids -a fourteen-year-old girl and a six-year-old boy.

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[201] The ritual prayer has several obligations within itself which prevents the wearing of these: the ritual ablution requires washing the face, so she has to clean-up her make-up each time. The nail polish prevents water from touching the finger nails, nullifying the ritual ablution. She has to cover all her body except for the face, hands, and the feet to perform the ritual prayer, so has to carry extra clothes with her if she is not already covering those parts when she is out.

Edibe respected her husband because of his piety, which was more than

hers, she thought. Thinking of her past sins, she did not feel competent to strive

for equality in her relationship with her husband; hence, she followed him like a

spiritual guide. However, she also had to give up her individual practices of piety

and self-disciplining, such as "sleeping on the floor" or "not sleeping without a

headscarf and a skirt" which could not be carried on as a married woman. She

said "marriage sweeps away innocence" and started crying as she remembered her

performance of piety before marriage. "Our imagination was totally shaped by

what we listened from the cassette sermons. Our horizon was as far as

Hocaefendi[202] drew for us." In other words, she lived in an "ethical

soundscape"[203] filled with Gülen's voice; and she was solely focused on

maintaining a pious and ascetic lifestyle and spreading this awareness to other

people through speech (*tebliğ*) and embodiment (*temsil*).[204]

She felt sad for breaking from this soundscape with marriage, but there

was no regret involved in this sadness. At the end of the day, she shifted between

the authority of her religious leader and her husband for the same purpose: to

submit to the authority of God, which was above all sources of authority for her.

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[202] Fethullah Gülen is referred as *Hocaefendi* by the people in Turkey who respect him as a religious scholar.

[203] See Charles Hirsckind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[204] *Tebliğ* and *temsil* are the major principles of the notion of *dava* formulated by Gülen under the principle of "enjoining good and forbidding evil." In fulfilling this ethical duty, *tebliğ* stands as the requirement to enunciate the truth, and *temsil* means the embodiment of the truth, sometimes replacing and sometimes strengthening the *tebliğ*.

Emerging from religious families

The intensive, sort of missionized sense of piety yearned by Edibe, has also been happily left behind by others for several reasons. Those who graduated from the imam-hatip schools, for example, now look back those years with a sense of enlightenment, a de-radicalization in some ways. The common idea about these schools is that they give really good religious education, but that does not necessarily make one a pious person.

The families who sent their kids to the imam-hatip school after the primary education, had different motivations and expectations: some genuinely wanted their kids to be well-versed in Islam, which would help them become a pious person; some were fearing that their children (especially daughters) would be corrupted in secular schools; some wanted to fight modernity, while some were simply afraid of it. In the 1980s, it was the breed of Islamist families that saw modernity as to be fought, or to resist its temptations. These families imagined their daughters as the soldiers of this fight, and their weapon was their headscarf.

A story of disenchantment: Zeliha

A striking example to this kind of de-radicalization is Zeliha, whose father was a close supporter of Necmeddin Erbakan for twelve years. He was a *hafiz*, and he made Zeliha receive religious education from an early age, by sending her to the summer Qur'anic schools every year, and then sending her to the imam-hatip school when she finished the elementary school. With all this intensive religious education, and indoctrination from her father, she comes to the campus

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entrance of a Turkish university and she is forced to make a choice between her higher education and her headscarf. Her father tries to dissuade her from taking off her headscarf, telling her that "this is my *dava*"[205] which, Zeliha replies by saying "This is not my *dava*."

I met Zeliha through the email group of the Meridyen Circle. I sent an email to this group explaining my project and asking for volunteers to share their experiences in the secular public sphere as a pious woman. Zeliha was among those who replied my email, and we met in Beyoğlu for a dinner. She was then working at the Beyoğlu municipality which belonged to the ruling JDP for more than ten years. Working there for nine years as a media and public relations officer, she had the chance to observe the transformation in the lifestyles of people like her father who shared his conception of *dava:*

> When I started working in the municipality nine years ago, there was a more visible spirit of *dava*. In the recent years, people have been more and more attending cocktails where alcohol is served. There is a decrease in the number of women wearing headscarves, and they are subjected to the glass ceiling phenomenon. Veiling (*tesettür*) has become more of a fashion than a practice of piety.

When she thinks back, she realizes that her father's approach to the headscarf, as well as all the other religious dogma, deemed a black and white situation, blind to the nuances of its reflection in the day-to-day life of the believers:

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[205] The way Zeliha's father used the word *dava* has a specific political implication here, as it was turned into the signpost of political Islam headed by Necmeddin Erbakan.

One learns that there are shades of gray in life as she gains experience. This changes her way of questioning life as well. Nothing in Islam is a black or white matter...There *is* something called homosexuality in real life, go ahead and slaughter them all if you can!

Piety and youthfulness: Neslihan

Neslihan joined our team in the Women's Platform two months after I started there. She was going to be the special correspondent of the entire foundation: taking photos at the events and writing the news text to be published on the foundation's website. This meant that she had to attend all the activities organized by the different platforms. In other words, she was to be more visible than any other female volunteer in the foundation, which made me curious about the reactions of the male staff who were all pious men. Neslihan, though wearing a headscarf, was too beautiful[206] and too lively to roam around any mixed-gendered conservative circle as a single woman. Yet, she worked perfectly in this place without being intimidated for her way of fashionable dressing-up or her visibility in the male-majority settings. But she was also given the choice of not attending to the all-male events, where she was substituted by a male staff to take pictures.

Neslihan saw this job as a way to overcome her sense of shyness in public, which partly resulted from being bullied in public by secularist people for being veiled:

–When someone hurts me in some way, I usually think that it is because I am veiled. But you can never know if this is true or not.

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[206] She is of Albanian descent, with fair skin and blue eyes, which is the most favored beauty type in Turkey.

–Why do they hurt you?
–Jealousy...
–How?
–I mean they will never be like me. I closed myself to everyone else at my most beautiful age; not everyone can manage to do that.
–Do you think this is something they envy about?
–They are not aware of their envy, but I believe that deep down it is there, because they themselves will never be able to do something like that. Because they only have a bodily existence; and their current unhappiness in life results from the collapse of their bodies...I wore the veil when I was only twelve, right after the earthquake in 1999. I don't think that anyone at the age of twelve would wear the headscarf willingly like I did.
–And what made you to do that?
–Fear of death....

This decision got more serious when her family made a ceremony out of this occasion; they invited their neighbors and relatives to celebrate their daughter's wearing the headscarf, i.e., carrying a sacred object on her head for the rest of her life.

However, she was not even a teenager when she made this decision, and she started to feel the weight of it as she advanced to her adolescence, and the emotional burdens of teenage years added to her sense of responsibility.

She said, at the age of fifteen, she fell in love and she thought that the guy would never like her because she is veiled and not dressing up according to fashion. This became a difficult moment for her as she seriously thought about taking off her headscarf. She managed to overcome that moment of doubt, yet it also showed her how strong the temptations are for a woman to remain pious in the modern world. She realized how piety is a constant process of struggle with its comings and goings, that one can never be sure of her piety just because of

performing the religious practices, for they are always prone to the temptations of the secular modern world.

The trial of piety with existentialism: Hilal

The temptations are not limited to heart affairs, as seen in the case of Hilal, who was hired to the WP to replace me when I started working at the university. I slightly knew her from college, who was in the same department with three years ahead of me. Therefore, I could identify with her engagement with the Western critical theories, especially existentialism. Having grown up in "a very conservative family" and with "a father who had strict rules" she also enjoyed the privilege of being the first daughter who went to college. She describes it as a "courage" shown by her father, who "can even be claimed to be a liberal man with this action."

However, she has questioned the conservative lifestyle many times during her teenage years. The serious questioning, on the other hand, started in her second year studying English language and literature at the university:

> –The readings on existentialism had a deep influence on me, sometimes to the level of suspicion (about belief). I was seeking for answers to questions such as "To what extent is this person right? To what extent do I belong to this world (of existentialism)? Why am I influenced so much?"
> –Why *were* you influenced?
> –I always had a dark side in my approach to life. I saw this dark approach being confirmed in the writings of Sartre and Beckett, which attracted me in the beginning.

Although this period of questioning and doubt led her to move away from religion –according to her definition-- as she started "performing religious

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practices not out of love but out of obligation;" the aftermath of this crisis brought

a new level to her depth of piety:

> Then, Islam showed me that my existence had a meaning. Religious
> practices became more meaningful for me. Both performing the ritual
> prayer and covering my hair meant more than obligation for me.

Sacred household, profane land: Ceren

Ceren, on the other hand, had experienced another form of awakening

when she came to Istanbul to study International Relations in Boğaziçi University.

She grew up in northern Cyprus,[207] as the eldest of three daughters of an imam.

"The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, also known as the Occupied

Areas of Republic of Cyprus, is a state which is not a state. As a politically

ambiguous space, the TRNC does not fit into the picture of a world of states as we

currently know it."[208] Not existing officially, this is a place of betwixt-and-

between, where all the borders have to be drawn repeatedly and consciously. In

the highly secular environment of this "filial homeland" Ceren's father was much

more concerned with protecting his identity as a Turkish Muslim as against the

highly secularized and Westernized majority.

"A life in a religious family, in a place where religion did not exist" is how

she defines her life in Cyprus. In that sense, Ceren's father needed a visible mark

of religiosity that would distinguish his daughters from the non-religious. The

headscarf, therefore, meant more for its outer meaning than its inner meaning for

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[208] Daria Isachenko, *The Making of Informal States: Statebuilding in Northern Cyprus and Transdniestria,* Houndmills (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9.

the wearer of it. For him it was the border that separated the sacred from the profane: "My father had drawn some red-lines for us, and the headscarf was one of them. It was more symbolic to him than religious, for he wanted me to wear the *türban*[209] style, not any other style."

She could only distinguish the difference in college, when she saw many different styles of covering, as well as many different types of religiosity advertised by various groups, networks, and organizations. The Hizmet network attracted her attention most, and she started familiarizing herself with the writings of Nursi and Gülen, which made her realize that her father's ideas were more nationalist, compared to the global vision the Hizmet draws.

Stepping into diversity: Buse

The trend of awakening to a new understanding of life after moving away from the family setting has been a clearly distinguishable pattern in all of my interviews. Among them, Buse's story reflects another dimension, as she was the only covered woman with a religious family background, and yet who has not affiliated herself with any group, movement, or ideology along the way to a more nuanced approach to piety.

She went to an imam-hatip school, and the restrictions put on these schools in the university entrance exam (so as to prevent the graduates of these schools to get prominent jobs) forced her to study American Culture and

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[209] *Türban* is specifically called for the style that covers only the head and the neck, while the headscarf also means covering the shoulders and the bosom with the same cloth.

Literature -again, in my university, but I had already graduated by then. I met her at a meeting of the Meridyen Circle, and she volunteered to be part of my project. After graduation from the university, she went to London, UK for her MA degree in Media and Communication.

This was a time the Turkish media was being rescued from the monopoly of the Kemalist, and secularist media corporations. The Zaman media group of the Hizmet movement was gaining more and more power, being the best-selling newspaper in Turkey, and a wealthy conservative businessman had just bought the Turkuaz Media Group, owner of the mainstream newspaper Sabah, and the ATV television station. Buse had the chance to be recruited to ATV by the new owners, who decided to keep the old secularist staff and balance them with some religious staff. In some ways, they had to continue with the old staff, for the religious conservatives in Turkey were just beginning to be interested in media expertise. I asked her if she had any problem with practicing her religious duties, or maintaining a pious life in her workplace:

> I am working in the children's channel, so it is a safer environment. There are no ultra-secular people in my group, I can spend time with them. The distance with people in the other departments is more serious. We have a *mescit* (prayer room), I can perform my prayers there. I see some people in the *mescit*, whom I would never imagine to be a pious person. So, we also have prejudices against them.

Before working in this secular workplace, she had a more formalist idea of piety, which is no more predictable to her based on the looks:

> The formalist, taboo-oriented understanding of piety which I received in my family and the imam-hatip school is now changing. Our conception was too much based on *fiqh* (Islamic law), which is very

much focused on the forms. However, I see that every human being experiences religion in her own way. Still, my parents do not think in the same way I do, because they have never stepped outside of their protected environments. They have always lived with people like them.

This kind of family is the most common one in Turkey, both in the sense of being religious or secular. These traditional families, who are usually religious, manifest a generational gap especially with the rise of higher education rates in Turkey. While the parents remain in the hometown, financially supporting their daughter's education, the young girl explores into a whole new world unknown to her parents. As in the case of Buse, Hilal, Zeliha, and Ceren, their religious formation at their parents' home goes through a deep transformation to a more diverse and nuanced understanding.

Yet, another case with this kind of traditional families is the lack of religious literacy, and depending on memorization and hearsay in the religious formation. In the lack of direct access to main sources, they have to rely on the local imams or any other religious scholar who can guide them.

New religious voices

As the monopoly of the Diyanet in the religious sphere declined with the rise of the *tarikat*s and *cemaat*s in the public sphere, secular education became the primary ground of contact with the younger generation and non-official religion. The university exam preparation courses are the first step of this contact, which is continued and consummated with recruitment to the group at the university.

What these *cemaat*s and *tarikat*s do is to prove their claim that the official Islam of the Diyanet is shallow and lacking the spirit of *dava*, and to instill a kind

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of "learned piety" in the hearts of the individuals by showing the real meaning of worship and religious practices. They think that the religious education given by the Diyanet is a sequel to the kind of modern Islamic education described by Robert Hefner in *Schooling Islam*:

> The rise of modern Islamic education brought about a shift in the distribution and style of Islamic knowledge. The earlier pattern of informality…gave way to classrooms, fixed curricula, examinations, and professional teachers. In these relatively depersonalized settings, many believers came to view their faith as a subject which must be "explained" and "understood" on the basis of formal doctrinal canons…[210]

The *dava* conception these *tarikat*s and *cemaat*s rise upon, on the other hand, aims to bring back this earlier pattern of informality and personalized education. They focus on the concepts of humility, fear of God, and sincerity, as they prioritize the individuals being moved rather than being persuaded.

The difference between the *tarikat*s and *cemaat*s is the scope of their mission: *Tarikat*s have always been major actors of public piety and social cohesion both in the Ottoman Empire (publicly) and in the Republican Turkey (privately); in some ways, they can be claimed to be the pioneers of the *dava* in Turkey, since they functioned in exactly the same way the modern *da'wa* movement in Egypt does:

> Da'wa does more than simply enforce a normative moral order. It makes that order dependent upon the activities of ordinary Muslim citizens acting within changing historical circumstances in such a way that mediates against claims to closure and certainty.[211]

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[210] Robert Hefner "The Culture, Politics, and Future of Muslim Education" in *Schooling Islam,* eds. R. Hefner and M.Q. Zaman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 33.
[211] Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape*, 137.

When their power in the public sphere was seriously curtailed by the Kemalist regime, the *tarikat*s had to go underground and continue their existence in small, private circles. The *cemaat*s, on the other hand, revived the social activism of the old *tarikat* tradition, and appeared as Neo-sufi movements in the secular public sphere with an ability to easily disguise as civil society movements. They also criticized the *tarikat*s for their loss of dynamism and ability to read the spirit of the time. Thus, while the *tarikat*s were solely focused on traditional religious education, providing Qur'anic schools to the younger generation, the *cemaat*s took up secular education as a pious act and a tool of *dava*, providing secular facilities such as university exam preparation courses, private schools, and universities.

From folk piety to authenticated piety: Zuhal

It is through one of these secular facilities that Zuhal and her husband got to establish a closer relationship with religion. Zuhal was the public relations officer at the Journalists and Writers Foundation, who, later on started work at a public university in the international relations department. She describes her family as secular, by which she means "neither lacking religion nor fulfilling its requirements." Her mother used to recite the Qur'an, and occasionally do the ritual prayer, and her father prayed less often than her. This kind of a family van be easily described as a traditional mildly religious family, rather than a secular one; but to Zuhal's current standards, it was a secular family. Because, she considered their relationship with religion as a cultural adherence, and thus she

thought it did not have a significant value. She was able to make this distinction when she was introduced to the writings of Nursi and Gülen through her brother-in-law, when he went to the Hizmet's university exam preparation course (*dershane*).

This distinction between cultural Islam and authentic Islam is one of the major messages of Gülen, and the other pietist networks as a matter of fact. It was Nursi's initial goal to instill *iman-ı tahkiki* (authenticated faith) in the hearts of believers instead of *iman-ı taklidi* (imitative faith) which had caused the Muslims to lose power against the non-Muslim powers in the last three centuries. Nursi describes the ideal form of faith as something beyond the limits of knowledge; it should be so strong that "the spirit (*ruh*), heart (*kalp*), inner heart (*sır*), soul (*nefs*) and other subtle faculties (*letaif*)" must each receive "its share according to its degree" just like "when food enters the stomach, it is distributed in various ways." Thus, if each of these faculties does not receive their share, it means the faith is weak.[212]

Similarly, Gülen reiterated in many of his writings and sermons that Muslims should seek for ascertained faith and go beyond hypothetical (*nazari*) knowledge and living religion as a culture. He described imitative faith as one's believing in something as it is, without feeling any need for inquiry, and thus adjusting his/her behavior accordingly. "This kind of behavior," according to Gülen, "lacks any questioning and thus ascertained knowledge;" hence "it can be

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[212] Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, "26th Letter," in *The Letters* (Ankara: Ihlas Nur Nesriyat, 2009), 384.

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subject to frequent shifts and changes according to the flow of the masses or the override of other external influences." Furthermore, people with imitative piety "cannot resist the flow of heresy and disbelief resulting from science and philosophy." Gülen claims that "the only reason most of these people have become Muslims is because they were born under the shadow of a mosque and within a strong Muslim society."[213]

The call for questioning and seeking ascertained knowledge in Islam might initially sound similar to the authentication process, which, Lara Deeb defines in her observations about the pious Shiite al-Dahiyya society in Lebanon. It is true that a similar kind of authentication process is promoted by Gülen and other prominent religious figures who want to raise people with sound faith for their *dava*; and there is a call for a shift from "a traditional milieu to an Islamic one," where,

> value is not placed on the completion of religious practices merely as an end in itself, but rather on the completion of religious practices as the end result of correct religious understanding. Beyond fulfilling one's religious obligations correctly, it is also important to seek knowledge necessary to obtain this correct understanding, and to contribute to the authentication process itself.[214]

However, the serious case to address about the Turkish society is more about promoting the completion of religious practices than putting the completed practices through an authentication process. Gülen says that in today's society,

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[213] Fethullah Gülen, "Sığlık, Durağanlık ve Tevbe (Superficiality, Stagnation, and Repentance," *Bamteli*, May 15, 2011, accessed September 13, 2012, http://www.herkul.org/index.php/bamteli/bamteli-arsiv

[214] Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 128.

religious practices are widely neglected and ignored, which prevents the

hypothetical knowledge from turning into ascertained faith. The laxity in

practicing the religious knowledge in day-to-day life leads one to live Islam as a

form of culture in the case of fairly observant Muslims, and to disbelief and

heresy in the case of the non-observant ones. In this sense, what these pietist

movements are trying to address are both secularization of the society, and the

"folklorization of worship" that Saba Mahmood has drawn attention in her

analysis of the women's mosque movement in Egypt. The participants of this

movement also complain that

> ritual acts of worship in the popular imagination have increasingly
> acquired the status of customs or conventions, a kind of "Muslim folklore"
> undertaken as a form of entertainment or as a means to display a religio-
> cultural identity.[215]

A good example of the display of a religious act as a religio-cultural

identity is the practice of abstaining from pork, which is not tolerated even by

nominal Muslims, while they see it completely fine to drink alcohol. As a

religious rule, both of them are openly forbidden in the sacred texts (both the

Qur'an and the Sunnah); however, one is seen as a marker of being non-Muslim,

while the latter is at most considered a bad habit of a Muslim. Zuhal's family is

but one of these examples, and even though her parents were engaged in some

religious practices, Zuhal did not consider these practices as a sign of "realization

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[215] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 48.

of one's religion" [216](*dinini yaşamak*); because in her understanding of worship, "rituals are performed as a means to the training and realization of piety in the entirety of one's life."[217]

Although I was limited by the scope of this dissertation to share all the stories I have listened during my fieldwork, I tried to reflect as much diversity as possible within the details of each story I told in this chapter. There is, of course, much more insights to be learned from these stories, including the contours of their self-cultivation process within a particular framework of piety, which will be examined in the next chapter.

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[216] "dinini yaşamak" might also mean to live or experience, or practice one's religion. It is a much commonly used phrase in Turkish, meaning that Islam is something to be lived through rather than just to be believed in.
[217] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 48.

Chapter 4

BUILDING A PIOUS SELF

In the previous chapter, I have explored the various journeys to piety taken by

women with diverse family backgrounds, ages, social status, education levels, and

areas of profession. Now, I will explore which path of virtue-formation they take

in these journeys, and how they negotiate between the dynamics of the body and

the mind, along with the different conceptions of agency, freedom, and

submission informed by the secular-liberal and Islamic economies of ethical

behavior.

If the realization of piety is a process of becoming, it requires the

utilization of various devices and tools to move along in this process. In this

context, Foucault's formulation of the "technologies of the self" is a helpful

conceptual tool to understand how exactly rituals are performed to cultivate a

pious self by the Turkish women acting on secular grounds.

Even though I will use the word "ritual" in this chapter, it is only for the

purpose of incorporating this debate with the larger scholarship known as ritual

studies. In fact, the concept that would be appropriate for the Islamic context is

ibâdet, to which, the closest English word would be worship.[218]

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[218] As Talal Asad suggests in *Genealogies of Religion,* the category of ritual, may
not be appropriate to non-Western and non-Christian cultural milieus, because of
its origin and development in Western Christianity. He claims that the category of
ritual is to a great extent the construct of Western academia, which, in turn created
a shared sense of ritual as a symbolic act in Western religiosity: "The idea that
symbols need to be decoded is not, of course, new, but I think it plays a new role
in the restructured concept of ritual that anthropology has appropriated and

İbâdet (*'ibâdât* in Arabic) is a much wider concept than ritual (*ritüel* in Turkish), for it involves all acts of worship and servitude to God, ranging from praying five times a day to going to work in order to earn one's living in the world.[219] While it can "refer to the whole range of appropriate acts for conforming life to God's will (*shar*), "it is most often used specifically to designate the legal category in Muslim jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to which belong the major ritual and religious duties of Muslims."[220]

Thus, within this space between the narrow and wide definition of religious practice in the Islamic sense, I will explore how the understandings of piety are determined in the way bodily acts are performed in the particular contexts these journeys to piety take place.

Utilizing the "care of the self" as the main analytical tool, I will trace the milestones of cultivating piety within the Islamic tradition, particularly through the works of Mohamed Al-Ghazzali, who laid down the technologies of self-

developed from the history of Christian exegesis." Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 60.
Catherine Bell agrees with Asad that the "scholarship on ritual as a universal construct has succeeded in creating the beginnings of a shared sense of ritual in many religious and civic practices of Euro-American culture," and she accepts that "we may well be in the very process of actually creating ritual as the universal phenomenon we have long taken it to be." in Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 265.
[219] In Turkish, there is a common saying: "*Çalışmak ibadettir*. (Working is worship)." It is supported by another common saying: "*Allah boş duranları sevmez*. (Allah does not like idle people)." In this context, *ibâdet* means any act that Allah likes a servant (*kul* in Turkish; *'abd* in Arabic) to do.
[220] William A. Graham, *Islamic and Comparative Religious Studies: Selected Writings* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 94.

disciplining and becoming perfect in his works *The Alchemy of Happiness,* and

On Disciplining the Self. In doing this, I will engage in a dialogue with Saba

Mahmood and Talal Asad in relation to their conceptions of virtue-making and

agency, and see how the women in this particular case negotiate with their

theories unknowingly while they are on their way towards building a pious

modern self.

At the end of the chapter, I will examine the particular contexts and

happenings that are paving the way for a particular type of piety, including the

easier access to Islamic pedagogical sources, the ease of travel, and the

availability of new religious communities that appeal to some of my interlocutors

for various reasons. In other words, I will try to portray a picture of the particular

realities concerning the everyday life conditions of these highly-educated

professional Muslim women, which are overlooked in the bulk of scholarship on

Muslim women that are submerged in the debate over Muslim women's

oppression, and lack of rights which have long been enjoyed by their Western

counterparts.

Technologies of the self and virtue-formation

Foucault contextualizes "technologies of the self" within three other forms

of "technologies" used by human beings to understand themselves.

> (1) technologies of production, which permits us to produce, transform, or
> manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permits us to
> use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power,
> which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain
> ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the
> self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the

help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.[221]

These technologies of the self are closely linked with the process of becoming, and the care of the self (mentioned in chapter one), which provides a better framework to understand the ritual practices and all other performances of Islamic conducts and behaviors as they are manifested in the day-to-day lives of these Turkish women.

I believe that understanding a bodily practice as "both an expression of, and a means to, the realization of the subject" in Saba Mahmood's words, would do more justice to the people who perform these bodily practices than approaching these practices as a symbolic act[222] which "presumes a different relationship between the subject's exteriority and interiority."[223] Mahmood explains that the latter approach stems from the conception of a "secular religiosity" by which she means "the Protestant conception [which] presupposes a

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[221] Michel Foucault, "On Technology of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault,* ed. L. Martin, et al. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 18.

[222] Mahmood's argument here is built on Talal Asad's reconception of the category of ritual where he rejects the idea of studying ritual as interpretation of symbols: "If there are prescribed ways of performing liturgical services, then we can assume that there exists a requirement to master the proper performance of these services. Ritual is therefore directed at the apt performance of what is prescribed, something that depends on intellectual and practical disciplines but does not itself require decoding. In other words, apt performance involves not symbols to be interpreted but abilities to be acquired according to rules that are sanctioned by those in authority: it presupposes no obscure meanings, but rather the formation of physical and linguistic skills." *Genealogies,* 62.

[223] Saba Mahmood, preface to *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [2005] 2012), xi.

distinction between a privatized interiority that is the proper locus of belief and public exteriority that is an expression of this belief."[224]

This conception sees rituals and bodily practices as markers of belief, rather than makers of it. It is heralded also by "many contemporary Muslim reformers writing under the rubric of 'liberal Islam' ...to establish this distinction by grounding it in the resources and scriptures of Islam."[225] For example, Amina Wadud writes in her feminist rereading of the Qur'an, that although "the Qur'an acknowledges the virtue of modesty and demonstrates it through the prevailing practices [of veiling and seclusion in the elite Arab tribes]" what is important is the principle of modesty "not the veiling and seclusion which were manifestations particular to that context."[226]

What Saba Mahmood places at the opposite of this approach is the "positive ethics" shaped by the Aristotelian conception of virtue-making, which strictly combines bodily acts and virtues together. In this conception, character, good or bad, "is the result of the repeated doing of acts which have a similar or common quality" –i.e. "habituation" as Aristotle names it:

> Such repetition acting upon natural aptitudes or propensities gradually fixes them in one or other of two opposite directions, giving them a bias towards good or evil. Hence the several acts which determine goodness or badness of character must be done in a certain way, and thus the formation of good character requires discipline and direction from without.[227]

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[224] Mahmood, "Preface," xi.
[225] Ibid., xv.
[226] Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Women: Rereading Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 10.
[227] Aristotle, *Ethics* (Public Domain Books, 2005), Kindle edition.

The agent is not left totally out of this process, but its beginning is dependent on guidance. Aristotle believes that the process of virtue-making "cannot be entrusted to merely intellectual instruction" as it is a process "of assimilation, largely by imitation and under direction and control."[228] At the end of this habituation process, the agent gains a "growing understanding of what is done" and chooses to do it for its own sake since it has by now turned into a habit, easier and more pleasant to be done –like a second nature. At this point, the agent does not need outside guidance anymore, as he/she "acquires the power of doing them freely, willingly," and from within.[229]

In this Aristotelian way of ethics, then, the modesty principle cannot be acquired through reason alone as an abstract principle, since it needs to be taught to the agent through habituation, which requires specific bodily forms to come into existence.

Whereas the modern thought, shaped by the Kantian ethics, sees reason itself as determining the will, without the intervention of any bodily experience, "only because it can, as pure reason, be practical, that it is possible for it to be legislative."[230] Contrary to the need for outside guidance, Kant argues that we become directly conscious of the moral law. In that way, the liberal reformers can claim that bodily forms are not essential to virtues, for virtue-making occurs from interior to the exterior, according to what Kant says:

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[228] Aristotle, *Ethics*.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason,* trans. Thomas K. Abbott, (Public Domain Books, [1788] 2004), Kindle edition.

We can become conscious of pure practical laws just as we are conscious of pure theoretical principles, by attending to the necessity with which reason prescribes them and to the elimination of all empirical conditions, which it directs. The concept of a pure will arises out of the former, as that of a pure understanding arises out of the latter.[231]

Virtue-formation in the Islamic tradition: Al-Ghazzali

Neither of these models can be isolated in order to understand Muslims' rituals and bodily practices, since the Qur'an carries the traces of both. In many verses, the Qur'an invites human beings to use their reason to find the truth, the signs of which are already given to them by God:

Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you might use reason.[232]

Even the performance of bodily rituals is related to the use of reason, because it is the essential faculty God expects human beings to use:

And when you call to prayer, they take it in ridicule and amusement. That is because they are a people who do not use reason.[233]
Indeed, the worst of living creatures in the sight of Allah are the deaf and dumb who do not use reason.[234]

However, in line with the Aristotelian model of ethics, the Qur'an also frequently reiterates its order to perform ritual prayers *with care* and conduct *righteous deeds*:

Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer and stand before Allah, devoutly obedient.[235]
Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds and establish prayer and give *zakah* will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.[236]

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[231] Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*.
[232] Qur'an 2: 242.
[233] Qur'an 5: 58.
[234] Qur'an 8: 22.
[235] Qur'an 2: 238.

The Qur'an's emphasis on both the reason and practices has produced theories of self-disciplining and cultivation of piety which carried traces of both models in the Islamic tradition. Al-Ghazzali's formulation of a pious or perfected self was based on the goodness of four powers in the human self: "the power of reason, the power of anger, the power of the carnal appetite, and the power of preserving equilibrium among the other three."[237]

In his topography, there are more than two paths along which the virtue-making happens; that is, it is not a "from interior to exterior" situation, nor simply the other way around. The habituation principle, for him is a self-cultivation method embedded in the Religious Law (*Shariah*), since "a good disposition appears in anyone who has made a habit of good works" and

> the inmost mystery of the command of the Religious Law to perform good works is that its purpose is the transformation of the soul from an unseemly form to a good form. Whatever habit a person does by compulsion becomes his nature.[238]

Good works include both the prescribed rituals as well as good deeds done for the sake of God, or the abstaining from bad deeds, again, for the sake of God. In that sense, ritualized behavior can be considered "one among a continuum of practices that serve as the necessary means to the realization of a pious self," and

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[236] Qur'an 2: 277.

[237] Abu Hamed Muhammad Al-Ghazzali, *On Disciplining the Self,* trans. Jay R. Crook (Chicago: Kazi Publications, Inc., 2011), Kindle edition.

[238] Al-Ghazzali, *On Disciplining the Self.*

"regarded as the critical instruments in a teleological program of self-formation."[239]

The Turkish women's headscarf, and its relationship to other ritual practices, particularly the five daily prayers, had never been discussed during all these years of political struggle between the secularists and the Islamists, presuming that women were always siding themselves with either front. I, now, want to explore how Turkish Muslim women, who want to become pious and also a part of the modern secular public sphere, have made sense of these two practices that are popularly seen not befitting to the image of the ideal modern woman.

Headscarf and ritual prayer

Everyone in this research has a unique story with the headscarf, whether they have worn it or not. Most of these stories are not so pleasant thanks to the unique structure of the public sphere in Turkey. This uniqueness also makes it complicated when one needs to decide whether to give a symbolic meaning to the headscarf, or to consider it as an expression and a means to piety.

In Zeliha's case, it is hard to see the headscarf only as an exterior symbol, equivalent to the cross worn by Christians or the kippa worn by Jews.[240] She went

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[239] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 128.

[240] I am making this claim in particular historical context, considering how the headscarf has acquired an existential meaning for Muslim women, unlike any other religious symbol in Christianity and Judaism have attained so far. The headscarf in general has multiple meanings for people; some see it as a symbol of religiosity; some see it as a fashion; and for some people it is much more complex than both of them. Because of all these complexities, wearing the headscarf is loaded with a much longer list of meanings and implications than what wearing the cross or the kippa are entailed with.

to her classes for four years by uncovering her hair each time at the campus entrance. It was too much for her to bear the curious and mostly unfriendly eyes around her, as she had to take off her scarf in public.[241] She fell into depression, and received medical help for some time; and during this process she had her hair cut very short, which was up to her waist before.

The lack of no religious symbol would create such a traumatic effect, let alone a political symbol. It might be argued that she saw the headscarf as indispensable to her religious identity; but this is not true, as she had already told her father that the headscarf was not her *dava* (at least in the sense that her father used the term). The headscarf, for Zeliha, was one of the techniques that she used to attend to herself and transform herself into an ideal model of piety; and the forceful loss of it created a fragmentation in her conception of the self, which pushed her to the edge of mental breakdown.

It is generally thought that the victims of the headscarf issue have been women who wore it, while those who did not wear it remained unaffected by the political storms created around the headscarf. Gül, my colleague in the Turkish literature department has also suffered the headscarf debates *because* she did not wear it. She worked at an imam-hatip school for a short while in the beginning of

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[241] In my university, a special place was built at the campus entrance for us to take off our headscarves. Actually, it was designed like a big dressing room with mirrors and hangers, and chairs to sit, etc. Thus, we did not feel that shame of uncovering our head in public, which was more difficult for those who cared about aesthetics, as the hair does not come out under the scarf as wavy and soigne. One should not underestimate the humiliating impact this experience can create for a young woman.

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her post-graduate career. She says people around her did not believe in her sincerity when she went to the *mescit* to pray:

> They told me that I was praying to show off, so I stopped praying after that incident. They cannot associate performing the ritual prayer with not wearing the headscarf. They thought that I was not pious because my head was uncovered. An uncovered woman for them is uncovered in all aspects.

"They" in this context refers to the self-acclaimed religious people, as she cannot see herself belonging to that group. She feels in-between, in a limbo, as she is not accepted by the religious-conservative section or the "modern" section as she describes the secularists:

> –The modern section thinks that you are just like them: one who drinks alcohol, and has no (religious) restrictions. And the covered ones directly say that "you are not one of us" when they see me. I feel really torn apart in that matter.
> –Do you think you can appear as you are?[242]
> –No, this appearance is not me.
> –What prevents you (from appearing as you are)?
> –My education, my career. The secular environment does not let you to realize what you believe in.

Interestingly, the covered women that she had around, shared the view of the secularists that headscarf was a symbol, though not political, but a religious symbol. So, they did not consider Gül as a pious person. When I think about my own astonishment at seeing Rüya praying in the school *mescit*, I realize that the political indoctrination from both the Islamist and the Kemalist parts for the last thirty years have indeed planted the seeds of this modernist view into my mind. Seeing the headscarf as an end result of an inner piety, rather than a means to it,

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[242] Knowing her interest in Sufi literature, I referred to the famous saying of Rumi: "Either appear as you are, or be as you appear."

had actually been the dominant view in the popular imagination, giving way to the claim that those who wear the headscarf are pious and those who do not wear it are not.

For Esra, wearing the headscarf is only a part of a broader concept of *tesettür* (covering), which has two sides: attitude and outfit. And the headscarf is just a part of the outfit, as she still tries to follow the rules of *tesettür* without covering her hair:

> I never wear short-sleeves, nor shorts or mini-skirts. I don't swim in the mixed-gendered places even with the Islamic bathing suit. I only go to a women-only swimming pool, and even there I cover my legs down to my knees.

But in the popular imagination, the attitude of *tesettür* is not conveyed to the others around without the headscarf, which can be imagined like the cap of a bottle: no matter what you fill in that bottle, it will all be spilt without the cap. So, no matter how much she cares about embodying *tesettür* with her behaviors, it is not seen by the others:

> I don't shake hands with men unless they initiate it. If you and I are standing side by side, a man would not attempt to shake your hand, but he would attempt to shake mine.[243]

The modern conception of interior-to-exterior virtue formation is very strong in the popular imagination, and it gives way to two different reactions: For example, the religious-conservatives do not believe in the existence of the virtue of modesty unless they see the outer expression of it; whereas, the secularists and

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[243] Although I have no problem with shaking hands with men, the conservative men never attempt to shake hands with me; and some are so sensitive that they do not talk to me unless I start the conversation.

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the liberal Muslims do not take the practical sensitivities seriously, because they do not see them important as long as the virtue of modesty is in one's heart.

Therefore, when Esra goes to the secularist places, she cannot make people understand and act according to her religious sensitivities:

> When I go to the hair-dresser, I tell them that I do not want a male hair-dresser. And they give me weird looks. My sensitivities in the swimming pool do not make sense even to veiled women. I did not want a wedding dress that showed my body parts, but I had to bow down to the pressures of both the wedding dress vendor and my family.[244] I did not want to have nail polish after manicure, because I was regularly praying. But I could not tell this to them, so they did not understand why I did not want nail polish.

For conservative people, on the other hand, Esra's bottle of piety is still empty because it lacks the cap on it:

> The headscarf has become an important symbol on itself. The comment I get from conservative people is this: "So, if you are doing all these things, then why are you not covering your hair?"

Contrary to the popular imagination, though, the headscarf does not have a monolithic function and meaning for women who wear it, or who have worn it for some time. To some extent, it might be claimed that the public image of the headscarf had gained its own identity as an object independent of the private experiences of the "subjects" who appropriate it as a bodily practice.

The public image in the eyes of the religious-conservatives says that all covered women believe that it is an order of God, and they believe that uncovering is a sin. On the other hand, the headscarf speaks to the secularists in a

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[244] Her wedding dress had a low-neck cut, leaving her neck uncovered, and she covered her arms with long lace-designed gloves.

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different language and tells them that it is a symbol of Islamism and the secret desire to bring back the *Shariah* rule.

Yet, what my friend Sena wanted when she covered her head in college was completely far from both of these public images. I met Sena in college as a veiled woman, with non-fashionable modest clothes. For four years, she was a typical observant Muslim girl, who had a special interest in history and philosophy rather than Western literature and criticism that we were studying in our classes. She went to Germany for her master's degree, and there she had a striking transformation, by taking off her headscarf and wearing fashionable clothes.

We were surprised at this transformation, as we had known her to be like any of us: covered, and part of the Hizmet network. That is why some of our classmates clearly showed their discontent at her in their Facebook comments, saying that she had gone astray too much, when she criticized the Hizmet movement in her status update. The problem was that we did not know her; we had never known her. We just had assumed her to be the person we wanted her to be. Years later, I reached her for this research, and asked her to tell me about her story of piety:

> My mother is of Circassian origin, and they are traditionally on a very friendly basis with religion –a relationship established on love rather than commands and prohibitions. And my father was of a traditional Western Anatolian family, who had always followed the mainstream line of religiosity, driven by the state: Sunni, nationalist, and believing in privatized religion. My interest in the Ottoman-Turkish history from my childhood, created a desire in me towards religion. I made my college choice with a religious motivation, as I wanted to be in a pious network.

So, I wore the headscarf at college by my own choice. *Not because I believed that uncovering was a sin, but because I wanted to become more pious…*I do not care about reward or punishment. I do not like doing something without believing simply because I am afraid of the Creator.

As our conversation went on, I learnt that she did not agree with the ideas of the people in the Hizmet network (which was stricter about a scripturalist reading and a focus on commands and prohibitions as part of the authentication process). So she decided to leave the network, and later on, the framework of the religion, so as not to fight against them. "Too much data entry" she thinks, is the reason why she lost the initial excitement about religion and piety, "because when you come across different views, and different religious conceptions, you realize that you are not special." In summary, the headscarf did not help Sena cultivate a pious self, even though she meant it to do so.

Another aspect of the headscarf issue that must be brought to surface is the ease or difficulty of wearing the headscarf, with the practical aspects and the socio-political complications. To some, the headscarf is/must be worn with pride and pleasure as it is "a verse of the Qur'an" while another section of the society thinks that it is an oppression on women, and wearing it must be like a torture for these women (especially in the summer days). So, what is it really like to be wearing the headscarf?

In my conversations, the comparison of it with performing the ritual prayer came out naturally. It is not surprising that for Zeliha, wearing the headscarf, or covering (*tesettür*) in general is much harder than regularly performing the ritual prayer:

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I cannot think of a veiled woman who is not performing the daily prayers. Veiling is a harder practice than prayer, actually the hardest one in Islam. I find it hard to understand those who do not perform such an easy practice as prayer but wear the veil.

A similar argument is traced in Esra's insistence on performing her prayers in every situation, while she cannot find the courage to cover her hair, and become a *başörtülü* woman that would come with a package (conclusive of all implications). Despite the fact that she is the only one not wearing the headscarf in her close circle of pious friends, and despite the guilt she feels for not wearing it, she cannot run the risk of the social pressure it will bring. She cannot risk upsetting her parents by donning a "symbol" that is unbearable for her family members, mostly because of its social implications. In this sense, the inevitable visibility of the headscarf makes it more difficult than praying, which can be always done in a private place without being seen by anyone else:

> In all places I went for job interviews, I used to search for a spot where I could perform my prayers. In my previous workplace, I was using one cup of water to have ritual ablution, and I was praying in the room which was used for breastfeeding. I have never had an alternative like not performing the prayers. Even when I cannot do anything, I will still perform the prayer with my eyes.[245]

In the case of Neslihan, who covered herself at the age of twelve, *tesettür* is easier than *namaz* (ritual prayer); because "*tesettür* turns into a lifestyle, it

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[245] Normally the gestures and body movements in the ritual prayer are obligatory, but it is allowed to perform while sitting if the person cannot stand upright, or while lying down if the person cannot even sit, and even with moving the eyes if one cannot move his or her body at all. Although these accommodations have been developed for health reasons, some people appropriate these accommodations to situations where one cannot perform the ritual prayer openly because of social and political restrictions.

becomes a habit" while "there is no habituation of *namaz*, because the Satan pokes you each of the five times…*Namaz* is your visa to enter the Paradise, that's why Satan fights with you more on this issue." [246]

Although the ritual prayer is the condition for entering the Paradise after death, it is not necessarily seen as the ultimate point of piety –understandably because piety should not be equated with the desire to earn the Paradise. Ritual prayer, in and of itself, does not make one a pious person, "unless," says Gül, "one can internalize the meaning of the prayer, and can establish a connection with God each time she bows down her head." In other words, the bodily practices of standing upright, bending down, and prostration, should transform the self to a better condition in order to be considered a sign of piety. In her imagination, each prayer is like a rite of passage. Each time the believer must come out as a different person. In other words, for Gül, the ritual prayer should be both the expression and the means to piety, which is manifested with good disposition: "Of course Islam has five pillars that everyone must be doing; so this not an extra deed, unless it is embellished with good disposition."

I was surprised to hear the same comment from Firuze, a covered woman working as a newspaper editor in London, who is actually a *hafiz*. In the standards

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[246]The Satan (Şeytan) is believed to be constantly trying to seduce the servants of God from following His orders, based on this verse in the Qur'an: "For he [the Satan] had said, 'I will surely take from among Your servants a specific portion. And I will mislead them, and I will arouse in them [sinful] desires, and I will command them so they will slit the ears of cattle, and I will command them so they will change the creation of Allah.' And whoever takes Satan as an ally instead of Allah has certainly sustained a clear loss." (Qur'an 4: 118-119)

of the society, she would definitely be considered a pious woman. Yet she had

different standards of piety in her mind:

> Piety means being close to God, having a good relationship with God, and doing everything for God, not his slaves. The role of worship and prayers (*ibadet*) is to keep the connection uncut. How would God measure our piety if he did not prescribe these practices of worship? They empower one's faith, but they are not the essence of piety. Good disposition is the essence of piety for me.

The difference of this approach from the "what matters is the belief"

argument is that it does not negate the necessity of the bodily practices; indeed, it

connects it to a system of bodily acts that can be determined as the components of

a good disposition. It is not regarded as a replacement of prescribed ritual

practices, but as an enhancer of them. As Al-Ghazzali suggests, "With a good

disposition, a person achieves the level of him (*sic*) who fasts by day and prays by

night. He attains great degrees in the Hereafter, even though his worship is

weak."[247] In other words, an agentive performance that transforms the self to a

better position is much more rewarding than mere performance of the rituals.

The subject between submission and agency

> The beginning of all (spiritual) happiness is taking pains in (the performance of) good deeds. The fruit of this is that the soul internalizes good qualities. Then, their light shines outside and good deeds begin to be accepted naturally and voluntarily. The secret of this is that connection which is between the soul and the body, for one affects the other and vice versa. It is for this that any act done negligently is in vain, for the soul has not given that act any part of its attributes because the soul was unaware of it.[248]

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[247] Al-Ghazzali, *On Disciplining the Self*.
[248] Ibid.

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The awareness of the soul mentioned by Al-Ghazzali in his treatise on "disciplining the self," is an important window to see the conception of agency in the classical Islamic ethics. He claims that any action without the awareness of the soul is in vain, as exercise of freewill is essential for a human being to be considered an agent. That explains why pursuers of authenticated piety condemn imitation, and require the use of freewill and critical thinking, as well as the embodiment of the truth reached at the aspired end of the authentication process.

Talal Asad criticizes Western cultural theory for reducing agency into a "metaphysical idea of a conscious agent-subject having both the capacity and the desire to move in a singular historical direction: that of increasing self-empowerment and decreasing pain."[249]

A similar reductionist conception can also be made for the Islamic subject-agent; this subject is also conscious and has the capacity (*fitrat*) and the desire (*irade*) to move in a singular metaphysical direction: to know God, and worship God.[250] However, a closer look at these key concepts would indicate how this conception of agency operates on a complex ground of relationships between different forms of existence.

In Islamic theology, *fitrat* (Ar. *fitrah*) "is the immutable natural predisposition for good, innate in every human being from birth, or even earlier, from the pre-existent state in which the human soul enters into a covenant with

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[249] Talal Asad, *Formations,* 79.
[250] "I created the jinn and the humankind only that they might worship Me." Qur'an 51: 56.

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God (Qur'an 7: 172). The term *fitrah* designates the human being's essential nature, moral constitution, and original disposition."[251] It constitutes the "spirit" in the topography of Ibn 'Arabi that he defined for the human beings:

> As microcosms, human beings contain the three created worlds: spiritual, imaginal, and corporeal. The spirit derives from the divine Breath, while the body is made of clay. The soul stands between the two and shares in qualities of both sides. Hence it is one like the spirit through its essence, but many like the body through its faculties.[252]

In this topography of the self, which is very similar to Freud's scheme of id-ego-super ego, the soul starts its journey of becoming in an id-like state, which is described as "the soul commanding to evil" in the Qur'an[253] and by the Sufis (*nefs-i emmare*). It gradually develops to the state of "the soul that blames"[254] (*nefs-i levvame*) or that holds itself accountable for its own shortcomings, which is actually the care of the self. Finally, the perfection is achieved at the stage where "the soul [is] at peace [with God]"[255] (*nefs-i mutmain*). In this journey towards perfection, the soul is equipped with *irade* (freewill) to discipline its vehicle, i.e. the bodily faculties, and attain to the level of the spirit, which, "as the breath of God, already possesses the perfection of the *fitra*, the original human disposition."[256]

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[251] Oliver Leaman & Kecia Ali, *Islam: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 40.

[252] William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn-al 'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 99.

[253] Qur'an 12: 53.

[254] Qur'an 76: 2.

[255] Qur'an 89: 27.

[256] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 99.

In this economy of the self, then, the freewill is essential in becoming a pious subject, or a test-taker in this world in order to be rewarded or punished in the Judgment Day. That is why states of unconsciousness are excluded from this test by the jurisprudents. Hence, the subject in Islam is a test-taker, rather than a seeker of pleasure, considering the limits of this world. Its agentive action is needed to discipline the self (or the soul) in order to raise it to the level of "the soul that blames itself." However, contrary to the secular Western perception of "increasing self-empowerment and decreasing pain," the Islamic perception of the subject suggests otherwise.[257] That is, the subject is expected to discipline her "evil-commanding" self by disempowering it, or giving it the opposite of what it wants, which means that decrease of pain is not necessarily the goal of the agentive action, since pain itself might be sought in order to discipline the self:

> Know that for whoever desires to expel his bad disposition from himself, there is only one way, and that is that he do the opposite of whatever that (bad) disposition commands him (to do). [258]

At least, when pain is afflicted on the agent, she[259] is expected to show patience and thus convert that pain into pleasure in the Hereafter. With all the

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[257] Although early Christianity had a great emphasis on pain and suffering, as Asad shows in *Genealogies of Religion* (1993), the modern notion of agency has become interestingly something that escapes pain. Even the common saying in English "no pain, no gain" is in contrast with the modern Western conception of agency.

[258] Al-Ghazzali, *On Disciplining the Self*.

[259] Although Al-Ghazzali's and my usage of pronouns differ, we are both referring to the human being regardless of a specific gender. Al-Ghazzali continuously uses the male pronoun as in all classical scholarly works, including those of the Western scholarship, which deployed male pronoun to refer to the human being. Al-Ghazzali's deployment of this pronoun does not necessarily

traumatic experiences she had, Zeliha confesses that "the headscarf is not something that you wear with pleasure;" yet she wears it because she believes that it is an order of God, "and it is worn to get closer to God." Even though it is not a bodily pain, there is suffering caused by a bodily practice; for the conventional theory of agency in the secular-liberal realm, she must choose to end that suffering by not wearing the distressing object in order to display an agentive action. The other ways of action are not considered agentive, but manifestations of victimization either by the society or a higher power. However, that pain coexists with pleasure, as she thinks that "suffering gets to be pleasurable as you remember why you are suffering."

Talal Asad gives the example of sadomasochism to argue for the simultaneous existence of pain and pleasure in a bodily act, and asks "Why is sadomasochism not rejected by all moderns who condemn pain as a negative experience?"[260] Asad uses that example to challenge secular-liberal people who reject religious pain and suffering on the grounds that it hinders agency since they are forced to inflict pain on themselves by a religious authority. All the religious

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mean to exclude women from this process of subject formation. In Islamic ethics, as Asma Barlas says, "both women and men have the same capacity for moral agency, choice, and individuality," which is evident from two facts according to her reading of the Qur'an: "First, the Qur'an holds both men and women to the same standards of behavior and applies the same standards for judging between them; that is, it does not sexualize moral agency. Second, the Qur'an appoints women and men each other's guides and protectors, indicating that both equally are capable of attaining moral individuality and both have the same function of guardianship over one another." *Believing Women in the Qur'an: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 140.

[260] Asad, *Formations,* 119.

restrictions one puts for herself in her day-to-day life can be considered an

example of pain and pleasure coexisting in a bodily practice; and if there needs to

be a calculation made, the amount of pleasure in return for the amount of pain in

sadomasochism is quite insignificant, compared to the infinite pleasure the

religious subject is promised in return for a finite pain.

This religious subject, then, willingly accepts to subject herself to the

restrictions of the religion, as indicated in Ceren's words:

> I don't agree with the idea that you should do nothing against your will.
> Isn't that what self-disciplining is all about? I would like to be a diplomat,
> but I could not realize this dream because of the headscarf. But the
> headscarf is an indispensable part of me; I cannot give it up for any reason.

Furthermore, the habituation process complicates the idea of agency and

being aware of the bodily practices; because, habits, by their very nature, happen

without the control of the subject, and transform the subject in return for its

agentive action. For example, when I asked Hilal to what extent religion restricts

her life, she answered that living within the lawful circle (*helal daire*)[261] has made

her happier in the long term.

> The headscarf seems to be restrictive, but it is not. When you are
> conditioned in a certain way, your desires and aspirations are also shaped
> accordingly. I do not desire to drink alcohol, or go out at night, anyways.

But overall, it can be claimed that the transformation from imitative piety

to authenticated piety was based on the use of agency, which was associated with

awareness, consciousness, reasoning, and responsibility.

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[261] *Helal daire* is a statement of Said Nursi, who says that "the lawful (*helal*)
circle is enough for pleasure, there is no need to transgress to the unlawful
(*haram*)"

The act of interpretation

An important part of this exercise of agency has been the process of interpretation, which came as a result of direct access to the primary religious sources and the pluralization of religious discourses. The critical thinking and the subsequent individualization of piety actually came as the unintended consequences of a simple desire: to cultivate authenticated faith in order to resist the temptations and challenges of the modern secular public sphere. This need to empower piety through knowledge, accompanied with the proliferation of Islamic pedagogical materials, and the later digitalization of primary religious sources have paved the way for the individualization of piety, which required a more intense engagement with the act of interpretation.

For example, Elif, a public-relations officer, who has been an affiliate of the Hizmet movement for long years, has developed her individual understanding of the practice of covering the hair with a headscarf:

> Not covering your hair does not mean that your hair is seductive. Being non-covered in our society is not the same as being non-covered in the Arab society...The purpose of veiling is not to attract attention and be seductive. But in fact, veiling is something that makes one more beautiful by covering the imperfections in one's body.

The exposure to diverse realities in the everyday life has made Elif and others to seek for new interpretations in religion that would take these new realities into account.

Travelling and reinterpretation

A big part of this interpretation process is the extra careful usage of the Hadith, by subjecting them to critical thinking in the light of the new experiences. This stands out as a big challenge to deal with for Sümeyye, who is the chair of the Meridyen Association that has taken up the mission of advertising and promoting the life of the Prophet as a role model for the contemporary society at the national and global level.

The website[262] they have prepared for this purpose includes a diverse range of approaches to the life, character, and mission of the Prophet from both Turkish and non-Turkish scholars, which is a reflection of Sümeyye's exposure to the non-Turkish Islam in her travels to the UK, Spain, and Malaysia. She compares her early understanding of piety at the imam-hatip school, with her current view shaped by her later experiences:

> In imam-hatip school, piety for me was based on the five pillars. After college –I don't know if this is a loss or something better, but I realized that this thing (piety) could be stretched to include more than practicing the five pillars.

Travelling has had a remarkable impact on this expansion process, as seeing different practices of Islam in Europe, or in Malaysia, she "realized that many things we had been guarding by considering religious were actually cultural." She gives the example of the popular belief that the month of Safar on the lunar calendar is baleful and brings trouble, so one must be extra careful and recite extra supplications in this month. She says, "when I was at college, we used

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[262] http://www.lastprophet.info/

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to question whether this was in the Hadith or in the Qur'an. But now, we are

questioning whether that Hadith is authentic or not."[263]

Also, the main experience that taught Zeliha about the shades of gray in

life has been her travel to the US, for a six-month language course in Washington,

D.C. She describes her experience as such: "I was in an aquarium before then. I

saw the ocean when I went to the US; I saw thousands of different types of

beings. I respect all of them, and I expect to be respected in the same way."

In essence, the act of travelling has been one of the oldest ways of

acquiring wisdom and knowledge, but remained a privilege of men until very

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[263] Questioning the Hadith is a double-edged sword for pious Muslims, especially for women who are not always happy with some Hadith attributed to the Prophet, such as "Those who entrust their affairs to women will never know prosperity" (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 9, 88: 119) or, "Isn't the witness of a woman equal to half of that of a man?...This is because of the deficiency of a woman's mind." (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 3, 48:826). Unlike what Fatima Mernissi did in *Women & Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, these women do not necessarily embark on a scholarly journey to prove these types of Hadith wrong, especially when they are included in the Sahih collection; but they try to understand the larger context of these oral traditions, and try to discover what can be seen beyond the literal undertakings of them. This cautionary approach in dealing with the seeming problematic Hadith results from the widespread veneration of the Prophet among Muslims, especially in the context of Turkey where Sufism has been very strong for centuries. Annemarie Schimmel writes in *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, that "The personality of the Prophet became the medium of religious experience, although, phenomenologically speaking, the center of Islam is the Koran as direct divine revelation, not the messenger who brought it. But the Muslims felt that the figure of the Prophet was necessary for the maintenance of the Muslim faith in its "legal" aspect (as indicated in the second phrase of the profession of faith)…Muhammad constitutes a limit in the definition of Islam and sets it off from other forms of faith." 214. In other words, they believe that their faith is at stake if they deny an authentic Hadith, and they try to avoid this risk as much as possible.

recent times because of the travelling conditions. The tradition of *rıhle* (*rihla* in Arabic) used to be the primary method of learning for the Muslim scholars until the modern schooling was introduced in the nineteenth century. According to this tradition, the students (*talebe*, which means one who demands) would travel long distances to study at the desk (*rahle*) of a teacher (*üstad*, or *ustadh* in Arabic, meaning the master) whose fame would spread through word of mouth. In fact, even before this tradition, travelling was considered to be source of enlightenment and opening-up of one's worldview, for it was partly his experiences during his travels as a caravan driver that made Prophet Muhammad to retreat to a cave in a mountain to engage in deep "critical" thinking of the state of his own society.

The reason why travelling and being in motion has such great contribution to one's expanding her knowledge base lies in Michel de Certeau's description of the act of walking: "To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper."[264] Lacking a place allows one to be exposed to infinite types of knowledge in her search for it; and finding a place would be the end of the passion for seeking knowledge and critical thinking of the already available ones in her knowledge base. Because, place means order, where everything is in its "proper" place, thus leaving no space for new data entry unless taking something out from the database. The place "excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (place)."[265] In such a case, critical thinking,

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[264] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 103.
[265] de Certeau, *The Practice*, 117.

where ideas could clash with each other becomes impossible; because "the law of the "proper" rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines…"[266]

During the course of travelling, or walking, between two places, on the other hand, one has the chance to experience the space, which "is a practiced place,"[267]that allows for variety, diversity, ruptures, clashes, and humility to cultivate deep and critical thinking. That is why, these young women have developed a critical and yet more inclusive approach towards religion and piety after they moved from their places of origin to receive their higher education, while their families remained at the same "place".

The adverse effects of critical thinking

For Sümeyye, there is lightness, an ease of motion created by the proliferation of critical thinking: "Before, we used to obey more to what the scholars (*alim*) said, but now we see them as the personal interpretation of that scholar."

The same ease of motion, however, creates a void in terms of religious learning for others like Zehra, because she cannot go beyond the level of criticism anymore. She is also a graduate of an imam-hatip school, and she had to have her undergraduate and graduate degrees in London, UK, since she did not want to take off her headscarf at school.

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[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid.

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Interestingly, the Hizmet movement kindled the fire of criticism in her for the first time, as she was impressed by the critical reading of the religious sources, as part of the authentication process. Before that, she had two types of religion in her mind: the imam-hatip school type, and the *tarikat* type. The first one emphasized rules and principles which needed to be learnt and obeyed; while the latter was focused on personal worship and invocations within a very strict hierarchy, without any questioning.

The piety movement, on the other hand, needed to open a space for itself between these two trends, which could only be possible through questioning the existing paths, and showing an alternative one to the public. The lack of a strict hierarchy and the accommodation of individual reasoning made this movement more attractive for the young, educated generation, who yearned for becoming a pious subject without having to align themselves with a political aim, or retreat into a private *tarikat* circle.

However, that space of freedom for individual reasoning, together with the loss of confidence in the traditional sources as a result of questioning and being exposed to different conceptions of Islam abroad, have left Zehra in the middle of a void, where she has to rely on her agency in every step:

> At the moment, there are no religious sources that nourish my soul. I used to benefit from the *ilmihal*[268] a lot in the past. I was not questioning their correctness at that time. Now I have this problem of not knowing which

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[268] *İlmihal*: The type of book that explains the principles of Islam, and Islamic practices. The contents of these books are prepared from the classical sources of Islamic law, particularly the Hanafi school of law that is followed by the Muslims in Turkey.

source to trust. When I was reading Hadith in the imam-hatip school, for example, I used to think that they were all true. But now there is this question of being authentic or not, especially on some hadith about women. Critical thinking has also brought a kind of degeneration in my obedience and submission...For me, criticism has surpassed learning in religion. I must first be able to read and understand the Qur'an by myself, because I am not convinced yet about the resources that I can use to nourish my soul. I am not even sure about the *mezhep* (Islamic school of law) distinctions yet, I am not sure whether we have a *mezhep* or not. If it is a matter of *içtihat*[269] then who will tell you about that *içtihat* if you already know the arguments and you have the education? So, I am questioning with my conscience; I am following a religious rule, not because so-and-so *âlim* said it, but because I find it reasonable or not.

She gives the example of shaking hands with men:

Who will I listen to in this matter? I decide according to the situation I find myself in. One who calls it haram, must persuade me about this. There used to be a series of rules, in the old days, which you would try to obey as much as you could. Now, I am not sure about the rules.

Zehra is still wearing the headscarf, performing her ritual prayers regularly, and working for the Hizmet movement; in other words, her individual tide turns did not stop her from performing the bodily practices she used to do, or denounce submitting to a group. No matter how much doubt she has in her mind, she has no doubt about her aim of cultivating a pious self, a good character.

Good character and the need for community

Al-Ghazzali thinks that a good character consists of three aspects:

One is that it is innate. It is a gift and a favor from God Most High for a person to be created with an innately good disposition. For example, one is created generous, another is created humble, and there are many like that. The second is that one can force oneself to become accustomed to doing good works so that it becomes habitual. The third is that one sees persons

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[269] *İçtihat*: (Ar. *Ijtihad*) It has the same roots with *cihat* (Ar. *Jihad*), meaning to strive for arriving at a correct judgment on a matter that is not clearly settled in the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

whose character and deeds are good. One should associate with them so that one may necessarily take upon oneself those attributes, even if one is not aware of (the transformation)."[270]

The third aspect of a good character defies isolation and individuality in one's journey to a pious self. Because of that, those who want to get closer to God in the perfect sense feel the need to be within a community and benefit from the good character of the people in that community.

"It struck me as a community of good people in the beginning" said Esra, when I asked her what attracted her in the Hizmet movement:

> They do not act against the spirit of the time. You can both be an individual and a community. The possibility of transforming myself within the community has kept me here.

For Sümeyra, the chair of a businesswomen's association that belongs to the movement in Fatih, Istanbul, having good role models attracted her in the beginning. She was living in a public dorm at the university with all kinds of people: leftist, Islamist, Kurdish separatist, rich and poor girls from far-away cities, and some followers of the Gülen movement, who impressed her with their calmness, and dedication to practicing their religion without getting involved with any political groups. She trusted them because they supported their words with their practices: "My role models were very strong women, both in telling me about piety, and practicing what they told me at the same time."

Through their example, Sümeyra could see that it was possible to be a pious woman and living in the modern life without renouncing it. She compared

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[270] Al-Ghazzali, *On Disciplining the Self*.

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the ideas of Gülen about community[271] with her father's teachings of individuality and personal freedom. Then she saw her "weakness to cope with this life" on her own, and "felt the need for a network to remain pious" since she also had a hard time practicing her religion in her secular family. She does not see any restriction in belonging to pious community, because she believes that "every community you want to get in has their own rules and restrictions."

For a pious woman who wants to be right in the modern secular life, the community of like-minded people appears as a pragmatic choice; as Zuhal says, being in a community provides continuity to pious practices and protection from the temptations of the modern life. That is also the reason why, Hilal sees the weekly gatherings with her friends within the community, as her main religious source, where they discuss readings from Nursi or Gülen.

These discussions help her more than her individual readings, as the social support that she feels for her quest keeps her going. Because these gatherings are regular and consistent, they help her to constantly remember her motivation for piety amidst the haste of the everyday life:

> This is an ailment of the modern times: everything has to be perfect, and we are supposed to run after this concept of happiness that is imposed on us; and yet we forget what we are running after when we just keep running.

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[271] Gülen says: "Islam can be practiced individually, and a person can be successful in performing their personal obligations. However, it is only through being in a Muslim community that God Almighty's favors can be acquired in a general sense and these favors can be represented in a perfect way." *Reflections on the Qur'an*, October 3, 2012, accessed October 23, 2012, http://en.fgulen.com/reflections-on-the-quran/4331-al-maedah-5-97.

Mualla *abla* made a very similar comment about the modern city life and its effect on piety: "Because the mind is messy in modern life, one's freewill *(irade)* to cultivate piety gets weaker." Whereas "in small towns, you know the street you walk, the market you shop at." Thus, your mind is more organized in a familiar setting, as it knows everything in its "proper place." This means less challenge and threat for your motivation for piety, unlike the metropolis. While "there is more threat to your piety" in the metropolis, "when you can use your freewill, your piety becomes more intense and deeper," which is also accompanied with a higher possibility of "failing against those threats." Then she added: "A life that combines the positive opportunities of the city with the innocence of small towns is a utopia, and against the wisdom of our worldly test."

She knows that it is part of the test to live in a secular modern public sphere, and she is aware of the virtues of agentive action towards cultivating a pious self in such a challenging setting. Thus, instead of dreaming about rebuilding the Golden Age of Islam, or an Islamic state, she is working towards improving the present conditions in the public sphere to allow for a peaceful coexistence of pious and non-pious people, as the general secretary of the Women's Platform under the Journalists and Writers Foundation.

Chapter 5

(RE)IMAGINING THE MODERN LIFE

This chapter talks about how modernity is viewed, lived, and shaped by Muslim women in Turkey, who want to become pious as highly-educated professionals living and working in the secular-modern public sphere. It aims to look at the process in which these passengers in various piety trains perceive the modern life which they are passing through, and how they rearrange certain things along the way according to their own tastes and needs.

Unlike the ideal type of the "Republican women" that was endorsed by the Kemalist state in the formative years of the secularist nation-state of Turkey, these women have a claim for both piety and modernity. In the wake of the rise of the public appearance of religion since the 1980s, these women rejected to be passive onlookers of the public sphere; instead, they wish to be active participants and hosts of this space, which took them three decades of struggle to access. Hence they are genuinely and deeply concerned with the questions brought by the modern age, and finding a path to walk between the Islamic and liberal-secular ethics.

Although they each follow individual paths to cultivate a pious self in a modern-secular framework, they also try to develop a collective attitude towards the issues like gender and sexuality from their unique positions in the public sphere. Both the Women's Platform (WP) and the Meridyen Circle (MC) have been involved in this attempt of constructing a collective attitude towards

modernity in general and the question of gender in particular. Through seminar series and various conferences they have brought together students, academics, independent researchers and authors with similar concerns of piety and modernity with the aim of developing a new discourse in response to the secular-liberal one: one that is neither apologetic nor militantly progressive at the expense of turning down tradition completely. In other words, by taking a fresh look at the liberal-secular ethics on which the ideas of gender and religion are built, these women's organizations take the pains to carve a space for pious modern women in the public sphere.

In this chapter, I will give special attention to the Women's Studies seminar series organized by the WP, which took place on a monthly basis from December 2010 to November 2011. These free and open to public seminars were led by Nazife Şişman, a freelance writer, translator, and sociologist, who did not have a post at a university because of the headscarf ban. She was the first covered woman who graduated from the Boğaziçi University in 1984, with a BA degree in Economics, and she received her MA degree from Istanbul University in Sociology in 1997. She was chosen for leading these seminars because of her expertise and previous writings on the women's issues in the light of the Muslim experience in modern periods.[272]

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[272] Her works include: *Yeni İnsan: Kaderle Tasarım Arasında* (The New Human: Between Destiny and Design), Istanbul: Timas Publishing, 2012; *Sınırsız Dünyanın Yeni Sınırı: Başörtüsü* (The New Border of the Borderless World: The Headscarf), Istanbul: Timas Publishing, 2011; *Emanetten Mülke: Kadın-Beden-Siyaset* (From Trust to Property: Woman-Body-Politics), Istanbul: Iz Publishing,

In the monthly seminar series of the WP, ten-to-fifteen women with different educational backgrounds read the books in the syllabus prepared by Şişman, and attended the meetings each month to discuss the readings. The ideas raised in these seminars ranged from Orientalism to the question of bioethics within the context of reimagining the secular-liberal ethics from their unique position and their unique concern: how to live as a pious Muslim woman in a secular-liberal realm (i.e. the academia, the media, the civil society, and any other position taken in the public sphere).

After discussing the main ideas raised in these seminars, I will give an account of the gender relations within the Hizmet community as manifested in the everyday life experiences of some participants in these seminars. I will try to compare the textual evidence that is present in the writings and sayings of the spiritual leader of the community with the actual practices in a particular portion of the community; in this way, I will discuss the possibility of creating a change in the lives of Muslim women by way of (re)interpretation of the canonical texts.

At the end of this chapter, I will discuss how the pious female scholars and intellectuals under the roof of the Meridyen Circle divert their cumulative power of producing and governing knowledge to different fields rather than religion in order to create this change on the lives of Muslim women. Drawing from my

2003; *Global Konferanslarda Kadın Politikaları* (Politics of Women in Global Conferences), Istanbul: İz Publishing, 1996. She has also translated many books into Turkish, including: Amina Wadud, *Kur'an ve Kadın* (Qur'an and Woman), Istanbul: Iz Publishing, 1997; Martin Lings, *Hz. Muhammed (sav)'in Hayatı* (The Life of Prophet Muhammad), Istanbul: Insan Publishing, 2003; Sachico Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (forthcoming).

notes in the annual meeting of the MC in December 2011, I will highlight their ideas on pious women's role in the social sciences, and the possibility of carving out a space for them, a kind of safe passage through the modern public sphere that would lead them to their ideal stations of piety.

Negotiating with the secular-liberal ethics

The ground on which these discussions take place is the secular-liberal ethics, which constitutes the backbone of modern states with its basic principles: secularism, the rule of law, equal rights, moral autonomy, and individual liberty. Although the liberal ethics claims itself to be universal, it cannot be detached from its historical and geographical origin, which is roughly defined as "the West" both by the proponents and the critics of it.

What makes this base a challenging ground to act is the "basic premise of liberal secularism and liberal universalism that neither culture nor religion are permitted to govern publicly; both are tolerated on the condition that they are privately and individually enjoyed."[273] As women who take Islamic practices of veiling and ritual prayer seriously for their cultivation of a pious self, they are challenged with this presumption of the liberal-secular ethics that "culture [and religion] must be contained by liberalism, forced into a position in which it makes no political claim and is established as optional for individuals...and be shrunk into the status of a house that individuals might enter and exit."[274]

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[273] Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 21.
[274] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 22.

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Yet liberalism also provides a space to move for them because of its inconsistencies, despite its claim for otherwise. This discursive space is provided in the very disputes about the meaning of its key terms "such as individual autonomy, freedom of (economic, political, social) exchange, limitation of state power, rule of law, national self-determination, and religious toleration."[275] The self-reflexive and ambiguous character of liberalism in terms of the identification and meaning of the ideas around the major concept of "liberty" is the space from which these pious women are walking out to build their own piety-friendly liberal modernity. Because they are clearly aware that there is no way out of modernity for them, not even an Islamic modernity, which, they think, is not more than a cheap imitation of the Western modernity as exemplified in the so-called Islamic hotels, or Islamic fashion, or even Islamic capitalism.[276]

What was sought for in these seminars both in the WP and the MC was an authentic, indigenous formulation of a new ethics that would not stand out as the other, or the alternative of an essential of the public sphere. They were not seeking for an "alternative modernity" as popularly attributed to many

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[275] Talal Asad, Is *Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, eds. Asad, Brown & et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 25.
[276] The rise of the conservative middle class in Turkey in the last three decades has forced capitalism to adapt to the religious sensitivities of these new consumers, while it displayed no change in its philosophy of promoting consumption. Hence, everything that was already available for the secular-modern lifestyle were modified to fit into the standards of an "Islamic" lifestyle, such as: holiday resorts with women-only beaches and pools, shopping malls with prayer rooms, fashion shows with Islamic outfit, etc. See Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State* for the fetishization of the headscarf as a consumption object.

Islamists.[277] Instead, they were quite keen on being melted in the mainstream secular-liberal realm without being forced to give up certain bodily practices which they deemed important for their self-cultivation towards piety.

That is why they had to play on the secular-liberal realm, and benefit from the discursive space provided by the "contradictions and ambiguities in the language of liberalism that make the public debates among self-styled liberals and with their 'illiberal' opponents possible."[278] However, the form of the debates that took place in these seminars was not like the conflict that is usually seen between "liberal" and "illiberal" civilizations, cultures, or traditions as seen in the studies of Saba Mahmood, Lara Deeb, and many other anthropologists. They were more like a result of the conflict which "is intrinsic to liberalism as an evolving discursive tradition"[279] making us aware of the fact that conflict with liberalism takes place within liberalism itself, and one does not have to be located in an "illiberal" realm just because they are questioning liberalism. Their critique of this realm implies a certain level of distance; yet it does not mean that they are the "others" of this realm.

The women that are the focus of this research are different from the Egyptian mosque movement participants in Saba Mahmood's study, or the

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[277] Many Turkish scholars define the rise of Islamic visibility in the public sphere as the rise of an alternative modernity or an Islamic modernity. See: E. Fuat Keyman, ed., *Remaking Turkey: Globalization, Alternative Modernities, and Democracy* (Oxford: Lexington Books. 2007); and M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[278] Asad, *Is Critique Secular?, 26.
[279] Ibid.

Lebanese Shia women in Lara Deeb's study as both groups of women are located in the margins of the larger society, concerned or contented with building an alternative place for themselves. Whereas, the pious professional women in Turkey are now aware that they are the mainstream component of the larger Turkish society, and they demand their due share from the public sphere –i.e. as the hosts of it, rather than tolerated guests. The secular education they have gone through and the penetration of secularism into their everyday lives have made them desire to continue living within the secular system, albeit a modified one into a religion-friendly condition. Their attempt is to rebuild the secular-liberal realm in this fashion rather than working for an alternative non-liberal or "Islamic" political system that would devoid them of having public roles or pursuing their individual worldly goals.

The setting of the seminars

The seminars took place in the meeting room at the main building of the Journalists and Writers Foundation in Altunizade, Istanbul. It was a modern three-story building used by the Research Center, the Intercultural Dialogue Platform, The Medialog Platform, and the Women's Platform, with its conference room, guest hall, meeting rooms, offices for the staff working for the platforms, a restaurant, and a closed parking lot. The rooms in the garret were designed as lounges furnished with fashionable sofa beds to allow for informal meetings, weekly religious talks, and performing daily ritual prayers, as well as hosting overnight guests albeit very rarely. In all aspects, it was built as a secular place

which restricted the practice of religion to its margins –i.e. the garret. The only visible religious practice was the headscarf worn by the women who worked at the building.

Although they were all affiliates of the Hizmet movement, and they all knew each other as practicing Muslims, no one in the building performed their ritual prayers in front of others except in the prayer room. In other words, everyone had internalized the idea of a secular public sphere and a religious private sphere within their workplace.[280] However, the secular vision of the public sphere was softened with decorative items depicting the Ottoman-Islamic art, like *ebru* (water marbling), *hat* (calligraphy), or the Ottoman tiles, in order to give the impression that modern-secular architecture could be blended with Islamic design. This was their way of claiming the public sphere for themselves without turning it into a mutually exclusive form of a religious sphere.[281]

A similar attempt of building a religion-friendly secular space in the discourse of gender and sexuality could be observed in the Women's Studies seminars organized by the Women's Platform. There were 15 women attending

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[280] This preference of performing *namaz* in private has Islamic references, as well as social connotations. Although Islam allows for the performance of *namaz* in any place that is clean, performing it publicly outside of a mosque (*cami*) or a masjeed (*mescit*) is considered an act of show-off or boasting. But this might also be very much related to the modernization process that deemed religion a private matter, and its public performance as unethical.

[281] This is different from adding a prayer room to a shopping mall in the sense that they do not add a religious sauce to a secular act (like consumption), but they conduct a religious act (i.e. *tebliğ:* spreading out the message of religion to the largest portion of the society as possible) within a secular setting (i.e. as a civil-society organization).

the seminars, all of them highly educated, from different professions. More than half of the participants including the lecturer were covered; and I saw almost all of them in the prayer room at the garret after the seminars performing their afternoon prayers. That is, they all considered each other as somewhat pious, including the organizing body. Yet, there were no demands or attempts to turn these readings into a religious talk or sermon, from the beginning till the end of the seminars.

In a conventionally religious setting, similar to the women's mosque movement in Egypt,[282] the women's madrasahs in Niger,[283] or the girls' Qur'anic schools in Oman[284] to some extent, "the woman issue" would be discussed by a theologian, or a self-learned religious scholar, drawing from theological sources, and focusing on the dos and don'ts according to the Islamic law. However, in these seminars, the attempt was to understand the general concept of gender and womanhood in both the liberal-secular and the Islamic sense; and come out with their own conception at the end of this learning process.

Being a woman: a gender-based reading of life

Nazife Şişman started the seminars responding to this question: "Why are we reading about women? Why should we know about the feminist theories?" She said: "The reason why we are reading about women is not that because we

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[282] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*.

[283] Oseina Alidou, *Engaging Modernity: Muslim Women and the Politics of Agency in Postcolonial Niger* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

[284] Mandana E. Limbert, *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory, and Social Life in an Omani Town* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

are woman, but because it is an important issue we must locate in our social lives." Then she continued to explain her interest in women's issues as such:

> As Muslims in Turkey, we have gone through a major transformation, and we have been discussing it on the basis of women's transformation. In fact, what we are discussing is not the woman, but our way of live [as Muslims in Turkey].

From the beginning there was an attempt to look at the issue from a larger perspective than women's rights and gender equality. Because these women had bigger concerns than achieving gender equality, or improving the life conditions of women. For them, "the woman question" was part of a civilizational transformation that had been taking place for the last three centuries, as well as the current struggle to be a participant of the liberal-secular discourse rather than being the object of it.

In this context, they have gathered to think over how to join this conversation beyond imitating its language. They have to find a way "to arm themselves with the weapons of the liberal-secular discourse" and yet "to protect their inner core while struggling for that purpose." This means not to hurt their deep-rooted technologies of building connection with God, established throughout the discursive formation of the Islamic tradition in their specific geography.

In order to achieve that, they have to locate the women's issue very carefully in their hearts and minds as pious women who have gone through secular education and upbringing. Şişman emphasized the fact that "This is not only about women; it is a much broader historical process that should be handled both vertically in its chronology and horizontally in its global spread." In other

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words, she assured her audience that the seminar series did not aim to impose a gender-based understanding of being or existence, repeating that "We are discussing the women's issue not because we are women, but because this is a topic we have difficulty in positioning in our social lives as Muslims of the modern age." They must make sense of this issue for they are burdened with an entire social heritage whether they adopt a gender-based identity or not. Regardless of their personal opinions, they have all been influenced by the "women's liberation" process, and they cannot simply turn a deaf ear to the victimization of women just because of their sexuality.

Nazife Şişman came up with a broad spectrum of readings that covered seven units: 1) the emergence of the category of "woman" in Europe; 2) the changing definition of sexuality; 3) the theory and history of feminism; 4) colonialism, modernization, nationalism, and feminism in the Middle East; 5) the question of representation: Orientalism and the Western depiction of Muslim women; 6) Turkish modernization and feminism; and 7) masculinity and femininity in the Islamic tradition of thought.[285]

Her aim was to handle this topic of gender and sexuality within the largest possible perspective in order not to fall into any reductionist arguments or judgments, for this was the main thing she, and the seminar participants, criticized about the secular-liberal, conservative, and Islamist perception of "the woman question."

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[285] See Appendix for the full translated syllabus.

The readings of the first unit on the emergence of the category of "woman" analyzed the relationship between the revolutionary fervor of the 18th century-Europe and were aimed to establish the idea of womanhood as a product of particular historicities rather than a universal, innate character.[286] The articles touched at topics like the woman worker, women's literacy, motherhood and the state, in a way to portray womanhood as an identity among many others that proliferated in the age of the modern states. This would allow these pious women to handle the issue as a secular (worldly) matter; without letting their resentments to be directed towards God, or the sacred sources, but seeing them as part of "*imtihan dünyası*," the world as a realm of test. As a political category, womanhood was an optional identity they could claim in order to receive their citizenship rights, and improve their life standards in accordance with the standards of the era they live in.

Modernization and gender relations

The study of the emergence of feminism and the conception of "woman" somehow gathered all the arguments around the specific conception of modernity and modernization, which were described by Nazife Şişman on the basis of production modes: the end of feudalism, the birth of capitalism and the new

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[286] The category of "womanhood" as a political identity has emerged in the process of what is today called "the first wave feminism, which dated from mid-1850s to mid-1900s. It started as a political activism concerning women's rights to vote, own property, and access to higher education, rather than being seen just as mothers and wives. Concerned with getting the basic human rights of white middle-class women, first wave feminism did not take into account any racial or class dimension in their claim for equal rights with men.

production system. She explained how this is directly related to the new gender roles:

> This new production system totally pushed women out of the system. They were pushed to the position of mere consumers with the emergence of the work-home separation. With this new production system, the man works at the factory, brings the money, and the woman spends this money. So, this model of "production at factory, consumption at home" created the "good mother" role.

In this way, Şişman paved the way for an understanding of the real life conditions that led to the emergence of the feminist movement, which started with Mary Wollstonecraft's protest of limiting women as mere consumers in her influential book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* published in 1792.[287] She noted that this was the struggle of the middle class women, while the working class and those in the rural areas had a different level of struggle. "Furthermore," she said, "it is also in this period that women's reproductivity gained a national, patriotic significance, in line with the role of the good mother." So was the focus on women's education, as the state needed educated mothers to raise good citizens.

It was in this context that the second wave of feminism arose within the civil rights movement in the US in the second half of the twentieth century, which came with a stronger theoretical background in order to form a systematic struggle against the universal oppression of women.[288] This time the concept of

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[287] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Deidre Shauna Lynch (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2009 [1972]).
[288] In the late 1950s feminism reappeared in the West, accompanied with the civil rights movement in the U.S. Although Women's Liberation movement in the

"woman" was established on the grounds of sexuality and the body. As Şişman

said, the relationship between the modern state and gender roles took a deeper

aspect with the state intervention on the bodies through population policies and

family planning. She highlighted "the shift to the realm of modern science from

religion in the definition of the body" and pointed at the secularization process as

the driving force behind the replacement of God with the modern state "in telling

men and women how to behave." After that she talked about the emergence of

biology, psychology, and sociology as distinct scientific disciplines, and how they

gave birth to the concept of sexuality. In other words, she also established the

concept of sexuality as a modern concept with particular historicity.

By this way, she positioned her audience at an appropriate distance from

the liberal-secular discourse of feminism and gender in order to facilitate an

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second wave feminism tried to formulate a unitary meaning for 'woman,' it could
not remain unified itself in its way of struggle. By the 1970s, there were already
three types of feminist movements within Women's Liberation: radical feminism
–located particularly in the U.S. – that saw sexual oppression against women a
universal fact and whose issues were 'women's reproductive freedom,' 'bodily
autonomy' and 'representations of women as sexed and inferior (in pornography,
advertising and prostitution); liberal feminism, which was concerned with
women's equal participation in the existing economic and political systems; and
finally Marxist-socialist feminism –located particularly in Britain– that criticized
the first two brands of feminism for ignoring the class factor in explaining the
oppression of women.
From the 1980s, the increasing criticism from Marxist-socialist feminists against
the liberal and radical feminists, in addition to the appropriation of post-
structuralist and post-modernist ideas into feminist scholarship, opened the way
for other marginalized women's groups to elevate their voices in expressing their
criticism against the white Western feminists, which resulted in the appearance of
the third wave feminism, produced mainly by women of color, third world
women, poststructuralist and lesbian women –those who were marginalized by
first and second wave feminisms.

informed critique of it, without falling into the extremes of blindly supporting or opposing it. "You must have a sound knowledge about what you criticize" was the summarizing idea by the time the first three units were covered.

Being a woman, being a Muslim woman

Setting up the socio-historical process behind the emergence of the "woman question," the participants of the seminar gradually agreed on the idea that "being born as a man or woman is part of being tested in this world, so there is no inequality or unfairness in terms of being a servant of God [ontological and moral equality]. Yet there are problems in terms of the social life, and we must accept them."

Learning about the history of feminism in the West, they came to the conclusion that Western women had concrete reasons to argue for rights considering the social and political atmosphere they lived in. They were part of a historical process in which the concept of rights emerged; so they could not be left out of this dominant discourse, as seen both in the first and second waves of feminism. As Şişman said, "their demand for rights naturally developed in the process of political participation and democratization."

However, there was a common tendency among the audience to detach women's rights from the feminist ideology for they saw it as part of the Enlightenment current that drove God out of the universe. "For this reason," claimed Şişman, "the feminist discourse has come to the point of revoking servanthood to God, and defining itself on the basis of sex."

Furthermore, its approach to the issue of freedom and women's oppression was seen way too generalist and ahistorical, imposing its universalist views on women's experiences to women of all geographies, classes, colors, beliefs and cultures through the concepts like patriarchy, misogyny, sexism, bodily autonomy and etc.[289] The participants claimed that they could argue for women's rights and struggle for ending women's oppression without resorting to the feminist discourse, with the motto of "Yes to women's rights, no to feminism."

So, how could they formulate their own approach to gender and sexuality as pious modern Muslim women? In the rest of the seminars, they had to establish a firm knowledge about the history of Muslim women in the Middle East. Going as far back as three centuries, they tracked the genealogy of the "woman issue" in their part of the world (i.e. the Ottoman-Turkish trajectory) touching at a broad range of topics such as colonialism, nationalism, modernization, and Orientalism.

There was no attempt of referring to the books of Islamic law (*fiqh*) written in the classical period during the formation of the Sharia, for Şişman had already made it clear that "women's socialization was a modern debate which resulted from the work-home separation." Only after securely affirming the socio-historical process of the debate in the Muslim societies, did they talk about the

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[289] Although the third wave of feminism pays attention to the universality claims, and criticizes the second wave for this reason, they still use the same concepts and gender-based analysis method to understand women from non-white, non-Western contexts. It is through studies like Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005), Sylvia Frisk's *Submitting to God* (2009) and Lara Deeb's *An Enchanted Modern* (2008) that the women's experiences were analyzed through particular and indigenous categorizations rather than explaining everything away with a universal, ahistorical concept of patriarchy and male authority.

conception of gender in the Qur'an –but not from the perspective of social roles but from the ontological and existential values of the concepts of masculinity and femininity, which had been the interest of Sufis rather than the clergy or the theologians.

The feeling of defeat and "the Muslim woman"

An important awareness for them was to realize how the debates on Muslim women were tightly connected to the feeling of defeat at the hands of the Western powers, the representatives of which criticized the position of women in Muslim societies, and Islam, for the first time. Şişman said:

> We have still not been able to get rid of this feeling, so our debates are still centered on this issue. Because we have experienced the transformation mostly over women; the changes in the lives of women have been more manifest. So even when we are discussing the headscarf and veiling, we are actually discussing modernization.

The issue of Muslim women's veiling and seclusion (*hijab* or *purdah*) first emerged as a colonial discourse as the symbol of the backwardness of Muslim societies. The status of Muslim women was used by the colonizers to "persuade the defeated Muslims of their inferiority in order to justify foreign occupation."[290] It was also the gateway of pro-Western Muslims, like the nineteenth century Egyptian politician Qassim Amin, in criticizing their own societies. Leila Ahmed suggests that his book *The Liberation of Women* "represents the rearticulation in native voice of the colonial thesis of the inferiority of the native and Muslim and

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[290] Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (London: Al-Saqi, 1985), 7.

the superiority of the European."[291] And Barbara Stowasser claims that, for Amin, veiling was the "true reason for ignorance, superstition, obesity, anemia, and premature aging of the Muslim women of his time."[292] In a similar manner to the Young Turk Abdullah Cevdet (mentioned in Ch. 2), Amin "had used the issue of women and the call for their unveiling to conduct his generalized assault on [Muslim] society"[293] resulting in an opposition that defined itself through the reaffirmation of the very criticized customs and practices. Being the gateway for secular liberal criticism of Islamic way of life, veiling and seclusion of women "came to be the focus of the conservative Islamic defense, in Egypt and elsewhere."[294]

Despite the conservative defense, women's modernization did take place in the Ottoman Empire starting in the nineteenth century with the Tanzimat reforms in 1839. But in this period, "even the most Westernist reformers attempted to legitimize their views within the framework of Islam," contrary to the Republican period after 1923. Neither Şişman nor the seminar participants deemed the reforms on women's liberation as Orientalist moves, or direct Western importation, as they affirmed that "even before the Republican period, it was already clear that women would not be able to lead their lives in the same way." That is, the debates on women's liberation did not start overnight with the

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[291] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 162.
[292] Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 127.
[293] Ahmed, Women and Gender, 162.
[294] Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 127.

declaration of the Republican regime in 1923. Therefore, they argued that "there were inner dynamics to this change" in women's lives, and to the emergence of a feminist discourse; but they also emphasized the effect of external modern Western discourses, influences, and interventions and asked "to what extent can you talk about inner dynamics in a world where everyone is in interaction with each other?"

This was awakening the audience to think beyond the sharp contrast between the Ottoman and the Republican periods which was built as the equivalent of religion vs. secular binary by the Kemalists, as well as the Islamists. Considering the Ottoman Empire as purely religious, and creating this image of tearing down the veil of women overnight with the declaration of the Republican regime worked for both group's arguments as they established their identity in contrast to each other.

Attempting to strip themselves from the totalistic accounts of both ideologies, they tried to see the genealogy of the change in women's lives that reached up to their time and shaped how they lived today. With this larger perspective, they could now explain why they were not totally happy with the efforts of mining feminism[295] from the basic sources of Islam, a task undertaken by many Muslim female scholars, who are roughly named as Muslim feminists or

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[295] After going through the genealogy of feminism in the West and in the Muslim societies in the previous seminars, they formulated it as a historically grounded phenomenon which did not exist prior to modernity.

Islamic feminists.[296] Going against the kind of attitude taken by Amin, and some secular feminists who deemed Islam and feminism incompatible with each other, these female scholars defended a feminist position within Islam, and attempted to read feminism into the Qur'an with the aim of unearthing, what they argued to be, the egalitarian essence of the Qur'an, which had, in their view, been sullied by the male dominated exegesis.[297]

From the perspective of the Turkish women in these seminars, there is a danger in reading feminism into the Qur'an as if it were an ahistorical, universal concept, rather than a historically particular phenomenon. But, for the supporters of this Islamic feminist approach, like Miriam Cooke, for instance, "feminism is much more than an ideology driving organized political movements." It is an "analytical tool" to assess "how expectations for men's and women's behavior have led to unjust situations, particularly but not necessarily for women."[298] The

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[296] Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Nimat Barazangi, Fatima Mernissi, Leila Ahmed, Rifat Hassan, Mahnaz Afkhami, Miriam Cooke, Margot Badran are the major scholars who are considered within this category. There are many others who are not known by the Western audience because they do not write in English. In Turkey, though, there is not any significant existence of a Muslim feminist movement. There are a good number of religiously observant female intellectuals who write about many topics including the women's issues. Nazife Şişman is considered one of them, along with Fatma Barbarosoğlu, Sibel Eraslan, Cihan Aktaş, Yıldız Ramazanoğlu and Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal. And in recent years, some covered women working as journalists and newspaper columnists have managed to gain popularity in the media to bring up women's issues, such as Elif Çakır, Nihal Bengisu Karaca, Özlem Albayrak, and Hilal Kaplan.
[297] For a detailed analysis of Islamic and secular feminist ideologies side by side, see Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).
[298] Miriam Cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism Through Literature* (New York & London: Routledge), x.

women in these seminars would suggest, however, that even this perception of gender relations is historically modern.

Who asks the questions?

While the Turkish women in these seminars are not against working on injustices between men and women, they differentiate between women's rights and feminism as an ideology, which emerged as a post-Enlightenment idea. In this sense, they do not agree with the universalization of feminism that would leap all the way to fourteen centuries ago to the formative years of Islam.

These women also take issue with the range of topics with which the Muslim feminist literature deals. They do not consider the questions of veiling, segregation, polygamy, divorce, inheritance, and witnessing as genuine or urgent as other problems faced by Muslim women. They see these topics imposed by the Orientalists like Lord Cromer, and their native voices like Qassim Amin, as an "endorsement of the Western view of Islamic civilization, peoples, and customs as inferior."[299] Of course they do not suggest that the Muslim feminist scholars are choosing these topics in direct response to the Orientalists but see these engagements as reacting to the dominant and hegemonic discourses that have emerged in such a defeatist atmosphere.

Although the women in these seminars accepted that the Western feminism had arisen out of genuine social problems, they seemed to argue that the emergence of Muslim feminism had additional "symbolic and discursive agents"

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[299] Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 153.

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besides the real factors on the ground. Those "symbolic and discursive agents" were the Orientalists who frothed up "the women's issue" in Muslim societies, which had not gone through the same process of political participation and democratization simultaneously with the West. When one of the participants asked: "Why didn't we have feminism [as an ideology] before the modernization period?" Şişman replied: "Because we had a different way of understanding life before the Tanzimat period." This means that at the time we did not have the necessary political, social, and cultural conditions that gave rise to feminism in the West.

Yet, this does not mean that there were no gender injustices in Muslim societies, as Şişman made it clear that the rise of the feminist discourse was strictly related to the industrial revolution, and the emergence of the discourse on rights, equality and freedom following the French Revolution in 1789.

While they affirmed the inner dynamics to the emergence of feminism in the Islamic discourse, they still saw a trace of artificiality in the whole modernization process, which constituted the gist of their mistrust of feminism within the religious discourse of Islam. They expressed their impression that Islamic feminism or those who argue for a progressive theology, in general, were acting on this ongoing feeling of defeat and they seemed to seek affirmation from the West. At this moment of the discussion one of the participants brought up the cover of the *Emel* magazine that featured a "hijabi Barbie" to criticize the obsession with Western norms of fashion and body image among Muslim

women.[300] She said "this is a sign of inferiority complex, revealing the idea that

we can also reach up to their standards of beauty with our hijab. Do we make it

Islamic when we dress up the Barbie in Islamic clothing?"

> This idea of "we also have it" has also plundered the *asr-ı saadet.*[301] Many have fallen into the mistake of attributing the qualities of intellectualism to Hz. Ayşe[302] and entrepreneurship to Hz. Hatice,[303] looking at that time from today's realities.

> Şişman's response created a surprise among the audience, for they thought

it was a virtuous act to take them as role models in their contemporary time. They

asked: "Is it wrong to create role models from the female Companions?" And she

answered: "It is wrong to present them with certain labels which are claimed to be

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[300] Sarah Joseph, "Hijabi Barbie: Growing up Muslim in a World of Body Image" *Emel Magazine,* Volume 66, March 2010, accessed October 3, 2012, http://www.emel.com/article?id=83&a_id=1913
A similar argument was also made during this seminar about the newly released Turkish fashion magazine *Âlâ,* which came up as a guide for middle and upper-middle class Muslim women to dress up fashionably. For more information, see Dan Bilefsky, "A Fashion Magazine Unshy About Baring a Bit of Piety," *The New York Times,* 29 March 2012, accessed April 11, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/29/world/europe/a-turkish-fashion-magazine-ala-is-unshy-about-showing-some-piety.html?_r=2&scp=1&sq=%C3%A2l%C3%A2&st=cse&
[301] The Age of the Companions, literally meaning "the age of happiness" referring to time period of the prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh).
[302] The youngest wife of Prophet Muhammad. She lived more than fifty years after the death of the Prophet, and she served as a great source in the circulation and compilation of the traditions of the Prophet that comprised the Hadith literature. The Arabic transliteration of the name is Aisha.
[303] The first wife of Prophet Muhammad. She was the owner of the caravans which Muhammad (pbuh) was leading as a merchant. She proposed to him, and they married fifteen years before Muhammad's mission of prophethood began. The Arabic transliteration of the name is Khadija.

non-existent in the history of Islam. This shows our weakness."[304] Another

participant complemented her sentence: "This is giving answers in the language

of those who ask the question. It must be us who ask the question, because those

who ask the question also determine the language of the answer. We must get rid

of this apologetic position."

For Nazife Şişman, the methodological weakness of receiving strength

from the Age of the Companions is the building of a long bridge that has the risk

of collapsing. She added that "if this empowerment is done through a chain

instead of a bridge, that is, if the argument takes its power from the recent history,

it would be more sound and strong." In that way, she explained the purpose of

reading about the recent history of modernization in the Middle East, and learning

about the women's experiences in the late Ottoman period: "to get rid of the

apologetic language and the reactive approach."

"There is not an ideal type of a Muslim woman"

The women in these seminars, therefore, reject to be defined within the

category of "Muslim women," for they claim that "it is not only religion that

shapes our lives." There is a vertical and a horizontal dimension to their existence

in the world: being a woman is part of that horizontal dimension, the experience

of living in the world and "addressing at the (secular) world." And yet, in the

vertical dimension, they have an existence beyond this world: "We are the

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[304] For more information on her ideas on the existence of women in Islamic history, see Nazife Şişman "Were there women in Islamic history?" *World Bulletin*, January 26, 2010, accessed October 2, 2012, http://www.worldbulletin.net/?aType=yazarHaber&ArticleID=2118

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servants, the creatures of God. So we are all (men and women) impotent against God." What matters for them in terms of this vertical dimension of their existence is the metaphysical equality of all human beings.

Being a woman, in that sense, consists only a part of their subjectivity in relation to God; but it is the compartment they are placed in: they are created within a woman's body. What they can do is to organize that compartment in relation to the expectations, habits, and desires of the other passengers having travelled on the same life journey in this world. They believe that both compartments, i.e. the woman's body and the man's body, have equal capacity of facilitating a comfortable travel and reaching at the final station: receiving God's consent in the world and in the Hereafter. However, the maintenance of the entire train that would take the servants of God safely back to their Creator is in the responsibility of the passengers. In other words, they cannot remain indifferent to the injustices that the passengers inflict upon each other. This is where they reach at the idea that ass pious Muslim women, they can work towards creating better life conditions for all oppressed people, including women; and they do not have to resort to feminist language while working for this aim. "Social equality is not our own concept; but benefiting from it does not harm our Muslimness, and piety."

Progressive theology: "human beings creating God"

Their method of caring for women's rights is trying to keep the argument within the secular-liberal realm, and not let theology to intervene in the issue of organizing social-political rights. In that sense, they find any form of progressive

theology unhelpful, even harmful, to the debates on women and other matters of modernity, for several reasons.

First of all, they think that progressive theology, including the feminist theology, has the tendency to create a situation where "human beings create God" by imposing their own values to God, and asking God to tell them their own values. There is a clear dislike towards the main idea of humanism that is at the heart of all progressive theology, which puts human being at the center of the universe rather than God. As pious and faithful Muslims, these women think that the humanist way of thinking might harm their feeling of submission to God, and God's wills. They see it as a dangerous path to walk on because of the possible seduction of making God confirm their own ideas and values, while thinking that it is God who dictates them.

The same unwillingness, although at a lower level, is seen in their attitude toward the elimination of the transmitted sayings of the Prophet on the basis of forgery or weak chain of transmission. They believe that one should be careful not to fall into the trap of trimming the entire Hadith literature according to the fashion dictated by the modern West. "We should not forget that our fundamental concept is justice, not equality," is an important reminder in the feminist attempt of looking for gender equality within the Islamic discursive tradition.

Another danger of pursuing the women's rights argument in religious realm is the higher degree of defensiveness people take against any steps taken; for they are more afraid to see any change in their concept of sacred, which is

dearer to them than the secular concepts. In this sense, the socialization of women, and women's working outside home should be discussed as mundane everyday realities rather than fundamental issues in the sacred canon of Islam. "The discourse of rights has only become common in the twentieth century, it is a recent concept," said Nazife Şişman, and she added: "We do not have to limit ourselves with this discourse in order to build our subjectivity as women. But we can use it to defend women's rights, for it is a social process rather than a religious matter."

By moving away from the secular-liberal and the religious discourses on the issue of women and gender, the participants of the Women's Studies seminars attempted to engage in an informed critique of both systems they lived in. Due to their professions, their upbringing, as well as their need to live in a community that would ease their maintaining of a pious self, they did not want to totally defy the set of norms in each realm. Their situation, and the method they followed were similar to the act described by Judith Butler, in *Undoing Gender*, when someone does not want "to be recognized within a certain set of norms" such as the secular-liberal and religious-conservative norms of womanhood. In this type of a situation, what an agent does is to take a distance from these sets of norms which might impair her sense of social belonging, but still "preferable to gaining a sense of intelligibility by virtue of norms that will only do [her] in from another direction."[305]

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[305] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 3.

However, taking this distance to the norms that one is defined with is not a unilateral decision when you still have to act on these sets of norms in order to survive. In that matter, the critical relation to them "depends as well on a capacity, invariably collective, to articulate an alternative, minority version of sustaining norms or ideals that enables me to act."[306] The highly-educated, professional pious women who came together in these seminars actually worked on a collective capacity to articulate an alternative version of those secular and religious sets of norms which they needed to act on. Because, as Butler says, one "cannot *be* without *doing*," thus "the conditions of my doing are, in part, the conditions of my existence." Considering that *doing* cannot be a unilateral process, for "my doing is dependent on what is done to me, or rather, the ways in which I am done by norms,"

> ...the possibility of my persistence as an "I" depends upon my being able to do something with what is done with me. This does not mean that I can remake the world so that I become its maker. That fantasy of godlike power only refuses the ways we are constituted, invariably and from the start, by what is before us and outside of us.[307]

Denying the norms they are defined by and acting on –whether secular or religious—is not an option for them, because, they also believe that one has to sustain her persistence as an "I" in a social world she never chose, as claimed by Butler: "My agency does not consist in denying this condition of my constitution. If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social

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[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid.

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world I never chose." [308] So, their option for maintaining their agency, which unfolded during these seminars, was to take the step to the "juncture from which critique emerges" as a result of their realization that, on one hand they need social recognizability to live, yet on the other hand they feel that the terms by which they are recognized "make life unlivable." So, at this juncture, they engage in a critique, which "is understood as an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living; in other words, not to celebrate difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation."[309]

"In our way"

This effort of critique was emphasized in the last seminar on 26 November 2011, with the closing comments of Şişman, regarding their position in the larger society and the larger secular-liberal discursive realm:

> We are all receiving modern education, we are all exposed to the same technology, same working conditions. We are sailing on the same river, so we are also exposed to the same problems. Then how should we act when we try to create solutions for these problems? We can bring more specific and particular solutions to these common problems like gender-based injustice and inequality of opportunities.

In fact, the very existence of the Women's Platform[310] that organized these seminar series was an expression of this desire to bring their specific solutions to

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[308] Ibid.
[309] Ibid., 4.
[310] For more information about the activities of the Women's Platform, see http://www.gyvkadinplatformu.org/

the problems they saw in the larger society. The family conference they organized in November 2010 reflected their concern with the well-being of the family institution, which, they believed, was an empowering institution for women when it is sound and good. Another workshop on the portrayal of women in the media in March 2011was concluded with a final declaration signed by secular-liberal feminists, as well as religiously-observant female intellectuals.[311] Thus, the platform manifests a living example of this desire expressed in the seminars: to bring solutions to the common problems of the larger society "in their own way" and without falling into the apologetic position.

Women's experiences in the Hizmet community

These women's capacity of *doing* is very much related to what is *done* to them, and what they *do* with what is *done* to them. All this complicated wording requires a case study to see to what extent the liberal-secular and Islamic norms are negotiated at the actual settings of interaction with others. For this reason, I will give a brief account of the experiences of some women from the Hizmet community who participated in these Women's Studies seminars. Comparing the words of Fethullah Gülen regarding women's visibility in the public sphere with the actual experiences on the ground, I will try to portray the interplay between the religious and the secular-liberal norms in the negotiation of gender relations within the pietist Hizmet community.

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[311] This final declaration called for immediate action from the state to stop homicides against women; it also included a statement protesting discrimination at the workplace based on gender and sexual orientation, as well as religious belief.

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The Hizmet community is currently the only religious network that works closely with the secular-liberal norms, which is clearly manifested in the activities of the JWF. It is also the most open one to the public visibility of women, which is interpreted by Berna Turam as an act parallel to the male Republican elite's pushing women to the public sphere to show off their "civilized, modern" manner:

> Similar to enabling Turkish women in the nation-building period, having women in Gülen's public sites complements a certain civilized image. For the Gülen movement, the public sites are an obvious way of distinguishing their own Islamic projects from other ones and displaying that distinction to the outside world, both the Turkish Republic and the West.[312]

For Turam, the public sites of the Hizmet community are window sites, where the exercise of gender relations is in contrast with the practices in the domestic sites, or the private realm. She thinks that, the community's insistence on the education of girls "at the cost of their headscarf" was another move to complement this "civilized image" of the public sites.[313]

The women in these "window sites" are active, educated, professional women, as well as some celebrities at certain occasions. Some of these women wear the headscarf in non-traditional ways, and some do not wear it at all. These public sites, as Turam observed, welcome women and men from all backgrounds and lifestyles, because the purpose of these events, for the Hizmet volunteers, is to promote dialogue and tolerance between people with diverse opinions.

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[312] Berna Turam, *Between Islam and the State: Politics of Engagement* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 2007), 114.
[313] Turam, *Between Islam and the State*, 115.

Their conception of the public sphere reflected the secular-liberal idea, somewhat reviving the Habermasian sense of the bourgeois public sphere which "may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor."[314] By creating this kind of an alternative public sphere to the strictly secularist and state-owned public sphere, which has been denied to the religious people to speak and to be heard, the Hizmet community members facilitated the negotiation between the secular-liberal and religious realms.

Berna Turam expresses her astonishment at seeing "religious" people organizing charity dinners at luxurious hotels in a completely secular-friendly setting.[315] Yet, this is totally ordinary practice for Elif, an intern at the Intercultural Dialogue Platform, as it is obvious to her that "we must be able to live in the standards of those whom we want to talk with." However, she thinks that the Hizmet community "have reached that standard today, and now they must be able to endorse humility as a distinctive virtue of themselves." She complains that some have actually internalized the standards of these window sites, and they prefer to have non-covered female assistants in order to give a pleasant civilized

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[314] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: Inquiring Into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Boston: MIT Press, 1989), 27.
[315] Turam, *Between Islam and the State*, 116.

image to their secular-liberal collocutors. She herself is non-covered, and she has been within this religious community since she was in the secondary school. In the light of her experiences, she admits that non-covered pious women within the network have more influence with their speech than covered women. "Despite all the improvements over the recent years," she says, "I realized that we still consider non-covered woman as the ideal teacher. I find her words more effective than the words of a covered woman."

On the other hand, she loses this advantage of being a non-covered pious woman in the private or one-to-one relations within the community. "I am also pious, but my piety is not seen." She complains that the men from the same community "do not show the same level of sensitivity" in their interactions with her, compared to their interactions with the covered women within the community. Because, she says "For pious men, the first sign/measurement of a woman's piety is the headscarf. Not wearing it causes a lack of identity within the pious community." Is there really a duality in the public and private experiences of these educated, professional women within the Hizmet community?

Technically, the spiritual leader of the movement clearly endorses the public visibility of women "as long as it does not harm their piety."[316] The Hizmet community/movement is attractive to these women because of its dynamic, non-centralized structure, as well as its lack of any clear boundaries, and thus entrance

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[316] Fethullah Gülen, "Women in Islam," *Interview with Mehmet Gündem,* January 25, 2005, accessed September 30, 2011, http://en.fgulen.com/press-room/mehmet-gundems-interview/1929-womens-rights-in-islam.

ritual or test. Within this movement they have the chance to preserve their individual characters while working for a collective aim. It is indeed one of the most liberal environments for women who desire to maintain their piety within a community. Yet, one cannot deny the repercussions of the ambiguous and polysemous character of Gülen's criterion of not harming the piety in allowing for women's public visibility:

> The contribution of women in certain fields of life is not banned in Islam, provided that physical conditions have been taken into consideration and their working conditions are suitable. Women have indeed contributed in every field of life (throughout history). For instance, they were allowed to participate in battles; their education was not only desired, but also actively sought and encouraged. Our mothers Aisha, Hafsa, and Umm Salama were among the jurists and *mujtahid* s (the highest rank of scholarship and learning) of the Companions. Moreover, the women who were among the household of the Prophet were a source of information (not only for other women but also) for men for learning religion. Many people from the Tabiin (the next generation after the Companions) consulted the Prophet's wives.
> This situation was not only restricted to the Prophet's wives; in the periods that followed, qualified women were teachers to many people. In Islam there is no such thing as limiting the life of women or narrowing their fields of activity. Things that appear negative to us today must be analyzed with respect to the conditions of the time in which they were experienced and to the policy of the respective states in which they happened.[317]

Looking at Gülen's words, one might imagine a public visibility of women at the standards of the window sites to be the general approach of all community members. However, neither men's nor women's relationship to a figure of authority is merely text-based. While the text says that women can work at any job including military service "if these are considered as being necessary and

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[317] Gülen, "Women in Islam."

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feasible" the actual practices among the community members is far from giving such a liberalistic picture, although it varies in its degree of liberalism according to the setting the movement operates on.

"The space available for women to act without harming their piety" is a very slippery concept that can take on a different meaning in the minds of each believer depending on the social context they act on. A man can protect his piety even in a bar, as seen in Berna Turam's research, while a woman can never enjoy that much space without "harming her piety:"

> When, with a glass of wine in my hand, I ran into a male follower in a bar and felt uncomfortable, he explained that he was used to the "night scenes" of Istanbul. Because he worked in public relations in one of the movement's foundations, he was used to dealing with a variety of celebrities in Istanbul nightlife.[318]

Thus, these standards of "protecting the piety" are perceived differently in the domestic and the public sites.

Public-private standards in women's piety

Despite the wide appeal of the women-friendly public sites, my fascination with them did not last long. I soon discovered that the welcoming attitudes in the public sites were limited to female outsiders. During one of my interviews with Ahmet Bey, I was inquiring about his wife. I asked if I could meet her at the charity dinner that night. The answer was prompt and expressed a subtle tone of sarcasm: "Who...Ayşe?...Oh no, Ayşe does not go out at night," he replied with a smile on his face. I was confused because I had been told a few minutes earlier that she was "equal" to him. Trying to hide my astonishment, I asked if she attended communal events during the day. Apparently she was busy with the children. Besides, she did not want to participate in those events, either. "What would she have to do with that 'business' anyway?" At that time, I was not quite sure what business we were talking about. Digging further into this issue for a while, I soon discovered a long line of paradoxes about gender order in the

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[318] Turam, *Between Islam and the State*, 116.

movement. The "business" meant the affairs of the Community, which took place in the non-private sphere where the wives and daughters of the followers did not necessarily belong. Indeed, most of the wives and daughters were regarded as irrelevant to the worldly pursuits of the movement.[319]

As an educated woman who had been highly involved in the "worldly pursuits of the movement," I was able to confirm what Turam said in her depiction of the paradoxical gender relations within the Hizmet community. I had never been the wife or the daughter of a male follower, so I was able to set my own criteria of piety in my relations with the affairs of the community and its male members. However, I personally witnessed the stark difference between my criteria of piety and the criteria of the wives of the prominent male members.[320]

Being a "Servant of God" or/and a "Woman"

The man whom Turam spoke with was not totally wrong when he told that his wife wanted to remain in the backstage, or in the domestic sphere, for this is actually the case for some women within the community. Even though they have access to the liberalistic ideas of Gülen in his books concerning the public visibility of women, they prefer not to be in the "window sites" of the movement. Because visibility is not their major concern in cultivating piety unless they have to be in the public sphere due to their professions. Besides, the suggestions transmitted through the male hierarchy within the movement may sometimes

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[319] Ibid.

[320] They are called "abi" (elder brother) within the community, while the prominent women were called "abla" (elder sister). These two titles mean that these people are seniors within the community and they are responsible for a certain local grouping that constitutes the inner hierarchy based on voluntary acceptance of the authority of senior member of the community.

include a less liberalistic conception of pious behavior, which makes them prefer to remain within the private sphere to be on the safe side in terms of their connection with God.

For educated, professional women, though, this option of remaining within the domestic sphere is not available, or not preferable considering their capacity to contribute to the "worldly affairs" of the movement, including being the public faces of the movement. This comes at the expense of fulfilling the role of womanhood, which sometimes overshadows their essential role of servanthood. As previously explained, this issue of being a woman or being a servant of God is a major question these women ask to themselves. The participants of the Women's Studies seminars needed help in finding the answer of this question, since they had to be in the public sphere and take public roles.

In one sense, "being a woman" is inevitable for these women when they take public roles within the movement. Sevda, a doctoral candidate in industrial engineering, had worked at a study abroad agency that was affiliated with the movement. She told me that her male co-workers constantly reminded her that she was a woman through their attitudes. They did not have any conversations with her other than the job details, and they did not allow her to attend the meetings when the senior male members of the community were present.

In that workplace she was never allowed to forget her gender identity; that is why she enjoyed working at a secular place, a public university as a research assistant, although she had to take off her headscarf in that workplace: "I am

happy to be seen merely as a person doing her job; there is no emphasis on my womanhood at all" she said.

On the other hand, the experience of Elif at a secular workplace was totally different, since she felt very disturbed by the laxity of men in their attitudes towards her. She was a pious woman, but not covering her hair; so she had to express her piety in subtle ways, like figuring out a certain standard of speech style when talking to men: "a soulless speech tone, like a computer, or an answering machine." She has a peculiar reason for imposing such a restriction on herself: "My feminine nature is quite dominant in the way I behave and talk; so I must pay extra attention to my attitudes when I am interacting with men."

As seen from these examples, people have to negotiate their behaviors according to the particular conditions surrounding them. There is no universal message dictated on men or women within the movement regarding how to behave in these kinds of particular situations. This allows a space for individual reasoning and negotiation, albeit with the risk of imposing too much restriction that defies basic human communication. The message of Gülen himself, favoring women's presence in the public sphere, has little effect in the actual interactions between men and women, since they are silent on the details of how to behave towards the opposite sex in a workplace.

As Nazife Şişman said in the Women's Studies seminars, the separation between work and home is a recent phenomenon, and it is in vain to look at the canonical sources to derive rules and regulations about this situation. The women

during the time of the Prophet did take public roles, yet they were nothing like the modern jobs that required being in an office for six to seven hours, five days a week, with members of the opposite sex with no kinship relations at all.

The religious sources are silent about the details of this new gender relationship, because they only contain the rules of modest clothing and gender segregation, which serves no real solution to the awkward situations experienced by Sevda and Elif in their particular situations. This space of negotiation means a lack of authority for Sevda, who thinks that the gender issue must be talked openly within the community in order to develop a common standard of behavioral code:

> We must be able to speak about this issue openly. The standards of gender relations within our community have not been determined yet. People are making their own regulations: some behave too relaxed to protest the current situation, and some do not even greet the members of the opposite sex.

One might think that if Gülen were not silent about the gender relations in the public sphere, there would be a standard code of behavior between men and women in the non-private spheres. Yet this idea is refuted with numerous instances of unhappy marriages within the community despite the persistent comments of Gülen –and beyond all the messages in the Sunnah and the Qur'an-- favoring wives, mothers, and daughters in the family.

In other words, religious authority is more than the sacred text, and people's relation to the message of the sacred text is beyond the process of signification, as Talal Asad highlights "the way the living body subjectifies itself

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through images, practices, institutions, programs, objects –and through other living bodies. And therefore with the way it develops and articulates its virtues and vices."[321]His conception of the authoritative discourse explains why mistreatment towards women have persisted in the history of Muslim societies despite the overwhelming majority of pro-women discourse in the sacred texts in contrast to a minor number of unfavorable ones, which the modern theology has problems in accepting.

As Asad says, we should take authoritative discourse "to be rooted in continuously interacting materialities –the body's internal and external constitution, and the energies that sustain them –that make for its *compelling character*." Therefore, reinterpretation of the sacred texts is not enough to create change in people's lives because "it is not signs in themselves that explain people's recognition of authority; it is how people have learned to do, feel, and remember signs that helps explain it."[322]

"Pious" women giving direction to knowledge: The Meridyen Circle

The Meridyen Circle is an example to this awareness of the insufficiency of textual interpretation in a time of need for the production of new knowledge and new texts to be interpreted by the future generations. In other words, the recognition of the modern condition that an educated woman has to live in, have

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[321] Talal Asad, "Responses," in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*, eds. Scott & Hirschkind (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 214.
[322] Asad, "Responses," 214.

led to the formation of this network of female intellectuals with an effort to produce new discourses that would rebuild the modern-secular public sphere.

The annual meeting of the MC, which was held on the last day of 2011, had the title of "Women Giving Direction to Knowledge." The meeting took place in the conference room of the Meridyen Association center, which had been converted from a Sufi lodge that was left unused after the Republican period. The conference room still had the graves of the custodians of the lodge. It was like a *barzakh* (liminal space) between death and life, the sky and the earth, past and present, and religion and the secular.

The annual meeting brought together around thirty female intellectuals and academics, most of who lived in the Western countries like Austria, Germany, France, UK, US, and Canada. The idea of continuing their graduate career in these countries was partly the result of the headscarf ban in Turkish public institutions; and partly the result of the ideological structuring within the Turkish higher education system that restricted the pursuit of some research topics challenging the fundamentals of the secular state.

More than half of the participant women were covered, in many different styles. Their attitudes were remarkably self-confident and displaying their individualities, notwithstanding the homogenizing effect of the headscarf. They were already tired of being defined by their headscarf, and speaking about their headscarf that whenever any conversation came to the mentioning of headscarf they would end that conversation saying "Oh, please, let's not talk about the

headscarf anymore; we've had enough of it." The common concern of the MC audience was to shift from being an object in a double sense: as women and as Muslim women that is read by the social scientists to being the subjects of their – not necessarily religious—areas of interest.

Hümeyra Şahin, the president of the Meridyen Association, opened the meeting with a similar message, calling them to focus on "what [they] can change in the areas that [they] study," instead of looking at how they were changed as women:

> Change has always been defined over women; and the change within Muslim societies is also being defined over the change in women's lives. We must do something beyond being the object of this definition.

The meeting was held in different sessions which were allocated to certain areas of study such as history, literature, political science, religion, arts, and media. In each of these sessions, senior members of the network shared their ideas and experiences with the audience, trying to focus on what they could do within these secular-liberal discourses without being blind followers or staunch enemies of them.

The gist of the debates was a central question: "Is there a homogenous conception of womanhood? Is there a common womanhood that transcends all differences?" At the end of the long discussion, a final answer was agreed as such:

> Let's not say "woman" any more. Let's say "human." Womanhood is too limited, too restrictive for us. It is too narrow to reach at the aim of becoming *insan-ı kamil* (the perfect human).

In other words, they desired to transcend the gender identity in becoming pious, and building a modern pious self. They emphasized the fact that knowledge production in the Islamic tradition is not related to the specific gender of the scholar. They disagreed with the widely acclaimed idea that the women of the *tabiin* (the next generation after the Companions) were teaching behind curtains. What hampered their scholarship was not the gender segregation, or the public visibility of women, but the *rihla* system (travelling to far places to be the student of a scholar) because of the harsh travelling conditions (as already mentioned in the previous chapter). Now that those harsh travelling conditions were removed, they considered no obstacle to quench their thirst for knowledge, and their desire to be the knowing subjects of their world, rather than the known objects.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

The main question I posed in the beginning of this dissertation was: "how is it possible to build a pious self in a setting established on secular-liberal values?" This was a question that required a long journey, tracing the history of the political, ideological, and sociological formation of "the setting" as well as the individual and collective routes to piety, which ended up having a specific form for each of its seekers.

Aside from the main question, I also had some subsidiary questions that would help giving a better answer to the main question, but also raising questions about the actual lives of ordinary people whose lives supposedly lack the level of marginality and difference to make it to the books or academic research. I asked "to what extent secularism has penetrated into the everyday lives of people, including the religious ones?"

In connection with that, I asked a third question: "Can we extend and expand the scope of piety to include the kind of relationship that secularist people establish with God through the sacred sources (the Qur'an and the Prophet)?"

In posing these two subsidiary questions, my aim was to invite my audience, in the Euro-American zone and in Turkey, to rethink about the religious-secular divide in categorizing people in Muslim countries –either as totally religious against a secular "West" or a minority of modern secularists against a majority of religious conservatives.

In fact, a major problem I had with this research was organizing my thoughts and presenting my data in an intelligible categorical framework. However, the unique character of the subjects in this research was to defy any stable categorization, which was also the main idea of the entire research project. In other words, the curse of ambiguity was also a blessing for opening up to a rich realm of theories, and promising new possibilities of taking the scholarship on women, Islam, and Turkey beyond the boundaries presented by the binary oppositions such as traditional-modern, religious-secular, conservative-liberal, Islamist-secularist, and etc.

Rethinking the religious-secular divide in Turkey

Turkey had the potential to disrupt the religious-secular binary with its unique way of molding secularism with a long religious tradition –albeit by force at some periods. The historical trajectory of the relation between Islam and secularism in Turkey, as explored on a wide range of contexts in the second chapter, explicitly showed that the secular-religion relationship has had a unique formation in Turkey.

As Nilüfer Göle suggests, the particularity of Turkish Muslim "habituation of the secular" cannot be depicted with the "deficiency theory" which "presupposes that non-Western experiences are lagging behind, incomplete and noncontemporaneous with the West" i.e. "as a second-rank imitation of the

Western original."[323] I also highlighted the Western Christian origin and development of the idea of secular and the political notion of secularism; yet I did not reduce Turkish secularism into "an authoritarian derivative of French 'laicite' measured in terms of its gaps, inconsistencies, and deficiencies regarding the French ideal-model."[324] Instead, I tried to examine the local conditions and the particular elements of the Turkish religio-political structure on which secularism found a new life of its own, as well as with the ramifications of it particular to that context (e.g. the emergence of performative secularism). Because, I agree with Göle that "each time a notion travels, and is repeated, it is never exactly the same because in the process of repeating a term or a concept, we never simply produce a replica of the original usage; every reiteration transforms the original meaning, adding new meanings to it."[325]

Rethinking the religious vs. secularist polarization

Even though there has been an apparent war going on between the secular and the religious forces in the political realm of Turkey, I believe that this divide has artificially been created by the parties involved in the contestation over political power. The religious and secularist arguments have been used by many political actors to agitate the feelings of their opponents and their followers, ever since Turkey was introduced to multi-party elections.

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[323] Nilüfer Göle, "Manifestations of the Religious-Secular Divide: Self, State, and the Public Sphere," in *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age*, eds. L. Cady & E.S. Hurd (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 43.
[324] Göle, "Manifestations," 43.
[325] Ibid.

In the constant polemics plying between the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the main opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, I see little difference between the way they use religion and secularism as a tool for agitation, as was seen in the "pious generation" argument which was briefly mentioned in the first chapter. Their strategies are based on particular calculations about the bulk density of their voter base, which gives the impression that the voter profile of AK Parti is religious (and anti-secularist), while CHP's voter profile is secularist (and anti-religious).

Although there might be some bits of accuracy in this rough calculation, it is very much far from being a reference for categorizing Turkish people, and understanding the dynamics of the Turkish society. Through two important political occasions that I was lucky to witness during my field work stay in Turkey, I was able to make some important observations regarding the asserted secularist-religious divide among the voters of these political parties. What I witnessed during the processes before and after the referendum on constitutional amendments on September 12, 2010 and the general parliamentary elections on June 12, 2011, showed me the clear mismatch between the actual feelings, motivations, and expectations of the ordinary people, and the way they were depicted by the political and intellectual elite as utterly divided in lifestyles.

During the referendum[326] process, I was staying at our village house to spend the holy month of Ramadan with my family. Each time we sat down for breaking fast, my uncle and my mother would engage in a political polemic over the referendum. My uncle would complain about how the government reduced his retirement salary, and my mother would remind him of the pre-AK Parti years and how they suffered with the lack of facilities that were only provided by the current government. She kept telling him that "you should be thankful to them for their services. You're being unfair with your complaints." My uncle, would then reply as such: "I have nothing to thank them about. You get all the benefits, I got nothing." These were not my uncle's political views, but rather the surfacing of his years-long resentment to my father (who were half-brothers with different mothers) for being favored over him in the sharing of their father's inheritance. In other words, there was an entirely domestic dispute in the center of a political debate about their vote for something very important for the progress of the country.

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[326] The referendum on the constitutional amendments was cast as a vote of confidence in Erdoğan by the propaganda of both the government and the opposition. Hence, the majority of people argued for their "yes" or "no" positions without having any clear idea about the content of the referendum. Neither my mother nor my uncle knew what the constitutional amendments proposed, nor did they care about them.
The proposed amendments included barring gender discrimination, enhance civil liberties and protect individual privacy. But the opposition dismissed these propositions claiming that these were just cosmetic reforms to hide their secret agenda of taking over the judiciary system and subjugating the army to their will. Because they thought that these were the last remaining posts of the Kemalist regime. For more information, see "Turkey's Constitutional Referendum: Erdogan Pulls it Off," *The Economist,* September 13, 2010, accessed October 28, 2012, http://www.economist.com/node/21010673.

There was nothing about the secularist-religious divide, or life styles in these "political" debates. The reason my father was silent during these debates was because he was constantly avoiding a debate with his brother for any reason, as he feared that he would shift the conversation to the old disputes. My mother, on the other hand, was genuinely feeling sad for Erdoğan for being constantly humiliated and defied by some of her relatives who had made it a tradition to vote for the Kemalist CHP since the single-party era. They also had exactly the same kind of lifestyle with my family. Again, the disputes were never about religion or secularism. Most of the time, I had no explanation for these political divides except for the resistance to change habits. Overall, though, the popularity of political discussions in that rural, traditional setting showed me to what extent the secular discourse had penetrated into the very fine tips of the Turkish society, without making any remarkable change on their routine religious practices.

Without having enough time to recover from the overdose of political debates, the Turkish people had to enter a fiercer political climate. Although Erdoğan was comforted with the 58% of pro votes in the referendum, he still had to carry on a serious campaign for the June 2011 elections to be able to get a majority in the parliament enough to make the new civil constitution, which was his primary pledge to his audience in the public meetings.

Until that time I did not have a chance to observe the voter profile of the AK Parti in a mass gathering of its supporters. A week before the elections, I went out to enjoy the nice weather on a Sunday. When I arrived at the bus stop, I saw

the private bus of the AK Parti, taking its supporters to the great Istanbul meeting in Kazlıçeşme square in the European side. With a sudden decision I found myself in the bus filled with enthusiastic supporters with flags in their hands. I sat next to an old woman, who said it was her fourth time going to Kazlıçeşme for Erdoğan. She was an active member of the local party office in Ataşehir, where the CHP voters are the majority. The young boys in the bus distributed water, sandwich, and hand fans with the party logo.

Everything was designed like a festival day: There were so many cars, buses, and minibuses decorated with Turkish and AK Parti flags, carrying people from both European and Asian sides to Kazlıçeşme. And I saw many boats while crossing the Bosphorus Bridge that took AK Parti fans to the meeting area. When we arrived in Kazlıçeşme, we had to walk a long way to the meeting area, because all the parking places were full with the other AK Parti buses that came to the area from closer locations. The long path we walked was occupied by all street sellers, selling all kinds of things from food and beverage to different items of merchandise with AK Parti logo on them.

Five hundred thousand people, from all walks of life gathered in the meeting area that day. I saw veiled women, and women with jeans and sleeveless t-shirts. I saw old men with *şalvar* (a type of lousy pants worn in rural areas), and I saw young men with suits. I saw children, happily waving their flags on the shoulders of their fathers. The diversity I witnessed in that meeting clearly defied any simplification of the AK Parti voters as anti-secularist religious people. The

fact that half a million people waited to see the Prime Minister Erdoğan for more than two hours under the burning sun is, indeed, a manifestation of devotion, but not necessarily a kind of devotion that endorses the religion-secular, or religious-secularist divide.

This meeting was a picture of the new public sphere brought by the transition to the post-Islamist and the post-Kemalist stage: the public sphere was now claimed by much more diverse voices than it had ever seen. Furthermore, as the referendum example showed, the public sphere could be extended to the domestic spheres mainly through television and other kinds of new technology like internet, even at the remotest corners of the country.

Interestingly, it is this ambiguity, ambivalence, and subtlety of secularism that the Islamic revival was threatened by and benefited from at the same time. The calls for an authentication of piety were stimulated by the wide acceptance of the secular modern values (e.g. democracy, individualism, liberty, equality and empowering of the self) by the ordinary people (i.e. non-elite), but the authentication process was largely carried on through the possibilities created by these values: individual access to religious sources, and engaging in the act of interpretation and reasoning instead of mere imitation, communicating the ways of acquiring authentic faith to others (*tebliğ*), and manifesting the embodiment of authentic faith to others (*temsil*).

Rethinking piety

The religious-secular divide, which is already blurred in Turkey's political experience with secularism, gets more blurred within the everyday lives of ordinary people. The individual stories narrated in the previous chapters have already revealed how the secular schools become the first door opening to religion, while direct access to religious sources to empower piety opens the doors to pluralism and critical thinking.

Because of this intricate relationship between the formation of piety and the secular modern public sphere, I believe that the popular categorizations of "laik" vs "dindar" in the political scene of Turkey lacks validity in the everyday lives of the majority of Turkish people. Yet, they have been scared off each other by the limiting and hegemonic usage of these concepts. Thus, I aimed to open up the concept of "dindar" with a particular understanding of piety that allows for a non-hegemonic and non-judgmental definition that does not reduce it to either belief or practice, or strips it from its social dimension.

My method in seeking such a comprehensive rethinking of piety was to keep the scope of understanding piety as wide and dynamic as possible. By formulating piety as a becoming, rather than a static form of being, I was able to include a wide range of Islamic and secular scholars to the conversation, in order to develop the most helpful analytical tools in understanding the particular routes followed by each traveler in their journey towards their particular conception of piety.

By highlighting the subjective ways of becoming pious, though, I did not argue for the absence of an objective category of Islam. Instead, from the beginning of the dissertation, I made it clear that I understand Islam as a discursive tradition, which is strictly tied to the sacred sources of the Qur'an and the Sunnah —while affirming the possibility of establishing diverse relationships with them. Considering the kind of reservations my interlocutors held towards progressive interpretations of Islam, which they described as the Protestantization of Islam, approaching Islam as a discursive tradition functioned as a helpful analytical tool in understanding their idealized conceptions of *dindarlık* (piety).

Even though there are many variations to the kind of piety aspired by them, it has the common quality of being immeasurable, and thus different than religiosity, which is associated with certain social, economic, and political qualities in the current secularist discourse.

Not long ago, I came across this distinction between the two forms of *dindarlık* that I made between piety and religiosity in a weekly column by a Turkish Islamic scholar, Senai Demirci, who is popular in Turkey with his devotional writings. It captured my attention as soon as I saw the title of his article: "I am not *dindar* anymore!"

> Recently a foreigner friend of mine asked me "Are you personally religious?" First I said "yes" and then I had to correct myself "not in the way that you think about it." The correct answer is "I am not *dindar* (i.e. religious)."

The category of *dindar* he rejects is the aspect of it that corresponds to "religiosity" as his friend asked the question in exactly that way. He sees that

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concept as a product of the secularization process that compartmentalized religion and religiosity as distinct realms (i.e. structural differentiation). Demirci thinks that *dindarlık* should not be a distinct category of people, as "the Qur'an does not address at scholars of *din*, or *dindar* people; it addresses at those who have intellect, who see, hear, talk, and think!" *Dindarlık* for him means making sense of his existence, and building a connection with God:

> "Where am I coming from? Where am I going? What am I doing here?" These are the questions of "people" not only "*dindar* people." The paradox of living a finite life with a heart that desires infinity is the problem of all human beings, not the obsession of the conservatives. Finding the meaning of standing upright with a perfect awareness in the presence of such perfect existence is the task of everyone with a mind, not the hobby of the "mystics."

He, therefore, does not want *dindarlık* to be restricted into a social or political category, since it is the essential part of being a human, a being that aspires for becoming through its very nature (the spirit, the *fıtrat*). But he is aware of the implications of declaring himself as being *dindar* in the sense of religiosity, which is, according to the popular secularist discourse,

> the lifestyle of the "poor" people who go to the mosque or the church more frequently or regularly than the others. The person who asks the question and defines me as "religious," is himself normal in his own mind but I am somewhat marginal. My color is a bit dark-greenish. Normality stays with him, and I end up being the weird one. Besides, I am "conservative", "not modern," they are the ones who are open-minded, liberalistic. They have the universal values, while I am left with a narrow and unimportant corner of religion. "Poor" me; I would not even have a name, or be recognized if it weren't for them. Luckily, they have wrapped me, labeled me, and placed me somewhere (!) By naming their lack of perplexity at the perfection of existence, and their lack of gratitude for the countless

blessings they have received, as "normal," they have been drowned in the presence of the holy secularism. [327]

This is a great example of why the conventional understandings of piety (which is collapsed into religiosity as a social category) should be reconsidered in a new way informed by the concepts of self-cultivation, and a matter of becoming, so that it would not be used for a monolithic depiction of people who, in reality, have their subjective ways of relationship with religion.

No matter how much the category of *dindar* is used by the secularist political discourse to give a sense of homogenization that reduces individuals into the replicas of one another, people's sense of piety is always diverse, as the stories in this research have already made clear. Each one of them brings their own knowledge of piety and religion to the public sphere despite the attempts of the Diyanet or other religious leaders to maintain unity among the audience they seek the allegiance of.

In the same vein, I highlighted the fact that being a follower of a religious community does not erase the individual perceptions of being and becoming. More than half of the women in this research were affiliated with the Hizmet movement, yet they each had different stories of piety to tell us. In addition to getting on the piety train from different stations, their ideas of the itinerary of this journey, as well as its destination were not the same. Each of them had a different

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[327] Senai Demirci, "Ben artık dindar değilim (I am not religious anymore)," *Haber7 Online News*, December, 18, 2011, accessed October 23, 2012, http://www.haber7.com/haber/20111218/Ben-artik-dindar-degilim.php

way of appropriating their relationship with the community into their process of becoming a pious person.

At the end of the day, everyone taking this piety journey is a test taker. They want to pass this test; and if they find it helpful to submit themselves to the collective will of a particular community, it is still their own decision and their own test taking strategy.

Rethinking religious freedom

Does that mean that everybody has to share the same test ground with them, even though they do not live their lives in such a conception of a test to prove themselves to some kind of higher reality or authority? This opens up a new perspective to the question of religious freedom in the kind of situations when it clashes with the secular conceptions of freedom.

My interlocutors in this research have made it very clear that they are not aspiring for any kind of an Islamic system, as they must be exposed to non-Islamic forms of living in order to manifest agentive performativities, rather than being forced by the state for the mere performance of the prescribed religious rituals.

The logic of the test requires living in a challenging environment. In that sense, they aspire for a "truly" secular state that would not favor any regime of truth over the others, so that people would have the opportunity to use their *irade* (freewill) in the utmost sense in choosing to get on the piety train. In the current

economy of truth, where secularism presents itself as the neutral, the normal, people are disheartened to get to the position of being different, or marginal.

Therefore, they are against the hegemony of the political discourse of secularism, and its presentation of the secular liberal principles of freedom of religion and speech as "neutral mechanisms for the negotiation of religious difference," while in fact, "they remain quite partial to certain normative conceptions of religion, subject, language, and injury."[328]

As Saba Mahmood suggests, secularism needs to reconsider its claims for neutrality and thus normativity; because contrary to its "ideological self-understanding…as the doctrinal separation of religion and state), secularism has historically entailed the regulation and reformation of religious beliefs, doctrines, and practices to yield a particular normative conception of religion (that is largely Protestant Christian in its contours)."[329] In that context, I believe that this dissertation's attempt of rethinking piety outside of the ways secularism has defined it, will necessarily lead to a rethinking of secularism itself, as I agree with Mahmood that "to rethink the religious is also to rethink the secular and its truth claims, its promise of internal and external goods."[330]

Pious people in Turkey do not want to be contained within a minority identity. They do not aspire to push the non-pious elements away from the public

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[328] Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect," in *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*. ed. Talal Asad (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 90.
[329] Mahmood, "Religious Reason," 87.
[330] Ibid., 65.

sphere, either. The efforts of the Women's Platform, the Meridyen Association, and the university I worked at had a common concern to create the conditions of sharing the public sphere with diverse identities as co-hosts rather than in a necessarily hierarchical manner. This aim is yet to be tested, for they have not been able to acquire enough power in the public sphere to be engaged with the temptations of creating a hierarchy and getting at the top of it.[331] But at this stage, their struggle is just to claim the mainstream, "normal" position in the public sphere, because they believe that piety in the sense of establishing a close relationship with God can be possible for each and every human being; it is not the monopoly of "the religious people", "the conservative people", "the Islamists" or any other container identity.

Conceptual openings

Studying pious subjects that are right in the center of the secular public sphere generates different results than studying those within contained groups. The pious women in this research lacked a proper place in the secular-liberal realm, after they walked out of the narrow, remote place reserved for them by the secularist discourse. They were not happy with their reserved place in the Islamist conception, either. They did not want to be the symbolic object for any kind of missionary agenda, including the Islamic *dava*, or any kind of identity-

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[331] I do not see the political struggle between the ex-Islamists and the secular Kemalist elite as equivalent of the actual acquisition of power and prestige in the ground level, although it has made a great impact over the contestation of public discourse. However, I do not see the women in this research, as a party of the ongoing contestation over dominating the public discourse for the sake of recognizability and visibility.

construction. Their intellectual labor was devoted to the possibility of not being named or defined by others –in other words, becoming subjects of the discourses that have objectified them so far.

Therefore, now they are acting on a space while trying to carve out a place in the secular modern public sphere on their own terms. They are free to walk along the streets of the city freely, appropriating a diverse range of technologies to cultivate a pious self. That is why; they are acting on multiple discourses of ethics and self, and constantly engaging in creative acts of interpretation to find their ways in the unknown and unexplored streets of the city of modern piety.[332]

Empowered by a long and rich Islamic tradition of self-cultivation, they are trying to embrace the liberal secular ethics without being assimilated by it. Their experience, indeed, shows that the liberal-secular ethics and Islamic ethics are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The paradoxical situations like being told not to act on dreams while having a huge literature on Islamic dream interpretation, actually create a space for the appropriation of different ethical formulations that defy reducing Islamic ethics to any single line of thinking. Or, the possibility of losing the passion for piety during the authentication process is a new dimension to understanding the realities of the Islamization process; likewise the emergence of authentication process and the deepening of religious interest in the youth during their secular schooling complicate the smoothness of the secularization process.

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[332] I am using the metaphor of walking in Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984.

Therefore, the insights in the experiences of my interlocutors, I believe, have the potential to open up new ways of understanding and studying the experiences of Muslims in the modern age, without necessarily placing them in any "proper place."

Furthermore, understanding the intricate relationships between a Muslim's individual connection to God, her social relations and responsibilities, as well as the historical, social, and political ground that she must act on, can allow for a more complex and comprehensive conception of Islam as an analytical category.

It is also my hope that this research opens up new windows to the conceptions of self, agency, and gender in the context of modern Muslim experience in Turkey, not as a special concern of those who identify themselves with the religion of Islam, but as a source of knowledge for any human experience. To me, it would be the greatest success of this research if it creates an awareness among the Western audience, and the secularist Turkish audience about the genuine attempts of these people to come up with creative ways of being and becoming, in a not-so-different setting for the Western eyes, which can see the similarities and shared experiences if they look beyond the outward performativities that are different from their conception of "normal."

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APPENDIX A

WOMEN'S PLATFORM (WP) WOMEN'S STUDIES SYLLABUS

Unit I- The emergence of "woman" as a category in Europe

Gisela Bock, *Avrupa Tarihinde Kadınlar (Women in European History)*. Trans. Zehra Aksu Yılmazer, Istanbul: Literatür Yayınları, 2004, pp. 41-96.

"Özgürlüğün Kızları ve Devrimci Vatandaşlar" ("Daughters of Freedom and Revolutionist Citizens"), in George Duby and Michelle Perrot, (ed.), *Kadınların Tarihi (The History of Women)*. Vol. 4. Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 2005, pp. 23-51.

"Almanya'da Okuma ve Yazma" ("Literacy in Germany"), in George Duby and Michelle Perrot, (ed.), *Kadınların Tarihi (The History of Women)*. Vol. 4. Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 2005, pp.138-156.

"Kadın İşçi" ("The Female Worker"), in George Duby and Michelle Perrot, (ed.), *Kadınların Tarihi (The History of Women)*. Vol. 4. Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 2005, pp. 374-397.

Nadine Lefaucheur, "Annelik, Aile ve Devlet" ("Motherhood, Family, and the State"), in George Duby and Michelle Perrot, (ed.), *Kadınların Tarihi (The History of Women)*. Vol. 5. Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 2005, pp. 401-418.

Unit II- The changing definition of sexuality

Nazife Şişman. "Küresel Cinsiyet Dinamikleri: Hayat tarzı, benlik ve yeni kimlik stratejileri" ("Global Gender Dynamics: Life style, the self, and new strategies of identity"), in *Küreselleşmenin Pençesi İslamın Peçesi (The Claw of Globalization, the Veil of Islam)*. İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2005, pp.107-119.

Nazife Şişman. "Marifetünnefs'ten Benliğin Keşfine: Çağdaş Cinsellik Kültürü" ("From Marifetunnefs to the Discovery of Self: Modern culture of sexuality), in *Küreselleşmenin Pençesi İslamın Peçesi. (The Claw of Globalization, the Veil of Islam)*. İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2005, pp. 121-130.

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