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Close-Reading Belongingness Experience of Non-Traditional Muslim Women in Türkiye:

Reçel Blog

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Abstract:

This thesis is a result of a quest to understand and to plead young, educated, Muslim women's struggle for recognition in Türkiye in contemporary times. It emerged from my will to reflect on a personal experience as a young Muslim woman from Türkiye. Moreover, my desire to contribute to women's empowerment, in general, has helped me to form this work. Thus, in this thesis, I analyze data from Reçel Blog (RB) through the close-reading method as well as utilize part of my own experiences via the autoethnography method.

RB is a blogging site that has been founded and run by a group of non-traditional Muslim women in Türkiye since 2014 to have a space for "women, especially for Muslim women to give voice to their daily experiences, their perception of social issues, their interests, curiosities, troubles, hopes, concerns, and struggles" (Reçel Blog, 2014). In this study, I utilize RB posts shared between January 2022-February 2023 to discuss the forms of social exclusion non-traditional Muslim women face in Türkiye.

Merging social exclusion and recognition theories, I argue that in Türkiye non-traditional Muslim women's access to the main activities of the society in different spaces (public, secular, religious) is impaired. This issue is closely related to social recognition. Muslim women are denied proper social recognition which is a fundamental factor for one to be present in the social encounters, activities, and spaces as oneself. Therefore, in their case, missing social recognition and not being able to participate in activities of society without tiptoeing around entrenches their social exclusion. Moreover, it is a vicious cycle: being excluded impairs Muslim women's self-realization process and not being able to reproduce themselves through various social encounters disempower them to resist against lack of social recognition. I conclude my study by discussing that RB is a tool used by non-traditional Muslim women to create their narratives to confront social exclusion and misrecognition in Türkiye.

ABBREVIATIONS

AKP- Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)

Atatürk- Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Founder of Republic of Türkiye

CHP- Republican's People Party

DP- Democrat Party (1946-1961)

Erdoğan- Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Current President of Republic of Türkiye

Ottoman- Ottoman Empire

RB- Reçel Blog

Republic- Republic of Türkiye

Selim III- The Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (1789-1807)

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"Hata yapmak/fırsatını Adem'e veren sendin/bilmedim onun talihinden ne kadar düştü bana/gençtim ve neden hata payı yoktum diyordum hayatımda"

İsmet Özel, Münacaat,1999

Words cannot express my gratitude to my family. I am thankful to my father for always being a great source of inspiration both as a father and an educator. Thank you for setting an example by becoming a Ph.D. at the age of 54. Thanks, should also go to my mother for cheering me up with her excellent sense of humor, especially during our daily video calls. You made this period less stressful for me. Finally, I am deeply indebted to the cat individual of our family, Rabıta. Thank you so much for sitting through the video calls and comforting me with your deep-set eyes. You matter.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a result of a quest to understand and to plead young, educated, Muslim women's struggle for recognition in Türkiye in contemporary times. It emerged from my will to reflect on a personal experience as a young Muslim woman of Turkish origin as well as the desire to contribute to women's empowerment in general.

As a young cis woman who also defines herself as a non-traditional Muslim, I could not help but be curious about religion in everyday life. My curiosity on the subject led me to do readings not only on Muslim theology but also on how Islam is experienced in everyday life in Türkiye by other subjects. In this quest, I was introduced to *Reçel Blog* (RB).

RB is a blog page that has been founded and run by a group of non-traditional Muslim women in Türkiye since 2014 to have a space for "women, especially for Muslim women to give voice to their daily experiences, their perception of social issues, their interests, curiosities, troubles, hopes, concerns, and struggles" (Reçel Blog, 2014). The founders of the blog are young-adult, mostly educated university-level Muslim women who have begun their feminist activism with the Muslims for Violence against Women Initiative (KŞKMİ) and later, they formed RB which was followed by Havle Women's Association as the "the first Muslim women's association in Türkiye" (Havle Kadın Derneği,2018). Some of the activists from the same movement also contributed to the Women in Mosques, Kadınlar Camilerde, a campaign which was aiming at improving the overall quality and accessibility of the female-only spaces in the mosques to make mosques more reachable for Muslim women (BBC News Türkçe, 2018).

Although KŞKMİ has not been highly active recently, Havle, Kadınlar Camilerde, and RB are still earnestly running. While Havle is pursuing feminist activism in feminist knowledge building by conducting research and conducting advocacy on Islamic feminism, Reçel Blog keeps being a safe and open space for Muslim women to share and raise injustices they face in their everyday lives. Kadınlar Camilerde, in addition to those, makes activism on social media platforms by drawing attention to the situation of female-only spaces in different mosques in the country. All of those venues surely give voice to concerns of Muslim women in Türkiye and contributes to

empowerment of this community. However, in this thesis I focus on RB as a virtual space of expression for non-traditional Muslim women.

In this study, I utilize RB posts to discuss the forms of social exclusion non-traditional Muslim women face in Türkiye. Initially, I have formed my research question around how non-traditional Muslim women experience belongingness in Türkiye. However, as I read articles introducing RB under the section "What is Reçel?" in RB and the interviews conducted with the editors and the founders of the blogging site, I came to conclude that RB women do not identify as "modern" or "non-modern" or "traditional" (Arslan,2015) (Estukyan,2015). Moreover, initially when they founded the blogging site, they were not identifying either as "feminist" (Yaşa,2014). RB women refers to themselves as "a group of Muslim women."

On the other hand, Muslim women is an extremely broad category and not pinpointing sub-identities obscures the forms of social injustices experienced by diverse groups within that supra-identity of Muslim women. In the case of Türkiye, considering that pro-Islam governments are in power for the last 20 years, it is argued that being a Muslim woman is a privileged status in the country. However, Muslimness is not a homogenous identity. Furthermore, taking this identity as granted, masks the maltreatments experienced by certain communities who share this status. Therefore, in this thesis, I pinpoint "a group of Muslim women" as non-traditional Muslim women. The reason of that word choice is also another matter of question.

My readings on history of modernity and Islam in Türkiye led me to the conclusion that identity, concerns, demands and expectations of educated, Muslim women in contemporary Türkiye is way more different those of 1980s and 1990s Muslim women in the country. As Göle, the Turkish sociologist, names featly these women are neither traditional nor secular or modern Muslim women, they have an in-between, hybrid identity (Göle,2000). In this thesis, in order to refer to that neither nor phenomenon, I prefer using non-traditional instead of modern or non-modern. The reasoning behind is, modernity is overloaded with meanings and by referring to this group of Muslim women as modern, I did not want to risk creating confusion. Although it is adopted from the West, modernity in Türkiye, as I discuss in Chapter 4 of this thesis, is not taken as it is and thus interpreted in its unique way. In Turkish social imaginary, modernity, and secularism as a part of that, is positioned in opposition to tradition

which refers to Islam and Ottoman Empire. Therefore, referring this group of women as modern would risk overwhelming the research. Moreover, "modern" is used as a slur by some Islamic male scholars to despise Muslim women (Cündioğlu,2004). Therefore, as the researcher, I made a choice and decided to stand with the "non-traditional" concept. Tradition is, indeed, a vague concept. However, it is beyond aims of this study to solely focus on whatness of tradition. Therefore, I take tradition only in relation to history of modernity in Türkiye which is held in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Non-traditional refers to ways of being in the world for Muslim women in Türkiye, which can neither be defined as modern or traditional. It is a sui-generis identity and definitely a dynamic one.

RB is an important virtual space where non-traditional Muslim women are able to express what sort of injustices, they face every day. Presence of such a platform is very empowering for Muslim women who are not welcome neither in secular public spaces nor in religious ones. Although the articles handed in to RB go through an editorial check, as the editors of the site say, it is an open space for everyone, but the priority is given to women. However, editors mention in an interview that they do receive emails and comments, positive and negative, from men as well (Arslan,2015).

RB consists of articles written by both the founders of the blog and guest authors since 2014. Although some of the posts are shared with the writers' real names, there are many posts written by guest authors. In this thesis, I use both type of posts. I mentioned the authors' real names only when I cite direct quotes from the posts of several editors from RB's "What is Reçel?" section. Except the parts I introduce the research material to the reader, I almost always use anonymous to refer to blog posts' writers. Moreover, I number the blog posts, and thus authors, as "Anon1, Anon2 etc." in order to avoid confusion for the reader among different posts. Another important thing to note is, although the blog posts are my research material and the authors are considered as research subjects within the scope of this thesis, for the sake of emphasizing the agency of the writers of the blogposts, I refer to them as "authors" throughout the text. Finally, for the reader to be able to differentiate my own experiences from those of the authors, I have on purpose used italics typefaces only when I share autoethnographic data.

Among the posts I utilize in Chapter 5, most are written by guest authors. However, there are also few shared with the author's real name. Nevertheless, for the sake of

consistency, I use "Anon" for all the posts in that chapter. On the other hand, since all the posts utilized for this thesis are stated in the references section, the reader has access to some of the authors real names. Yet, considering RB is a public blogging site and accessible by anyone, this is not considered to be a problem within this thesis.

Topics of articles in RB vary from challenges of Muslim women in their marriages, their belonging experience in secular public places or even in religious spaces, to their practices of political activism. As an educated, young, Muslim women who is following RB since it has been founded, I have always found a lot of convergence between their experiences and mine. One of them was about me practicing veil for some years and deciding not to practice it until very recently. During that process which I made that decision and afterwards, it was very empowering to read about the experiences of other Muslim women-veiled or not, in RB on being a Muslim woman in Türkiye. I wanted to write on my experience of practicing and not-practicing veiling multiple times, however, I was still observing and did not have the words to express what it is like. Our worlds are not free of meanings. Veil, in the Turkish setting, is beyond being a piece of cloth that is used to cover head part of the body. Veiling, non-veiling or even to stop practicing veiling after practicing it for a certain period of time comes at a cost for Muslim women in Türkiye. Moreover, the injustice experience around the meanings given to veiling is just one of those common experiences. I have had several others which led me to involve an autoethnographical aspect to this thesis. In this study, in addition to focusing on belongingness experience of Muslim women in Türkiye through close-reading texts in RB, relying on my memories I share my own experiences as a non-traditional Muslim woman.

1.1.What Is The "Problem?"

Until I decided to involve RB to this thesis, I was not able to identify the "problem" these women are facing with. I used to read it as an insider and thus what I saw was pain, anger, disappointment, being ignored and so on. However, during my time in the social exclusion program, I have seen some convergence between the definition of social exclusion and the experiences of RB women. As per definition of social exclusion suggests, Non-traditional Muslim women in Türkiye are having difficulty in "participating main activities in the society they live in" (*CASE - Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion* as cited in Burchardt et al., 1999:229). This difficulty is taking place especially, but not limited to, in the spatial exclusion form. Muslim women are being asked to be invisible from public (male space)" (Anon1,2023), "yet they are constantly under surveillance (Anon10,2022)".

However, as I have read the blog posts in RB along with social exclusion theories, I have come to realize social exclusion is still too broad as a theory to pinpoint the experiences of Muslim women. Thus, considering the multi-dimensional nature of social exclusion, I decided to narrow my research question around the social/cultural dimension of exclusion. At this point, I run into the concept of recognition in the literature. It helped me to problematize the missing piece regarding the "pain" of non-traditional Muslim women.

Merging social exclusion and recognition, I came to realize that for Muslim women not only their access to different spaces (public, secular, religious) is impaired but also, they are denied social recognition which is a key component to be present in the social encounters as oneself. Therefore, in their case, missing social recognition or not being able to participate to activities of the society without tiptoeing around, entrenches their social exclusion. Moreover, it is a vicious cycle: being excluded makes them refrain from participating activities of the society with their prominent identity and not participating to those activities is the mere definition of social exclusion.

 In this study, thus, I utilize social exclusion and recognition theories to understand the challenge of non-traditional Muslim women on striving for social recognition in different spheres of the society they live in. RB is an example of this effort. Therefore, in order to understand and to plead young, educated, non-traditional Muslim women's

struggle for recognition in Türkiye in contemporary times |I employ 11 blog posts chosen out of 30 posts as material which are shared between January 2022 and February 2023 in RB. The reason for this choice will be explained in the following chapter (chapter 2). Moreover, irrespective of order, I answer these research questions.

1. What are the main themes related to the social exclusion of non-traditional Muslim women in Türkiye?
2. What are the forms of social exclusion non-traditional Muslim women in Türkiye face with?
3. In which spaces (public, domestic, secular, religious, physical, virtual, etc.) social exclusion, is taking place? How does the space affect form of exclusion in the case of non/traditional Muslim women?
4. How non-traditional Muslim women resist to forms of exclusion they are subjected to?

1.2.Previous Research

Studying non-traditional Muslim women, I have benefited from research literature of several disciplines. I did my initial readings on theories of social exclusion and gender. While doing my M.A. in the social exclusion program, I have decided to prioritize social exclusion theories and utilize them as one of my main tools for discovering the experience of non-traditional Muslim women. Secondly, I have always had a keen interest in gender theory, and studying the experience of a group of women, I find it necessary to "gender" my research. It is crucial because what we know as science today has been established by white privileged heterosexual men (Ideland,2018:786) and the subject of that science in humanities has been average "man" for an exceptionally long time. As Halberstam, an American academic known for his work on queer philosophy, articulates, gender studies is founded to unveil "the false universalization of male subjectivity" (Halberstam, 2014:116). Thus, studies in humanities without a gender perspective risk obscuring the experience of female subjects. That is why, in this study, in addition to using social exclusion theories as the main anchor, I find it crucial to add a gender perspective to this study.

There are four components in my study of non-traditional Muslim women in Türkiye. The first one is undoubtedly the modernity experience of Türkiye and its encounter with Islam as the ideology of the Ottoman Empire. This is a topic that is already over-researched by various disciplines including sociology, political science, history, and international relations. Moreover, when we mention Ottoman Empire, we still talk about a milieu expanding over centuries. However, as per I focus on modernity experience, I have taken only a specific time interval (late 18th century to today) into consideration and have done my literature research accordingly.

The studies on this topic date back to the 1970s. One of the key studies on this topic is Şerif Mardin's, Turkish sociologist, "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?". Mardin conceptualizes two mainstreams of Turkish politics as "center" vs "periphery." While the "center" refers to the Westernized, pro-modernity elites, the "periphery" signifies people for traditional/Islamic ones (Mardin,1973). Another

prominent study on the topic is Feroz Ahmad's, Indian scholar with expertise on modern Türkiye, "Politics and Islam in Modern Turkey." In this study Ahmad, talks about the encounters of secularism and Islam in the modern Türkiye starting from early 19th century and how this process transformed both of these ideologies, thus making Turkish interpretation of modernity. (Ahmad, 1991).

 The second aspect of my thesis is about pious Muslim women and their relationship to Islamic practices in Türkiye. Although there is a variety of research on the area, most of them focus on either Islamic and or Islamist feminism or activism against the ban on headscarf. (Arat,2016; Kılıçkıran,1997; Koç,2015; Yılmaz,2016; AslanAkman,2013; Badran,2005; Mello,2011; Arat,1997; Göle,1997; Cindoğlu and Zencirci 2008). In other words, studies on Islamic feminism in Türkiye are already saturated. Therefore, as part of my literature research, I have had a vast selection of articles and books to utilize. Reading those studies along with RB, I concluded that in my thesis I want to use the concept of "Muslim women" and not "Islamist women" due to two main reasons.

First of all, the founders of the blog, identify themselves as "Muslim women" and they diversify from "Islamists." This choice is significant because it tells us about where non-traditional Muslim women stands for with politics. Compared to the latter, Muslim is a more neutral standpoint. Islamist, on the other hand, is a word overloaded with negative meanings in the Turkish case. It is defined as someone who pursues Islamic politics for the revival of Islam. From the perspective of Muslim women, "Being political" in the Islamist sense in Türkiye, evoke bad memories. This is related to the history of the headscarf in Türkiye which is constructed as a political category and religious symbol since the early years of the foundation of the Republic. The negative attitude towards religion and "religious symbols" further intensified following the 1980 coup d'état in Türkiye; Muslim women were not able to participate in public fully as they are as soon as they are veiled[1] until 2007. This phenomenon created a cleavage in Islamic activism as well in the 1990s. While there was not a direct threat to Muslim men accessing universities or other state institutions, Muslim women were cast aside. In the following period, while Muslim women strike activism fighting

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[1] In this study instead of the headscarf, I use the term "veil" to refer to the modest way of dressing that is practiced by modern Muslim women. This is because modest attire is beyond the headscarf in the mainstream Islamic interpretation in Türkiye. It implies loose-fit dressing in addition to a headcover (shawl or any kind of veil)

for their rights to be present in the public with a veil(headscarf), Islamism has gotten to be more associated with Muslim men. In other words, in the 1990s Muslim women's movement's priority was not a revival of Islam but rather activism to make the headscarf ban lifted. This is the second reason why I use non-traditional Muslim women and not Islamism or activism.

Non-traditional Muslim women in Turkish case is a new form of expressing femininity. RB has pursued Islamic (not Islamist) feminist politics. It is an agency for expressing femininity and helps create non-traditional Muslim women's narratives. On the other hand, in this study, I approach RB as a data source rather than an example of a feminist agency.

Another crucial point in my thesis is using a blogging website (RB) as a data source instead of conducting interviews or other qualitative research methods. During my literature review, I found several Master theses which focus on blogging and female subjectivity in Türkiye. One of them, likewise this thesis, utilizes Reçel Blog (Akyılmaz, 2015). However, unlike my research, Akyılmaz focuses on RB as a case of Islamic-feminist activism in Türkiye. Another research done on blogging and gender identity is about the representation of women on blogs as a social media platform in Türkiye (Özer, 2019). This research differs from my study in concentrating on the role of blogging in women's representation. Finally, I have run into a thesis that focuses on how gender is constructed in blogs (Çelebi, 2009). Similar to Özer's thesis, Çelebi's thesis also employs media theories to conceptualize blogging. However, unlike my thesis, Çelebi uses several data collection methods including in-depth interviews. On the other hand, differently from all three theses, I employ auto-ethnography as a method, and involving my own narrative both as the researcher and the subject of the research is one of the main strengths of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1.Research Material

RB has been founded in 2014 by a group of young, Muslim women to hold the floor regarding everyday life problems of Muslim women in Türkiye. Although initially, they were only six Muslim women, as time goes by, the community received way more attention and expanded. One of the editors states in an interview that they were already invited to multiple TV programs to talk about RB since the fourth month of its foundation (Estukyan,2015). Their raising visibility also contributed to more women get in contact with RB and share their stories. Currently, in addition to blog articles shared by founders of the blogging site, there is plenty of articles written by other Muslim women anonymously or even using their own names. By 2023 April, there is over three hundred blog posts shared on the website.

The need for the platform did not come of out nowhere. RB community arose as a resistance to the mainstream Islamic discourse on non-traditional Muslim women in Türkiye. By mainstream Islamic discourse, I refer to a perspective that defines the primary role of women as caregivers and diminishes womanhood into domestic space. In the case of Muslim women, this discourse holds Muslim women responsible for the bringing up of future pious generations. However, the upbringing mentioned here does not aim to empower Muslim women as a community or as individuals but vice versa. Neither the frontiers nor the content of the labor designated to Muslim women here is not decided by women. Thus, Muslim women are treated as a tool to employ a worldview designed by actors outside of them. The problem here is, such an attitude serves for reproducing already existing exclusion practices against Muslim women in the country. The labor laid on Muslim women brings its own understanding of morality as well. Thus, while some acts are favored, others are punished in several ways. Misrecognition and social exclusion is some of those punishments.

From a larger point of view, presence of such a phenomenon in Türkiye is also related to the incompatible aspects of modernity with the interpretation of Islam. The mainstream and traditional Islamic perspective prioritizes sexual segregation, while the modern secular worldview, at least idealistically, encourages female participation in public as equal citizens. The presence of women in the public sphere, which is defined as a male space in Islam, is perceived as the first stage of failure. Therefore,

there is strong resistance against the presence of Muslim women in public by male, Muslim scholars in the country. This resistance does not only come in the form of openly denying access to Muslim women to various public spaces through making statements in the media but also writing on the "harm" Muslim women cause to the wellbeing of the Islamic community. As traditionally women's subject in Islam is identified with the domestic field and the nurturing responsibilities, any deviation from this structure is believed to strike at the roots of the Islamic community. Therefore, the problem is not only limited to public space. The problem culminates in the imagined essential Muslim women image that is grounded on the mainstream interpretation of Islam by the majority. According to this view, the ideal Muslim woman is the one who has a formal education, an occupation in the modern sense but prioritizes her domestic "responsibilities" over her other roles. The indicated perspective is also mostly very nostalgic.

In the early 2000s, this view has been crystalized and a discussion around the domestic skills of Muslim women in Türkiye started. Islamist male scholars have mooted an idea and started debating on non-traditional Muslim women losing their domestic skills and not even being capable of making a jar of jam (Cündioğlu 2004), (Dündar, 2004). Jam has become a symbolic discussion from then onwards. This is where the RB community comes into the picture. They resist, first of all, men talking on their behalf and on something they have never experienced and will never do. Secondly, RB is an uprising against mainstream Islamic interpretation's attempts to reduce ways of being a non-traditional Muslim woman in Türkiye (Küçük, 2014) (Feyza, 2014). Therefore, in the blog space, they share their everyday life challenges of all dimensions. As one of the editors and active writers of the blog page, Rümeysa puts it:

> "The issue is not how much of jam preparing I know. It is rather, some people are uncomfortable with the distance between me and the jam-making" (Rümeysa, 2014).

Not surprisingly, the name of the blog page "Reçel Blog" means jam in Turkish. This choice, as it is also deliberately repeated by several founding authors, refers to the way they perceive themselves. RB community describes themselves as women who are competent both at home and outside. By that I mean, they are capable of managing

their domestic life as well as their public life. To get across this message, they perform their activism by spreading the word from firsthand experience.

The blog currently includes more than three hundred articles and most of them are written by guest authors who wanted to speak their minds through RB. The posts usually consists of around five hundred words and includes a title and an image. The titles are mostly very sentimental that the composition of them bites into the reader. Some of them are short "I DID IT!" (Anon30,2021) and some are poetic such as "Cleaning the Mothers" (Anon13,2023) or "Killing the Angel in the House" (Anon14,2023). Others are more argumentative and to the point: "Leave the Mosques Alone" (Anon9,2022). There are also ones written on occasion such as "After Mahsa Zina Amini" to discuss the murder of a young women by the morality police in Iran (Anon19,2022). There are long titles too and they are not few in number such as "What if I do not fast today as I am menstruating? Maybe I am overexerting myself?" (Anon7, 2022)

All articles also include an image. The images are mostly graphic ones and thus do not include actual people but rather are designed or created visuals. The pictures of the paintings by famous artists are also used in some blog posts. Moreover, some posts include photographs of real people, but these are few. However, since it would require additional data analysis methods and contribute to the amount of data to be analyzed, I did not include the images by default as data for this thesis.

Moreover, in the beginning of every article there is a short citation extracted from the main body of the texts. These citations are usually the punchlines of the text and thus encourages the reader to keep on reading.

Within the scope of this thesis, in order to understand and discuss the forms of social exclusion non-traditional Muslim women go through, I utilize eleven blog posts out of 30 which is shared between January 2022-February 2023.

Table 1:List of Blogposts Utilized in This Thesis

Title	Author	Date
Burying Daughters Alive and My Mother	Anon1	02.02.2023
"We are Lady Parts": A Part of Us	Anon2	24.08.2022
My Modern Veiling Style	Anon3	08.08.2022
All Women Are Equal But Some Are More Equal Than Others	Anon4	15.07.2022
Swimming or Washing Carpets?	Anon5	27.05.2022
Oh, My Femininity, Are You With me?	Anon6	24.04.2022
What If I Do Not Fast Today As I Am Menstruating? Maybe I Am Overexerting Myself?	Anon7	19.04.2022
They Ignore That I Am An Adult Woman	Anon8	07.04.2022
Leave The Mosques Alone	Anon9	04.04.2022
A Note To My (Our) Personal History	Anon10	22.03.2022
How Political Am I?	Anon11	18.01.2022

2.1.1. Characteristics of the RB Authors

In this research, the research subjects are educated, in the early adulthood period of their life, Muslim women living in Türkiye. By educated, the term refers to people who completed or continued at least a bachelor level of formal university education. Although there is no exact age definition in all the articles analyzed, it can be followed through the social media accounts and life course of the authors who blog with their real names. The editors of the blog are women aged in the range of 20-40 years old and this cohort is referred to as young or middle adulthood by developmental psychologists (Feldman & Lopez, 1982). This information is gathered both through the posts written by the editors with their name in RB and also their social media accounts. Moreover, guest authors, are also within that age range. Although, guest authors do not share their name, it is easy to follow which age cohort they belong to through the details they share in the blog posts such as certain events that happened in

the country and what age they were when that specific event happened etc. To sum up, although not every blog post is stating the authors age in the exact number, through the details available in the posts, it can be deduced that the blog writers in RB are within the young-middle adulthood age cohort.

Another characteristic of the research group in question is their religious affiliation. Muslim, in this case, refers to a person who is an adherent of Islam and submits, *aslama*, to Allah's commands (Adamec, 2016:311). Finally, women refers to a group of people whose gender identity corresponds to the sex, female, the person was identified with at birth (*Definition of CISGENDER*, n.d.).

2.1.2. Limitations and Ethical Considerations

2.1.2.1. Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that my material is in my native language, Turkish, however, this study is written in English. Although interacting with a data in my native language contributed to get a better grasp of the subject matter, considering I have translated all the citations by myself, and I am not a native or professional translator of English language, might have caused some meanings getting lost in translation while I am translating the citations from the blog posts I have chosen to utilize for this thesis.

While translating I try to find a middle ground between clarity of the end text and loyalty to the original meaning. Clarity was crucial because in the end I was not translating words but the meanings behind them. However, considering meanings are bounded by cultural contexts, in an attempt to translate, it also requires explaining the cultural understanding behind it. Yet that is challenging considering amount of time and resources limited. Nevertheless, throughout the thesis, whenever it is needed, I explain in detail what is meant by a certain word or expression.

In addition to that, as I translate, I try to keep in mind that language is not only sum of words but rather every language has its own dynamic ways of interpreting the world. Thus, as much as translating the data, narrating it was a crucial part of this study. Accordingly, in citations I use in this study, when necessary, I explain the background of choice of word and what it means in the contemporary context via footnotes and parenthetical definitions.

Another limitation was the broad background of the non-traditional Muslim women question in Turkish case. It required me to read variety of research on modernization experience of Türkiye. This is the reason I expatiate on this topic in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, there are still a lot of research that I was not able to include in this research due to time and space related limitations.

Sample size was also a challenge in this study. RB has been running since 2014 and in the last nine years, there has been more than three hundred   articles shared so far. Therefore, to determine the sample size was an important part of this research. On the other hand, considering the optimal scope of a master's thesis, I initially scanned twenty-nine blog posts shared within the past year in RB. However, considering one of the research methods I utilize, close-reading, I decided to further limit the number of posts to eleven because close reading method requires a very meticulous reading of the material and provides overflowing of data. Thus, given the limited space and time, the amount of data collected has been more than enough within the framework of this study. Moreover, the reason I specifically choose those eleven is that they are the ones that have the most data regarding my research questions.

Moreover, relying on my memories, I involve my own experiences in this study through autoethnography method. Although "the past, lived experiences of the researcher are privileged as sources of knowledge," there are limitations to this research method as well (Jackson and Mazzei,2008:300). Considering that I, as the researcher, using self-reported data as part of this research, the data can contain several sources of bias. First of them is selective memory. Considering the memory is fallible, it is not possible to remember every event just as it had happened. Therefore, the data from my story might contain the risk of misremembering a memory or unintentionally altering the content of the memory chosen. Another bias might be attribution. Considering I identify as a Muslim woman, likewise the research group, this study might include positive meaning attributed to my own agency. Those are also the questions related to reliability, validity, and generalizability of this research. On the other hand, when applied to autoethnography, "the context, meaning and the utility of these terms alter" (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011:282). Autoethnography understands reliability in terms of if the researcher is credible to narrate that unique story and if that story could be actually experienced by the researcher (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011:282). In my case, sharing various inside information and details that

could only be known to the members of conservative communities and the non-traditional Muslim women makes the sources of this thesis reliable. Validity is about if the narrative "evoke the feeling that the experience described is lifelike" (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011:282). The stories of mine that I use in this study is coherent with those of non-traditional Muslim women shared in the blog posts. Due to validity concern, I state how the stories in the blog posts and my own stories are related to one another. They are mutually consistent. Finally, generalizability of the research, in the autoethnographic studies, is about if the shared experience of the narrator is able to" illuminate unfamiliar cultural practices" to the reader (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011:283). This thesis is a result of a two years' work and I have been dwelling on the topic for an exceedingly long time. I drafted content of this thesis by writing most of my assignments, during MA program, on this topic. Moreover, in the last six months I shared various parts of the content with several colleagues and received feedback. They agreed on that this study, despite its limitations, is informative about the certain experiences of the community in focus.

2.1.2.2.Ethical Considerations

In this thesis, I study social exclusion phenomenon as experienced by a group of people through collecting data on an online blogging site. Considering the data is available and I access to that through internet, during the research process I have observed the ethical guidelines of internet research.

The first ethical consideration is about present and future safety of the blog authors' as well as the researcher's. While presenting my findings, I look out for if dissemination of the data would cause any present or future harm (life, career, reputation) for the authors in the blog (Markham and Buchanan 2012:10). Considering that all the authors in RB are adult women so there is no risk of creating a harm for minors. Moreover, authors who write with their real names do not share sensitive data that would cause them harm or guest authors do not open up their personal information that would reveal their identity. Finally, as I am also sharing my personal data through auto-ethnography method, I also look out for my own well-being during process. I have concluded that reflecting on and sharing my memories through academic work does more good to me than harm.

The second consideration I observe is about usability of data from Reçel Blog in another platform. The online blogging site is publicly available to anyone with access to internet, thus there is no legal restrictions on that. However, as stated in RB website, editors of the blogging site request to be informed via e-mail in case of utilizing their content in another platform (Reçel Blog, n.d.). Following their request and to be on the safe side ethically, I have informed them in advance through the email address they have shared. Thus, I do not have major ethical concerns while utilizing the data from the blogging site.

Another ethical question I have had on mind initially was about the anonymity of the blog authors (franzke et al., 2020:7). During data collection process I realized that some of the authors write with their real names, some as guest authors and some with pseudonyms. Among the blogposts I utilize, many of the authors signed their post as guest author but there are also ones shared with real names or pseudonyms. Nevertheless, for the sake of consistency, I use "Anon" for all the posts while quoting. On the other hand, since all the posts utilized for this thesis are stated in the sources and references sections, the reader has access to some of the authors' real names through the links provided in those sections. Yet, considering RB is a public blogging site and sharing real names is under the initiative of the authors, this is not considered to be a problem within this thesis.

2.2. Method

2.2.1. Close-Reading

When I have been first introduced to the close-reading method by my supervisor, Taru Leppänen, a Finnish scholar of gender studies, I have been already familiar with the Blog page (RB) I am using for this study. I have been following it regularly for the past seven years, realizing the patterns and common themes but I have decided to engage with it academically, I have never reflected on the method I would use to approach life experiences there. This is where the close-reading method comes to help.

As a method, close reading, today is widely used in literary studies. It deals with the formal properties of a text, its literary means, language, structure, and style. This way of reading, which became popular in the mid-20th century, makes it possible to interpret a text without extraneous information such as historical context, author

biography, philosophy, or political ideology (Lentricchia & DuBois, 2003:2) (Showalter, 2002:23). Setting aside the context gives room for engaging with the texts as it is. Close reading as a method enables researchers to comprehend complex texts by using repeated reading, cognitive scaffolding, and discussion (Fisher & Frey, 2014:35). This way, the characteristics of a text, which can also be a movie, a painting so on and so forth-such as the format, punctuation, the choice of word, repetition of certain words, themes, the gaps between certain components reveals experiences which could otherwise be missed.

So close reading as a method is all about pausing and looking at the precise techniques, dynamics, and content of the text. It is not about reading between the lines, it is about reading further and further into the lines and seeing the multiple meanings that a phrase, a description, or a word can unleash (University of York n.d.).

Using close-reading, I have paid attention to the following criteria: audience, significance, and scope (University of Wisconsin n.d.). Considering I am using data in my native language, Turkish, and authoring my thesis in another in a foreign setting, the majority of the audience of my thesis will not be having direct access to the content and its meaning. Therefore, in this thesis, I will be explaining the socio-cultural background and characters in addition to the form, language, and message of the texts which fall under the umbrella of my research question. Additionally, I try to understand the significance of certain passages, words, etc. about the entire blog articles and it works both ways. I also try to go from the larger text to the passage that excited my attention to comprehend the relation there. Finally, the scope of the data utilized is important in this study. During the initial data collection, which took place in January 2023, I scanned thirty blogs written and/or shared between January 2022 and January 2023 in Reçel Blog. Later on, I have added two more posts from February 2023 and March 2023. However, thereafter, I have further limited the number of articles to eleven. There are three reasons for those limitations. First of all, I preferred the past year because RB is very dynamic, and I want to engage with the most up-to-date data from the blog. Moreover, as a reader I am more familiar with the data from that period. Although I have been a follower of RB since 2014, I was not as regular reader until the past couple of years. When I decided to engage with the material within this study, I find it more convenient to take on something I already have an idea about. Secondly, the close reading method requires a balanced amount of data to be managed

at once since it is a method of detailed reading. Thus, I have avoided overwhelming the study with the data as it would cause the details that are much crucial in the close reading method to be overlooked. Finally, as I have also utilized my own experiences through the autoethnography method, thus, the thesis is saturated with data.

2.2.2. Autoethnography

The second method I have used during my research is auto-ethnography. Researching a community that I consider myself a part of, as an educated, young cis Muslim woman- I wanted to reflect on my first-hand experiences as well in this study. Therefore, I have decided to include auto-ethnography as a method in my research process.

Auto-ethnography is simply defined as the study of the self in which the researcher is the subject itself (Hughes & Pennington, 2017:5). Initially, I was hesitant to bring my firsthand experiences in as back then I thought it might cause vulnerability. I was scared to be vulnerable as I have inevitably associated it with pain. However, during the seminars of the Gender Studies department, I have grown on to the idea and decided to include auto-ethnography and my subjective experiences as a Muslim woman in this study.

As Ellis, a leading scholar and qualitative researcher in autobiographical writing, argues autoethnography is not only a technique of knowing the world but it has the power to transform the researcher as well (Ellis,2013:10). It enables the researcher both as the subject and the object of the research to reflect on the ways they observe the world. It is an observation about how we observe the world around us, and how we relate to it. Moreover, auto-ethnography opens the door to engaging with our insecurities and fears as researchers. Considering all that, I have decided to take chances hoping that I can find space for healing by wearing my heart on my sleeve.

Autoethnography emerged as a research method in the 1990s, parallel to the critical turn in ethnographic research. It was a response to the dominance of white voices in social science research and intended to provide scholarly space for the lived experiences of the underrepresented, oppressed, and marginalized (Chawla & Atay, 2018:1).

In this study, relying on my own memories, I share my side of the story as a Muslim woman grow up in a conservative setting in Türkiye. Considering the limitations of autoethnographic research, I write my own narratives as distinct as possible so that the reader will be able to distinguish from other stories I cite.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Social Exclusion

Although social exclusion initially was used to refer to individual life failures, thanks to the expanding literature on the subject, nowadays it is utilized to understand deprivation at a deeper level. In this section, I will briefly review the body of related work on the subject and explain how it is linked to my area of interest.

Until I decided to engage with RB academically, I was not able to name the common experience blog posts were pointing at. I used to read it as an insider and all I could feel was pain, anger, disappointment, being ignored and so on. However, reading social exclusion theories, I have seen some convergence between the definition of social exclusion and the experiences of RB women. As per definition of social exclusion suggests, Non-traditional Muslim women in Türkiye are having difficulty in "participating main activities in the society they live in" (*CASE - Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion* as cited in Burchardt et al., 1999:229).

In this study, based on that definition, the concept of social exclusion is applied to understand Muslim women seek for recognition in Türkiye. I argue that non-traditional Muslim women in Türkiye are striving for recognition as independent individuals in the country and it is reinforcing their social exclusion. To understand what social exclusion refers to in their case, it is useful to go through the evolution of the concept.

When initially articulated by René Lenoir in 1974, excluded ones referred to as social "misfits", such as people with mental and physical disabilities, substance abusers, single parents, age invalids, children exposed to abuse so on and so forth (Lenoir,1974 as cited in Sen, 2000:1). Later in the 1980s the term used to refer to the people at the bottom of the society in multi-ethnic areas of France related to the rising unemployment problem (Burchardt et al., 1999:228).

Unemployment was not only problematic in terms of material deprivation or poverty, but it was also gradually followed by social disaffiliation of the subjects. This phenomenon eventually created a continuum of exclusion and deepened the vulnerability of certain communities (Silver, 2019:1). However, as it is investigated in the French case, there was more to the story of deprivation than the depleted wallets.

The unemployed individuals were not only suffering from material deprivation but the impoverished lives (Sen, 2000:3). Lack of material resources was, indeed, a factor preventing them from reaching goods to make a living, but poverty or deprivation is not enough, for example, to explain meanings and experience attached around unemployment which had led to social disaffiliation in those cases. This is the freshness social exclusion concept brings to the table of social research.

Until the 1980s exclusion was used sporadically and exclusively as a synonym for poverty and marginality (Keller, 2014:8). However, as the research showed, the concepts of poverty or deprivation were no longer enough to explain the depth of dispossession experience for disadvantaged communities. By the mid-1980s policymakers have also acknowledged that we no longer live in a post-war society, and a new social justice approach is required (Silver, 1994:533).

Addressing social justice on economic terms has been off-targeting other forms of deprivation in society. In this sense, social exclusion emerged **as a useful instrument** to investigate dispossession. Moreover, beyond its instrumental use, social exclusion itself also has been acknowledged **as a social problem** wrecking social cohesion in society. It was problematic because "exclusion threatens society as a whole with the loss of collective values and the destruction of the social fabric" (Silver, 1994:534). Following this perspective, from the 1990s onwards social exclusion was put on the political agenda in Western countries. (Silver, 1994:533). The concept also reached its contemporary meaning around the same time (Keller, 2014:11).

From the 2000s onward, social exclusion goes beyond defining individuals around consumption capabilities and asks if the person in question is able "to participate in the key activities of the society in which one lives" (*CASE - Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion* as cited in Burchardt et al., 1999:229). Key activities might be economic (1) such as employment or political (2) including the right to vote or access to power as well as social (3) ones like to gain acceptance in public spaces regardless of their prominent identities. However, is every political, economic, and social disruption on earth fall under the heading of social exclusion?

The definition of CASE answers the question stating that an individual is socially excluded if one is a resident of the society(a), and not able to participate in the activities for reasons beyond one's control(b) despite one is willing(c) to do so (*CASE - Centre*

for Analysis of Social Exclusion as cited in Burchardt et al., 1999:229). Following this definition, not every form of exclusion in society is social exclusion. For example, as article a suggests, people in the global South might be having difficulty crossing the borders to find their way to more affluent countries in the West but it is an issue of migration policies rather than social exclusion. Similarly, people who are in voluntary seclusion(c) from the public or society, in general, are not counted as socially excluded. Thus, it is crucial to be clear on the context while pursuing social exclusion research.

3.1.1. Social Exclusion and Gender

Although exclusion studies try to address different forms of inequality by categorizing them as economic, political, and social, that is not the whole story. The social group, or identity, one belongs to is also an important axis in social exclusion research. Although exclusion is very contextual, there is still a pattern counting against especially historically disadvantaged communities. For example, children, seniors, people with disabilities, LGBT+ individuals, and women suffer from social exclusion and are forced to withdraw from participating in public life (Silver, 2015:2).

The injustice systems in society have a history that is intertwined with other diverse systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, and religion, and a combination of them with social exclusion deepens the vulnerability of already disadvantaged communities. As one of those social issues, already existing gender inequalities in our contemporary societies has an inflammatory role in the social exclusion of women.

Gender-based injustices in society exacerbate the formation of social exclusion as a result. Likewise, the social exclusion of women as a process pushes women further into the margins and entrenches gender inequalities in society. The gendering of the research topic here is crucial because social exclusion research by being gender-neutral misses the forms of exclusion women suffer from. As Rees argues by bringing evidence from numerous examples of social exclusion research; despite women constituting the majority of unemployed people and they are usually the economically inactive ones so on and so forth, gender-neutral social exclusion policies have not made much progress against the rigidity of these patterns (Rees, 1998:23). Likewise, unaddressed forms of exclusions can accumulate and pave the way for multiple

disadvantages or categorical inequality for some communities and create an "underclass" (Silver, 2019:3)

Discussing the exclusion of women as an outcome, I problematize the challenges faced by non-traditional Muslim women in Türkiye while striving for social recognition and social esteem as a part of it. Considering the social dimension of the social exclusion framework, recognition is not only one of the key determinants of participation in society but also a component that establishes the society itself. Misrecognition or disrespect is part of social exclusion as an outcome.

 Although there are several mechanisms at work in the creation of the social injustice problem around recognition, in this study I utilize gender-based inequalities in the country as an axis as well. I argue that already existing gender-based injustices in Türkiye have an inflammatory role in the formation of social exclusion for non-traditional Muslim women. Although the gender inequalities axis intersects with many other spheres including economic and political ones, within the limitations of this study, I only focus on social recognition as a part of the social dimension of exclusion.

3.1.2. Social Exclusion and Solidarity

The gradual evolution of the social exclusion concept sheds light on the variety of injustices in society. Considering the roots of the social exclusion concept in poverty, the initial policy work emphasized employment. However, over time, it is acknowledged that inclusion through paid work is simply not enough. The injustices in society are much more complicated than to address only by financial assistance. This is where social exclusion emerges. It introduces us to the multi-dimensional reality of deprivation.

However, social exclusion is also very contextual. It may highlight a process of dispossession taking place in a specific setting, or the social exclusion might be the outcome of some other processes in some other contexts or both. By context, space is a vital component in social research. Space might refer to physical spaces or different spatial levels such as global, regional, or national. Also, it might refer to public space, religious space, or even virtual spaces.

Globalization, liberalization, and increasing democratization demands by different actors of societies worldwide draw international attention to the concept of inclusion,

especially after the failure of many countries to combat inequality despite the overall economic growth (Silver, 2015:1).

Although social injustices are taken as an economical problem, it is not the whole story. Rising democratization demands connect the dots between economic disadvantages and political and social deprivations. Moreover, although the crises are outcomes of global socio-political and economic structures; the patterns of power struggles at the global level reflect upon subnational and local levels. Those levels are the main grounds that disadvantaged citizens feel the immediate effects of social exclusion. Likewise, citizens claim their rights through the institutions at those levels such as courts, parliaments, etc. The challenges raised can be political, such as access to power or participation in decision-making processes, as well as social, such as access to public space or claiming recognition of their identity. Those struggles trigger the social exclusion process of disadvantaged groups as well, by definition, this is the notion of social exclusion itself.

To sum up, the approach of eliminating economic inequalities that will promote the overall well-being of disadvantaged communities seems to fail. Simultaneously, the new social movements also contributed to shifting the attention from economic to social and political dimensions of certain disadvantages. As a result of that turn, the social exclusion approach emerged because poverty theories have been neglecting certain experiences by over-emphasizing the economic aspect.

Moreover, thanks to this shift in perspective, previously ignored forms of suffering have made their way to the agenda of policymakers. Social exclusion is one of those social injustices. It, indeed, might be used and is used by some scholars as a methodology to discover those social struggles. However, it is also a process and/or outcome signifying certain forms of suffering in some contexts.

Nevertheless, social exclusion is too broad of a concept to articulate all the social struggles. That is why it is crucial to subcategorize the social injustice under one of the dimensions political, economic, or social, of the social exclusion term.

In this study, I focus on the social-cultural dimension of exclusion in the case of non-traditional Muslim women. I want to understand, borrowing from Silver(2015), how distance among people, physical or symbolic, affects social interactions. She claims that through mechanisms such as family structure, social network, and other institutions, spatial segregation as a part of social exclusion affects social solidarity in

society (Silver, 2015:12). Focusing on solidarity, I also utilize recognition theory considering its share in the social solidarity discussions in the literature.

3.2. Politics of Recognition

Honneth argues that both the failure of economic redistribution politics and the overall increasing moral sensibilities in the societies shifted our understanding of justice from economic redistribution to the political significance of social or cultural disrespect. This shift brought, Honneth argues, recognition of the dignity of individuals to the center of attention from the 1980s onwards (Honneth, 2001:44). While forming his theory he visits different schools of thought, from ancient Greece to Kant and the concept of respect. However, Honneth highlights Hegelian master-slave dialectics as the first theory which directly places the principle of recognition in the center of ethics and follows that tradition (Honneth, 2001:45).

According to Honneth, deriving from Hobbes and Rousseau, recognition matters because only in their desire for social esteem, humankind stepped out of their natural state and formed civilizations, societies, and, therefore, norms (Honneth, 2001:46). However, the striving for respect and honor did not indicate loss of individual autonomy. Although Hobbes and Rousseau considered the strife for recognition as a threat either to political order or to individual autonomy, according to Hegel's dialectics, self-awareness is dependent upon experiencing social recognition.

Deriving from Hegel, Honneth argues that recognition of individuals in society is rooted in their socialized identity formation (Pada, 2017:2). Moreover, contrary to Hobbes and Rousseau's idea, recognition struggles do not work like a pendulum of threat between social order and individual autonomy. It is a mutually complimentary process. Solidarity is a condition of individuation since individuality is only attained through social relations.

However, there is recognition in all of that and why is it so much crucial? Honneth argues recognition is a key element to achieving freedom and freedom encourages solidarity in the sense that individuals do not perceive one another as impediments (Pada, 2017:7). However, how does recognition take place, and in which spheres?

Honneth introduces three patterns of recognition which he names *love*, *respect* (legal order), and *social esteem* (solidarity). He argues that those patterns provide formal

conditions for interaction so that human beings can assure their dignity and integrity in the society they live in (Honneth, 2001:50).

Love is the fundamental course of relation defining the social interaction between the child and the parent. Here the dependency of the child enables them to realize the parent as a separate part of the interaction or individual. The second sphere, *respect*, is recognized by the subject as they encounter other parties of interaction in broader social settings, and finally, culminating in the third sphere, "the intersubjective reflexivity of the individual is realized by society as in the form of social esteem or belongingness" (Pada, 2017:4).

 In the case of the RB community or non-traditional Muslim women, not being able to fully participate in society impedes their self-realization processes because identity is something built through intersubjectivity. Those social interactions and encounters form not only the identities but also the normative mechanisms upon which society is founded (Pada, 2017:3). Therefore, in the struggles for recognition, which is mediated on the multiple grounds of intersubjectivity, non-traditional Muslim women are not able to attain their fullest potential. Following Honneth's theory, a fulfilling self-realization is only possible through developing an anxiety-free relation with oneself and recognition is a precondition for that (Honneth, 2001:51). Likewise, as much as individual autonomy and self-realization in connection to that are vital for forming social relations, the individual needing the perspective of "a generalized Other" to assure their social status (Honneth, 2001:50). Therefore, intersubjective relations immanently need both a certain level of individual autonomy and reciprocal recognition of different identities, demands, and interest groups. One person, at the end of the day, does not make a society.

CHAPTER 4: ENCOUNTER OF ISLAM AND SECULARISM: TÜRKİYE

4.1.Modernization Experience of Türkiye

Although the modernization experience of Türkiye is usually associated with Atatürk and his reforms, the initial steps of Westernization had been taken as early as the late 18th century by Ottoman Empire. Beginning to lose battles by the 18th century, eventually made Ottomans seek an answer. This is where Ottomans turned their face to the West and took the first step in terms of modernization by changing the military structure in a Western way (Silverstein, 2003:501). Selim III initiated the process by establishing new military and naval schools with the guidance of the French (Lewis, 1961:39). In the following period, although Ottoman administrators have been determined to limit modernization to only borrowing technical improvements of the West, things went in a different direction. The exchanges with Europe did go well beyond technologies on the armed forces.

According to Lewis, despite, Islam, and Christianity encountered each other for ages on different lands, those encounters had insignificant impact on the Muslim community. However, French Revolution was the game changer (Lewis, 1961:53). In the case of the Ottoman Empire, the intensifying encounters and cooperations with the French continued in the 19th and 20th centuries and despite some disruptions, set the ground for the flow of Western ideas-equality, freedom, fraternity, to the Ottoman Land. It triggered the emergence of a new class that was following the tradition of pro-Western components and called themselves "Young Turks" (Silverstein, 2003:498). They were seeking answers to save the declining Empire. Being educated in the West, or modern schools in Anatolian land, Young Turks as the bureaucrats and the elites of the 19th century, were facing the West for solutions (Mardin, 1992:16). However, as the Empire was changing in the Western direction, there was a principal difference.

While the Western model of centralization of government, or power, included multiple confrontations and thus the compromises with the periphery, Mardin argues, the Turkish version of modernity was lacking it (Mardin, 1973:170). Historically, since the final years of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Republic of Türkiye,

unlike the West, there have been only two major social groups that were on a constant collision course: "the urban dwellers and the nomads in Anatolia" (Mardin, 1973:70). While the urban dwellers were the highly educated, usually coming from affluent families and have more financial, social, and cultural resources then the second group, the nomads who have been living in the countryside usually were not educated and thus have had little to no access to resources of the country. (Suzuki, 1964:208) (Mardin, 1973:178) (Mardin, 1971:201).

Nilüfer Göle, a Turkish sociologist researching modernity and Islam, argues this division indicates that the history of modernity in Türkiye "is the history of two conflicting cultural models (…) the Westernist and the Islamist (Göle, 1996:30). Accordingly, while Mardin's "urban dwellers" refer to pro-secular Westernist notables who have been occupying the center of society since early 20th century and the following period, "nomads of Anatolia" signify communities of periphery who represents the tradition and religion. Starting from this point of view, in this thesis, I research the encounters between those two cultural models and the identities that are shaped by those encounters.

4.1.1. Encounters of Secular Nationalism and Islam

Considering the definition of secularism, a secular state is one with no official ties to any religious movement. On this account, for example, while the United Kingdom and Greece are not technically secular states as both have remaining established churches, France and Türkiye are considered secular states where there is no reference to religion in their legal and juridical systems (Kuru, 2013:166). According to this definition, Türkiye is a secular state, however, secularism in practice is very contextual and this applies to Türkiye despite the strong emphasis on secularism in the institutions. Coming out of the modernization period, secularism was re-interpreted and has found a new meaning in the Turkish context. Although secularism and Islam are usually thought to be in an antithetical relationship, Arat argues, this positioning conceals the contexts where those two concepts intertwine (Arat, 2012:1).

Owing to modernization efforts starting in the late Ottoman years, Atatürk established the country on the already existing Westernization process but with one difference: an already matured idea of secularist nationalism (Arat, 2012:6). Thus, Atatürk's reforms should be read as a continuation of the process that had started in the 18th century

Ottoman Empire. Initiating the Turkish Revolution movement, Atatürk, therefore, did not start with a clean state but rather inherited the load of experiences of the late years of the Ottoman Empire. That situation had its advantages and disadvantages.

The main contribution of the Revolution to the overall modernization process was to dynamize it (Bora & Gültekingil, 2009:21) From the 1920s onward, the main goal of the reforms was to "modernize" the country in a more Western way, and it included eliminating stronghold of Islam on the society (Heper, 1997:34). Islam was the principal component in the ideology of the Empire and thus founding a new state required, in the perspective of founding leaders, disengagement from Islam. The political elites of the time, while not completely neglecting the importance of religion, did believe that for a Westernized Türkiye, religion should be eliminated at least at the state level. Atatürk has chosen national secularism as the ideology of the Republic and although not immediately, the Kemalist regime has become gradually militant against Islam (Ahmad, 1991:3).

The radical policies of the governors did have a reflection on the major social cleavage in the country. "The modernization project and its secularizing measures" of founding leaders have been "in tension with Islam" as the religion of the majority (Arat, 2012:3). Although, the secularization efforts date back to pre-Republic days, the major steps had been taken in the 20th century such as the abolishment of the caliphate[2]. Despite the endeavor of the political leaders in the 1930s to utilize nationalism simultaneously, as a substitute for Islam, the state lacked schools in provincial areas to teach the new ideology and remained limited with the elite communities (Ahmad, 1991:8). Considering the pro-Islamic traditional majority population in the country-side, inevitably, this top-down reform movement has confronted with resistance. However, those communities, usually residing in the countryside, lacked the resources, such as a political party, to resist through democratic means.

Türkiye was ruled under the single-party regime, Republican People's Party (CHP), up until 1946. In other words, until the 1950s secularism which is identified with the state and the CHP, founded by Atatürk, had been the dominant ideology in political

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[2] **Caliphate**, the political-religious state comprising the Muslim community and the lands and peoples under its dominion in the centuries following the death (632 CE) of the Prophet Muhammad. Afsaruddin, A.. "Caliphate." Encyclopedia Britannica, December 10, 2022. https://www.britannica.com/place/Caliphate.

decision-making processes. Democrat Party (1946-1961) was the first party to de-seat CHP and end the one-party era in 1946. DP was known to be situated in the center-right and aimed at gathering people who are displeased with CHP ruling (Demirel, 2011:52). Although DP was still receptive to principles of Kemalism such as nationalism and secularism, there was nuance in their understanding of laicity. DP in their party program states that "they do not approach laicity as a total turn away from religion" (Demirel, 2011:51). Granting this particularity is a very slight divergence from the strong secularist foundations of the Republic, it was the beginning of a new lineage. Today's Justice and Development Party (AKP), for example, evaluates itself as the continuation of DP and the following lineage (Duran, 2022). What is more, despite, AKP being a political party formed within the republic, party administrators have never neglected that they see their movement as a continuation of the Ottoman heritage (*Historical Revisionism in Russia and Türkiye*, 2018). DP's motto, "Enough! It is the nation's turn" summarizes exhaustion from 30 years of monophonic administration. Considering the secular elites being in the power positions during that era, the nation in DP's slogan refers to whoever is left out but the periphery people. The rise of AKP might also be interpreted accordingly. Despite there being more than 50 years between DP and AKP, it is not hard to find commonalities. Both of the parties were aware of the social reality of the country. The founding leaders of the Republic and the CHP consisted of people with military or bureaucratic backgrounds and were usually from the big cities. The initial years of the Republican Türkiye saw World War and some other major shifts which explain the rigid, top-down policies of the notables in terms of managing multiple identities of the society. However, after that Türkiye has run the threshold of single-party regimes. Thus, both DP and one of its much later successors AKP have been established on the ground of including the periphery to the game of democracy.

The rise of AKP in 2002 as the majority party, therefore, might be explained by well-interpreting the social cleavage and what the periphery is asking for as the "other" of the country. Although the periphery was not a minority population-wise, being excluded in terms of participating and benefitting from what the secular Republic had to offer pushed them to the margins of society. Especially in the early years of AKP, the ruling has been an answer for disadvantaged people who have been seeking ways to get their voices across through democratic means. However, we observe a change in the pluralist democracy position of AKP in the past 10 years. While the neoliberalist

policies remain intact, there has been an increasing religion and tradition emphasis in recent years. As pointed out by Erdoğan, the current President of the country, "being native and national" are the new objectives (Kasaba,2018).

Being native and national, especially, is highly related to having religion and tradition at the center of society. This strong reference back to the Empire days does reflect on strong attachment to religious rhetoric as well. Even during economic fluctuations, the party leaders rely on their explanations of religious discourse (Ruptly, 2018). However, this shift is deepening the already existing social cleavage and despite the mainstream idea, it creates disadvantages not only for the secularists but for the entire social segments in Türkiye.

4.1.2. The Social Cleavage

The Republic did not only inherit the early modernization works but also took over the long-standing struggle between the villagers and the urbanites, existing since the late Ottoman years, in terms of accessing and/or sharing the resources in the country. By resources, I refer not only to economic ones but also social and political ones, including who will get access to political decision-making positions or which identities will be recognized or excluded from the public sphere. This was not a problem in the majority of Ottoman times because state-individual relations were defined on a different ground.

The individual subjects, until the 20th century, were defined as vassals, *tebaa*, to the *Sultan*, with little to no decision-making power. Although the 19th-century modernization period had sown the seeds of the change, the major shift happened in the early 20th century during the second constitutional era, *II. Meşrutiyet*, which brought re-formation of assembly (Üstel, 2016:30). This was the time the transition from the *tebaa* to the citizen started. The founding leaders of Türkiye, from the initial years onward, embraced the citizenship concept with their interpretation and resumed with the policies to embed citizenship into Turkish society. This time, however, it was clearly "the patriotic citizenship of a secular republic rather than pious membership of a Muslim community" (Heper, 1997:34).

Despite the Kemalist vision being dedicated to utilizing national secularism as the glue of Turkish society, it has overlooked to the "social cleavage underlying Turkish

politics" since the beginning of the modernization process in Ottoman times (Mardin, 1973:170). The newly emerging country inherited not only the already established ground for modernization but also the social partition that came along with that process. In other words, the necessity to find a common ground between the urban dwellers who are also the political notables of the early Republican period, and the people of the periphery who have been characterized by their pro-Ottoman and religious in Islamic sense standpoint has now fallen on the new Republic's shoulders. This essential division and the tension between those two social groups has been a major issue shaping the later years' political struggles as well as the contemporary political arena.

While the urban dwellers have been the lineage of the founding elites of the Republic and have taken pro-Westernization, pro-state and secular-national attitudes, the nomads were identified with tradition and religion as the core of the empire as Mardin argues (Mardin, 1973:170). However, as Bernard Lewis points out, neither Islamists nor Westernizers are homogenous groups. In both of those groups, we can talk about the presence of fundamentalists and moderate ones (Lewis, 1961:234). The same phenomenon exists in contemporary Türkiye as well. Secularism in contemporary Türkiye is a pendulum with multiple actors including the fundamentalist and liberal ones but neither pole of the spectrum is entirely dominant in every sphere. Although the intensity of factionalisms on different grounds of the spectrums seems chaotic from time to time, in the end, this is how democracy works. Through encounters and sometimes conflicts the resources are redistributed among groups. Being able to negotiate demands through democratic means, including civil society work, prevents total segregation or polarization in society. This is the reason why polarization is a major topic of discussion in contemporary Türkiye. Thus, the issue is no more choosing religion over secularism or vice versa but rather to what extent secularism will be applied in the institutions and experienced in public life (Topal, 2012). In addition to that, how the governments and the bureaucracy as an extension of it will respond to usually conflicting demands and interests of different social groups in the country.

Borrowing from Shils, Serif Mardin argues that "society has a center" (Mardin, 1973:169) and who will have a say in which area, including the center, of the society

is produced, negotiated, and reproduced in everyday encounters. Intersubjectivities sets the ground for sharing the resources let it be economic or social such as esteem or recognition. In other words, normativity is formed through relations between subjects. In the case of Türkiye, as the two main parties of the social cleavage since the early modernization period, those negotiations characterize the relationship between the Islamist stream and the secular one. Canan Aslan Akman, a Turkish politics researcher, put that into words as follows:

> The relationship between Islamic forces and the secular Turkish state followed the complex trajectory of interaction during which co-optation and reconciliation emerged at critical junctures of their confrontation (Aslan-Akman, 2013:116).

As Aslan Akman points out, the relationship between the two streams has always been an area of struggle. However, counterintuitively, they do not always conflict but rather mutually compromise in certain conditions.

One of those confrontations is on gender politics terrain and here the two streams mutually compromise at the expense of deepening the vulnerability of women in Türkiye. Aslan-Akman continues, Republican secularism not strictly enforcing criminalization of religious marriage without the civil one, for example, made thousands of women subject to injustices while providing spaces for an Islamic practice (Aslan Akman, 2013:116). The response of the Islamist stream for that has been to adopt the secular gender codes such as equal rights in public and civil life with an interpretation of Islamic norms (Aslan Akman, 2013:117).

The encounters between the two streams eventually led to, despite some rigid breaks in between, the intertwining of both standpoints. This also signifies a change in the social imaginary. The top-down enforced Western model of modernization from the 19th century onwards looked at things through binary oppositions such as modern vs. traditional, secular vs. religious and defined the latter as inferior while reconstructing the former as superior (Göle, 1996:27) (Göle, 1997:86). However, the real-life experiences of people are not that rigidly constructed and much more complex. In the

Turkish case, one of those complex or hybrid identities is the Non-traditional Muslim woman.

4.1.3. Gendering Modernity

''Every revolution defines an ideal man, but for the Kemalist revolution, it is the image of an ideal woman that has become the symbol of the reforms. In the Turkish case, the project of modernization equates the nation's progress with the emancipation of women'' (Göle, 1997:86)''

Despite Secularism and Islamism being thought to be mutually exclusive, they have had something in common in the Turkish case: managing women's position in society. While Westernists argued that equality between sexes in different spheres of life including participation in public life is a pre-condition for progress, according to Islamists, women going out of private space(mahram) means eradicating traditional Islamic understanding of spatial relations and would inevitably harm morality of society (Göle, 1996:30). In other words, the female body is a site of struggle between the two ideologies in Türkiye. While Kemalist modernity utilized the female body as a China cabinet to build a sense of a secular nation, the Islamists view the female body as the border dividing private and public spheres and arguing that it belongs to the private one (Çınar, 2005:53). Thus, both of those streams had a say on the status of women for their reasons. However, in the attempt to utilize the female body for the sake of their ideology, both pro-Western and Islamist outlooks, have constructed their ideal woman image by differentiating themselves from one another. In this endeavor, the pro-Western Kemalist revolution created the ideal Republican Turkish woman in reference to the mythic Turkish past arguing that the pre-Islamic identity of the Turkish community has already involved male-female equality. This reasoning has been utilized to construct a disengagement from Islamic traditions. The New Republic has been formed as a continuation of the Turkish past concerning "the golden Turkic past in Central Asia'' (Arat, 1997:99). In addition to that, Kemalists interpreted civilization, on the premises of rationalism and positivism, as a single-track, progressive, and universal product (Göle, 1996:37). Therefore, there was only one way of being an advanced civilization and it was by imitating the West not only in terms of technical

improvements but also by realizing its cultural manners. This was the point that they diverged with pro-traditionalists. According to the pro-western, secular point of view, the West owes its success not only to its material progress but also to its total way of living or culture. This outlook fined Islamic culture for the failure of the Ottomans from the Constitutional era onward and argued that adopting the Western way of living is necessary for the advancement of the society. Especially, what is believed to be Islamic practices such as polygamy and the veil have been the main targets of pro-Western scholars and Kemalists later on. Both of those practices were concerning the women question. Thus, Islamic traditions, Kemalists believed, were impeding social progress, and unveiling would be the symbol of liberation of women from Islam (Göle, 1996:40). However, here the liberation of women should not be understood as encouragement of individual emancipation. From the perspective of the collectivist Kemalist outlook, women's liberation, education, and participation in public life including work is crucial not for the sake of individual liberation but "for their utility for the state, the nation, and the community" (Aslan Akman, 2013:117).

4.1.4. Islam and Women

> Determination of the parts of the body that are to be open to the public gaze, parts that are to remain hidden, and the manner in which this display is to be carried out is one of the most effective means through which boundaries that mark the public and the private are drawn (Çınar, 2005:53)

In the opinion of Islamists, on the other hand, women's role is central in society because they are seen as the main responsible actors in the upbringing of the next generations. This vital role, however, is to a great extent, limited to the private sphere(mahram). In order to understand the conceptualization of private space in Islam, it is crucial to look at how spaces are constructed in the Islamic tradition.

Unlike the modern secular view on the separation of religious(private) and non-religious spaces(public), the traditional Islamic perspective does not accommodate a distinction between sacred vs profane spaces. This view suggests that no space is beyond God's control. Thus, Islam attempts to leave no space unregulated. Therefore, as a religious system, it has something to say in every microsphere of life. It includes both the sphere of the material world such as physical bodies as well as the non-

physical world of thoughts and emotions both in private and public spaces. It approaches existence in a holistic way and tries to manage any encounter that exists.

Borrowing from Mernissi, a Moroccan sociologist, in the Islamic universe, there are two sub-universes: the universe of men and the universe of women and this division reflects the difference between the powerful and the subordinate. That is why the female body's access to the public, or the male-dominant space, is interpreted as a threat by traditional Islamic perspective. Although Mernissi has her observations on Morocco, some of her arguments are also valid on the Turkish case. Islamist outlook, for this reason, judges the Kemalist modernity project encouraging access of women to public space as the reason for moral decay in the society (Göle, 1996:43). This view is still valid in contemporary Türkiye. Lütfi Bergen, a contemporary Turkish nationalist-Islamist, blames modernity at this point and argues that pulling women out of the house (the private space) is a capitalist move and instead of emancipating women, it serves for exploitation of women's labor (Bergen, 2020).

However, despite the difference of opinions on the subject, correlated with regime change in Türkiye towards a more secular and modern political order, intersections of "female and male spaces" have become inevitable. Moreover, the sexual desegregation and increasing presence and thus encounter of non-traditional Muslim women with other identities in Türkiye have brought challenges.

4.1.5. Non-Traditional Muslim Women

"Who would feel safe in the country of fanatics?" says one blog post in the Reçel Blog (Duran,2016). AKP rising to and remaining in power for the last 20 years enabled communities of the periphery to move closer to the center of society. Thus, it contributed to forming new encounters between certain communities and ways of living that have been previously apart. Those new encounters have created new struggles as well as contributed to diverse ways of lives mutually transforming each other and setting the ground for the emergence of new identities. Non-traditional Muslim women are one of those hybrid identities in contemporary Türkiye. The binary definitions of east/west, religious/secular, and traditional/modern indeed provide an overall framework to chart the terrain of social conflicts in Türkiye, however, the Turkish experience of modernity involves its own complexities and ambiguities. Non-

traditional Muslim women's identity in Türkiye, having the breakthrough during the resistance against the headscarf ban days of the 1990s[3], have diverged from being the counterpart of the Muslim men in working together for the revival of Islam and emerged as a "search for new and more enabling expressions of femininity" (Kandiyoti, 1998:283). On the other hand, the strong meanings attributed to the female body both by secular/modern and Islamist/traditionalist worldviews obstruct the presence of Non-traditional Muslim women. Non-traditional Muslim women's quest for recognition is perceived as unsettling the mainstream societal norms. Thus, they are treated as a subject of inconvenience in many of the social spheres. This situation makes things hard for them to freely participate in different spaces of Turkish society. Sometimes those challenges come in the form of verbal harassment or at times things get more intense and they are subject to violence only to hear that "they" are "playing the professional victim again." This "they" refer to an ambiguous community to which non-traditional Muslim women are not even sure if they belong. "They" are considered to be part of a homogenous majority who are potentially AKP voters, belong to periphery communities, not well-educated but yet make it to the privileged positions thanks to their religious affiliation. This perspective classifies non-traditional Muslim women as a part of a homogenous, privileged yet "redneck," beneficiary of the nepotism, community and inevitably plants seeds of hate. This hatred against them does not only harm the community in question but also the overall well-being and safety of the country. As the blog page nicely articulates, in such an atmosphere no one would feel safe.

It is important to note that, the rise of AKP to power and the changing landscape of the economic, social, and political terrain of the country contributed to the emergence of new privileged communities. Thus, I agree that with this change, previously neglected communities have had a greater chance of accessing resources, economic, political, and social, in the country. However, the distribution of resources and access to them happens on a spectrum and despite the common misconception, there is no homogenous religious/traditional group in Türkiye that takes it all. It is always a site

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[3] For more information on the headscarf ban in Türkiye see: Cindoglu, Dilek, and Gizem Zencirci. "The Headscarf in Turkey in the Public and State Spheres." *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 5 (September 1, 2008): 791–806. https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200802285187.

of struggle between different interest groups and those groups are usually remarkably diverse in modern societies. Moreover, even if it is considered in the binary framework of modern/secular communities vs religious/traditional ones, the grass is not greener on either of those sides for non-traditional Muslim women.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the findings I have derived from the data source. Based on 11 blog articles, I deduced several themes and categorized them into five subheadings depending on the recurring patterns: female body as a site of negotiation (1), living between invisibility and hypervisibility (2), community pressure (3), tell me your attire and I will tell you who you are (4), being political: agency and empowerment(5). I discuss social exclusion of non-traditional Muslim women around these themes. In addition to that, I have embedded space as an axis into my thesis out my findings. I am analyzing how these themes are experienced in different spaces and institutions: secular-public space (university, public transportation, work, etc.), religious-public space (mosque and domestic public gatherings), and domestic space(family).

5.1.Female Body as a Site of Negotiation

The challenges around the positioning of the female body in the secular-religious Turkish context is one of the most repeated themes in RB in the past year. This recurrence is not only related to the female body being a tool utilized by the secular-Kemalist ideology to present and hand down to next generations values of the Republic (Çınar,2005:53) but also the configuration of the female body as a frontier between private and public spaces (Göle,1996:44). Therefore, Muslim women's body is a site of negotiation.

In the blog, the fundamental issues presented around the female body are related to the sexual segregation of space in Muslim societies. Defining women's bodies as belonging to the *mahram* (private) space, entrenches the sexualization of the female body. This phenomenon serves for an impaired glorification of the body and provides a basis for the practices around secluding the female body from the public gaze. Moreover, this seclusion does not only apply to adult Muslim women but also girls. For example, in this context, some girls growing up in religiously-conservative families are encouraged to practice the veil as early as nine years old. Veil, however, is not only about head cover, but rather implies a modest way of dressing, and living and it is learned in the process. Thus, Muslim families in Türkiye encourage their daughters to slowly shift to a more modest way of dressing from pre-teen years onward. However, seeking modesty withholds girls from enjoying certain activities

their peers do, especially in public spaces. For example, swimming. In the blogging site, one of the authors explains this situation through her experience of not being allowed by her parents to go to a public mixed-gender swimming pool. She begins her story as follows:

> A summer in the 2000s. I am gradually preparing myself for veiling, but I am not sure if I am yet in menstruating age. My family had bought me a pink headscarf to practice veiling already. They handed it to me saying that they preferred pink just as I like (Anon5,2022).

This beginning is important because there is a strong relationship between menstruation, sexualization of the female body, and the veil in mainstream Turkish interpretation of Islam. The author mentioning her menstruation age is related to the understanding that menstruation is perceived as the age a girl grows to maturity. Maturity is believed to be the time the Muslim person starts to be held accountable to God, *Allah*. Veiling in this sense categorized as a responsibility of Muslim women from that age interval onward and not practicing it is usually considered as disobeying the order of God. Therefore, the author (Anon5) is "encouraged" by her family from an early age to follow a modest way of dressing which includes veiling. This emboldening has also had a preventing side. From early ages onward she was "hinted" that when it is "time" she is expected to be veiled and protect her body from the public gaze. That public gaze was anonymous though, nobody named it.

Spending her summer holiday in a central Anatolian city, Anon5 continue to her swimming pool story as follows:

> In these hot days of summer, going swimming in the pools of hotels is the main leisure activity. Pools are for mixed-gender, thus, usually, boys and men go, are taken there, are entertained there. Men go swimming; women stay at home. One day my aunt decides to take her daughters swimming. My brothers will also be joining them. How about me? I am not allowed to. I also have a bug for swimming, but I may not. I insist: "how about I wear shorts just like my brothers? And even a t-shirt on it? So, it will be fine." My mother suggests calling my father then. I call him in hope only to hear: "No, you may not. Those clothes(swimwear) are revealing/not modest (Anon5,2022).

In this story, everyone having access to the pool but not her make the author feels like an outcast. The image the author shares in the blog post with her post affirms that feeling. The image is from the Movie "Addams Family Values," showing Wednesday Addams among her colleagues wearing their swimsuits next to a lake. Everyone except Wednesday wears an orange swimming suit. They are all blonde, Wednesday is not. Reading this image along with the post of Anon5, it is observable that the author feel for Wednesday Addams in that context. Wednesday character is known by her gothic way of dressing, her out of ordinary personality and moving schools due to problems she "causes" at schools. Wednesday is also a lonely child. Although it is a voluntary loneliness, in fact she simply do not fit in. When we get back to Anon5's, identifying herself with the fictional character of Wednesday Addams, she draw attention to how she feels out of tune with her social sphere and even with herself. However, in Anon5's case, what makes her identify with Wednesday is not a gothic way of dressing, being a morbid or having a spooky personality. They have another common point: their community excludes them. Similar to Anon5, social circles Wednesday attends fails integrating her to its course. She is seen like a complete stranger with the way she talks, walks, dress etc. Anon 5 too, no surprise feels like an outcast when she says:" I am the only one who started gradually experiencing modest dressing in my social circle. There is no one alike among my friends (Anon5,2022)"

This author's story evoked a similar experience to mine:

> *In the heatwave of summer holidays, while my boy cousin was free to go swimming at the public pool in the neighborhood, it was out of the question for me as a girl. He was eleven and I was only nine. I did not understand back then what was "wrong" with my body that I had to preserve it from the public eye, while my cousin's body could easily be present as it is in the public. I did it anyway. The moment we arrived at the pool; a bee stunned me. I remember the guilt I immediately felt. I made it to the pool without the permission of my caregivers. Not only that but also, I did something wrong. I was about to be in public with "revealing clothes" and God 'warned' me this way. I could not swim that day. We had to return. My confession was followed by the scolding of my grandfather. I admitted that he had been right. I have done something wrong. As a nine years old child, I thought back then, I have to refrain my girl body from the public eye* (d.k.t.).

Similar to Anon5's story, growing up, I was constantly told by pious women relatives, and neighbors that *"precious things must be put out of sight"* as they have referred to my body parts, sometimes fixing my clothing. I did not understand back then from whom it was I was hiding my body. There was an anonymous public gaze there, but it was very ambiguous in my child mind. As I grow into maturity, things have become clearer. It was men that we women were refraining our bodies from.

I got to observe it in the story of a close friend when we were both sixteen years old:

I met with M. during elementary school and in high school we registered to different schools based on our scores on the central examination. She went to a more prestigious school then mine. She was veiled, I was not. However, due to headscarf restraint in 2005, she was not allowed by the school administration to be veiled within the school premises, including the school yard. Like many other girls, she was removing her veil at the gate of the school. However, it did not "save her" from being excluded by her colleagues. In her case social exclusion was not embodied in the words of her colleagues all the time. It was more subtle, but she could feel it. Her colleagues and teachers were turning their eyes away avoid her as much as possible or when they cannot ignore her, make fun of her. A year living this way, M. could not help but shaved her hair off completely. It did not change the reaction of her colleagues much, but it was a resistance, I have come to realize after a while. Since then, I could not help but think about time to time why would a 16-year-old girl shave her hair? She was communicating her pain and resistance with this act. She was telling, if you violate my privacy(body) by claiming access to that, and I am not giving access to you, public gaze, to my hair. (d.k.t.)

Feelings around the body emerge accordingly for Muslim women. Especially, the shame. One author shares a memory of her with her mother on the subject. Her mother was subjected to physical abuse as a child and her daughter was the first person, she was able to share it after 45 years of having been in the emotional war (Anon1,2023). The author stresses the learned shame feeling and how it can violate a person internally because it was the shame that led her mother to disguise the crime that had been committed against her (Anon1,2023). It reminded me of my own experience with my own body and shame:

I have realized as I grow up, how "revealing" the body is thought together with shame, ayıp, in my language. I used to practice the veil for several years during university and I remember feeling bothered in case somehow my arm or my leg come into sight even for a minute when there are unrelated men around. Later, in the process which led me to decide not to continue veiling, I slowly realized there was a blockage between me and my body. I was not able to name that. I was trying to inspire myself to think how precious my body is since I protect it from gazes, it is not a trespassing area for public gazes. However, I was not able to fully embrace it as it is. Yes, I was confident with my appearance but somehow when my body parts are visible to the public gaze, I was feeling shy, like I have done something wrong. My discovery of feelings of shame continues, for 4 years now in Finland. For example, not following a modest way of dressing in the Islamic sense, 2 years ago I decided to experiment with my body. For example, I get to join mixed-gender sauna sessions, and doing that for over a year now, I have realized my relationship with my own body has changed. I developed a more loving and compassionate perception towards not only mine but also other bodies (d.k.t.).

Mentioning the body, based on her mother's experience, Anon1 questions the meaning of the female body in Islamic discourse. She especially refers to the rhetoric on "Islam emancipating girls and women." It is argued in the mainstream Islamic context, in pre-Islamic settings, girl offspring were thought to be a disadvantage to the family and thus they were "buried alive" (Naik, n.d.). The author mentions being taught about those stories from an early age and how "they used to build the story underlying that Islam saved her and many others like her so she should actually be grateful" (Anon1,2023). *Here, it is not clear to whom she refers by "they" but from my personal experience as a Muslim woman growing up in a conservative family, I relate to those stories. I still do not know the religious source this discourse is grounded on, but it is a repeated story for many Muslim women. Back to the question of emancipation, we are taught that Islam "emancipated" women* (d.k.t.). This is a narrative that is eventually

internalized. The veil is part of this emancipation narrative as well. In RB one author shares some of the opinions she keeps receiving on empowering and emancipating the power of the veil:

> (1) "You are veiled because you are a woman. Veiling is the peak point of womanhood. Even, décolleté is precious because of what hides. You are more precious. You are fully unseen. You are more precious as a woman" (Anon 6,2022).
>
> (2) "Female body is a playground for patriarchy. In the name of beauty, you are (non-veiled women) violating your bodies" (Anon6,2022).
>
> (3) "It is better to cover your whole body in the summer, protection-wise. Have a look at those with revealing clothing, how ugly their bodies, full of sunspots and they still want to wear revealing clothes" (Anon6,2022).
>
> (4)" I am free now. It used to take me hours to fix my makeup and dress up but now I simply wear my veil(headscarf) and leave home" (Anon6,2022).

This discourse implies that by choosing to veil, Muslim women pursue a life with dignity. Moreover, it is beneficial for them as well health-wise and aesthetic-wise. There is also a secondary meaning behind the third quote:" you are actually more beautiful/attractive but by choosing dignity over lust, you do not present your beauty." On the other hand, the author says:" she doesn't quite feel that way" (Anon6,2022). Then she goes ahead and asks: "Why I am not able to feel all those? Free, beautiful, precious (..) Recently, I think about the veil is violating me. What is troubling me? I cannot define" (Anon6,2022).

Moreover, the veil narrative has an implication way beyond modest attire. It also hints at sexual restraint and affects how a Muslim woman perceives her body, the opposite sex's body, and the way she evaluates romantic relationships. The 'modest lifestyle' does not give much room to experience and experiment with romantic and sexual feelings both for Muslim men and women. On this matter, Anon6 searches her heart and asks, "Do I lust for a sinful life?" (Anon6,2022). The answer is no. But still, she says that she feels uneasy about something. Then, she reflects on the common saying "This world is the place of trials and tribulations" (Anon6,2022), and articulates that she acknowledges it. But still, she asks, "how I(she) can remain pious after my(her) soul is excessively crushed" (Anon6,2022). In Anon6's experience, when she says 'sinful life', *Zina*(fornification) is one of the things she is referring to. However, the

sexual self-restraint experienced by Muslim people, she argues, traps them, especially Muslim women (Anon6,2022). However, sexual seclusion until marriage is not only governed by self-restraint.

5.2.Living between Invisibility and Hyper-Visibility

In the mainstream Turkish Islamic understanding, the heteronormative family is the basis of society and is promoted (Erbaş,2023). However, pre-marital sexual encounters between opposite sexes are considered a major sin and are named "zina(fornication)." Zina is grounded on the Quranic verse: "And do not commit adultery -for, behold, it is an abomination and an evil way" (Qur'an,17:32 translated by Asad,1980). Asad, explains adultery, zina, here as:

> "(...)It is to be noted that the term zina signifies all sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who are not spouses, irrespective of whether either of them is married to another partner or not; hence, it denotes both "adultery" and "fornication" in the English senses of these terms" (Asad,1980).

Therefore, sexual and gendered segregation of space is a tool used in the Islamic universe to prevent "zina." The veil is promoted with the same reasoning. This segregation defines female subjects as belonging to the private/domestic space while the public is defined as the subuniverse of men. However, this kind of setting creates unfair power relations among sexes and benefits one sex, male, while it makes the other, women, lose ground. One of the authors in the blog questions this injustice through the unfair treatment Muslim women faces when they use online dating applications. Referring to one UK-based sitcom TV series, "We Are Lady Parts," she expresses her astonishment at a Muslim women's character using an "Islamic dating app." She elaborates on her being surprised by telling how "normalized" it is in the UK case because she thinks in the Turkish milieu a Muslim woman using a dating app would result in either "she is laughed at or blamed on hypocrisy." On the other hand, she continues, "why Muslim women are expected to be angelic? Has to be the chaste one? Dating apps are full of Muslim men. What makes them think we, Muslim women, are free from desires?" (Anon2,2022).

Considering dating apps as an example of virtual public space, we can argue that there is a resemblance between how non-traditional Muslim women experience belonging in physical public spaces similar to virtual ones. Muslim women's experience with

being seen/present/recognized in public affects also their self-perception. For example, one author, explaining her thoughts on her gender identity asks:

> "If I lived in a yard all alone, would it still be the same? No gazes around me. How would I feel about myself? Would my gender make any difference then? Would I still be a woman because I still have a womb?" (Anon6,2022).

The binary construction the contemporary Turkish milieu has on men vs women and veiled Muslim women vs non-veiled secular women bypass the reality of non-traditional Muslim women in Türkiye. Moreover, not recognizing this new identity, further excludes Muslim women. Limiting Muslim women into a binary category against men or secular women, the mainstream Islamic discourse loses touch with the reality of Muslim women. There is an idealized Muslim woman discourse that is produced and reproduced by male, middle age, *Sunni*[4] Islamic scholars in Türkiye. However, this ideal image works like a rubric that scores Muslim women and tries to govern even micro aspects of their everyday life. Feeling overwhelmed with this process, one author pour out saying, "I might be practicing veil, but I am human, not an angel" (Anon9,2022).

Muslim women are encouraged not to be seen while all eyes are on them. One of the authors refers to the Panopticon model of surveillance to explain the "eyes" of her father she has been feeling since she was a child. (Anon10,2022) In the "panopticon prison," she seemed like she is free to do as she like but she always knew the surveillance, thus she could not (Anon10,2022).

The father figure here represents the public gaze in domestic space. Deriving from the author's analogy, similar to domestic space, Muslim women are under surveillance in public space. They are both hyper-visible and invisible just as they are expected to be: "I feel both invisible and [hyper-visible] feel like everyone watching me" (Anon6,2022). This experience is valid even for religious-public spaces such as mosques.

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[4] **Sunni**, Arabic **Sunnī**, member of one of the two major branches of Islam, the branch that consists of the majority of that religion's adherents. Sunni Muslims regard their denomination as the mainstream and traditionalist branch of Islam—as distinguished from the minority denomination, the Shiʿah. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia. "Sunni." Encyclopedia Britannica, November 1, 2022. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sunni.

In mosques, there is usually a space separate, less tidy, covered with curtains, and thus not visible from the main praying area: women's praying area. Women are not welcome in the main praying area (and vice versa) and there is usually a separate entrance for female-only space. Space usually speaks for itself and mosques as part of the Islamic universe which belongs to the public subuniverse give a noticeably clear message to Muslim women: be as less visible as possible. The mainstream Islamic discourse grounds this practice on the argument that the female body is one of the major temptations, *fitnah*, for men. UK-based Islamic scholar Sharif elaborates on this understanding with the following words:

> "The Prophet said: 'A woman is 'awrah; whenever she goes out, the devil beautifies her.' The word 'awrah, usually translated into English as 'nakedness,' can also mean weakness, vulnerability, and something unseemly or indecent. Women are considered 'awrah because of their desirability; because their exposure to being seen is like leaving one is home unguarded and hence vulnerable to attack. In Islam, the feminine form – desirable, alluring, and sensuous in the privacy of the marital home – should not be made to appear so in the public sphere. It is not just the objectifying male gaze that demeans or threatens women; sometimes some women need saving from their intemperate selves" (Sharif,2017).

This understanding tears non-traditional Muslim women between hyper-visibility and invisibility. The demand for them to be invisible is entrenching them to be hyper-visible in the public. Even in women-only spaces of mosques. As Anon10 discusses, Muslim women live in a panopticon model of prison, and they are free but yet they know that they are always under surveillance.

5.3. Community Pressure

One blog article discusses the issue of hyper-visibility and talks about how she feels "they" rip her to bits. "They" is the female, old and young, mostly veiled, Muslim women, present in the mosques. The author begins her story by introducing herself: a veiled, working, and studying young Muslim woman. When she spends her spare time in the mosque on the University campus she is studying, usually reads books with authors from a wide spectrum of political thought. However, she keeps receiving negative feedback on that through "disapproving gazes." The author names this "mobbing in the religious space." However, it has been going on for a while now that this has become mundane now, she says and tells us about "what happened this time":

> "I was in the mosque that day again both to pray and to study there a bit until my next class. The mosques are a usual place for aunties[5], *teyzeler*, I have seen it one more time. First, they criticized the way I turn towards *kiblah*[6]. They corrected me precisely. I said all right as I did not want to be a bighead. However, I still thought, we do not want to understand this verse from Qur'an:

>> "To Allah belong the east and the west, so wherever you turn you are facing ˹towards˺ Allah. Surely Allah is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing." (Qur'an 2:115 translated by Asad,1980)

> Then they(aunties), got on the way I dress as I pray. I was advised to wear a long skirt, loose trousers would not do the job because, otherwise, my knees would come into sight as I pray. I acknowledged that criticism as well and did as they say.

> After the prayer, I got back to studying. One of the aunties went around me a couple of times and finally decided to get a word. "Are you reciting the Qur'an?," I replied that I am studying. She did not like that and repeated the question and I repeated my answer. Giving me an eye from head to foot she said: Oh, we thought, you are reciting Qur'an (...) because it is time to recite, so we thought you do so as well.

> Time to recite! In the Mosque!

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[5] Here the author refers to old, veiled, Muslim women and calls them aunties. Those women the author refers to should be understood as the representatives of the public gaze in the religious-public space. They stand for a traditional interpretation of Islam in Türkiye.

[6] The direction of the sacred shrine of the Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, toward which Muslims turn five times each day when performing the salat (daily ritual prayer) Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "qiblah." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 20, 2020. https://www.britannica.com/topic/qiblah.

I am overburdened by other people in the house of God just because I am studying instead of reciting Qur'an as a veiled Muslim woman" (Anon9,2022).

Anon9's story tells us also about the peer pressure Muslim women are subjected to. It is not only the outsiders putting pressure on them, within the Muslim women community but there is also pressure to keep up with the norms of the mainstream Islamic view. Even in a university setting, considering most of the universities in Türkiye are secular institutions, non-traditional Muslim women feel peer pressure from other members of the Islamic community. Sometimes the reason is the book a person is reading, reading a secular author, etc. or the way she is dressed and thus it negatively affects the belonging experience and entrenches social exclusion of non-traditional Muslim women. This community pressure is present in another author's story as well. Anon2, continuing telling her opinion on the series "We're Lady Parts", tells her opinions about the community pressure Muslim women face:

Her (Amina's) passion for music makes things harder. Why would a Muslim man want to marry a woman whose passion is playing guitar? Or let us ask that way: why would a Muslim man prefer a woman who has passion? Women's occupations and passions are always belittled" (Anon2,2022).

In Anon2's story community pressure comes through triggering the emergence of negative feelings such as guilt or shame for having passions out of the gender roles cut out for Muslim women. However, the gender roles the Turkish milieu offers to non-traditional Muslim women are much too tight to fit. As Anon9's story exemplifies, even being invisible, being in a women-only space, or being veiled is not enough. Muslim women are not recognized as they are. There is always something to be corrected when they are the case. For example, the veil as Anon9 says is not helping her to attain recognition by one of the communities she is a member of, and it is vice versa. She is "overburdened" because she is veiled. Another author shares her opinion on the subject with the following words:

> "Despite the mainstream perception, there is not one homogenous Muslim women category available. Our gender already burdens all of us, they are invisible, but we feel them, those burdens, as women. Being on the veil does not make things easier, it makes it even harder sometimes. You can suddenly become labeled as the daughter of dajjal[7]" (Anon2,2022).

Here Anon2, by referring to one of the evil figures in Islamic understanding, dajjal, is obviously caricaturizing the phenomenon and with this way of phrasing, the author emphasize how thin is the line between the angelic Muslim women and the evil one. Although veil is a vital component of the essential Muslim women image in the interpretation of mainstream contemporary Turkish Islam, it does not guarantee inclusion for Muslim women. Often it is vice versa.

Going back to square one, veil, as a practice, is to be used when Muslim women are going out to public spaces. Therefore, theoretically speaking, Muslim women, as long as they are veiled should feel free to be present in public as themselves, but it is not working this way. On the contrary, defining the female body as *fitnah* throw the book at Muslim women in preventing pious men from being tempted by being as less visible as possible. That is why Muslim women are feeling that they are being nudged constantly. One blog titled: "They ignore that I am an adult woman" discusses this issue as follows:

> I have not been dressing inner hijab for some time now and it gets to them. They are the neighbor next door, someone on social media, an unrelated man, or a family member. Somehow, (they think) they know all the answers and qualify for advising me. (Anon8,2022)

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[7] ad-Dajjal sometimes spelled Dajal, (Arabic: الدّجّال, *ad-dajjāl*) *("The Deceiver/impostor")*, also known as the false Messiah is an evil figure in Islamic eschatology. He is to appear at a time in the future, before Yawm al-Qiyamah (The Day of Resurrection, Judgment Day) "Dajjal - New World Encyclopedia." Accessed March 25, 2023. https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Dajjal.

Following the experiences of Anon2, Anon9, and Anon5, Anon8 is also struggling with her community, and she questions like others, why people think they have a say in the dressing of a Muslim woman. Especially men? Despite they never probably experienced veiling themselves.

Another author elaborates the discussion on the attempts to govern Muslim women's lives and asks how come to those rules do not apply to Muslim men:

> What about men? Is men's hair/body parts not a temptation? We, Muslim women, are human too with temptations, and what if we also get attracted to the opposite sex's (visible) body parts? But I am not eligible to question veiling, that is beside the point! (...) I already dress up in a modest way (...) How can my kneecaps lead someone astray? Is this religion only for women? Don't men's tight pants turn me on while my kneecap turns someone on? Can you tell them(men) the same? I do not think so (Anon9,2022).

This double standard is applied outside of the Islamic community as well. An author with a secular-feminist background writing a "self-criticism" article in RB explains how she used to approach Muslim women and men previously:

> They (Muslim women) are shot in the head like *Malala*, you say "live by the sword, die by the sword", and they are forced to drop school and get married. You say, "She dropped with her consent", and you see a believing man (Muslim man) drinking Rakı (a local alcoholic beverage) and do not find it strange, however when it is a Muslim woman having the same, you say how is that even possible? (Anon4,2022)

Both Anon9 and Anon8 feel burdened by other people and not by God, and she thinks those people think they have the right to do that because she practices the veil (Anon9,2022), (Anon8,2022). Moreover, "people" is not limited to the Islamic community. When it is Muslim women in Türkiye, there is always room for criticism, and modest dressing is utilized as a tool to label the religious identity of those women. However, it should be noted that there is no standard way of modest dressing, and the veil(headscarf) is only one part of it.

5.4. Tell Me Your Attire and I Will Tell You Who You Are

Modest, or "muhafazakar" (conservative) attire in the Turkish context, simply, implies loose clothing, an inner hijab, and the headscarf. However, there are many interpretations of it and the way veil is dressed can also tell a lot about how a Muslim woman is perceived in Türkiye. What is called as "hijab" style, for example, is considered to be practiced by Syrian women in Türkiye. One author spell out her story with "hijab style" and how it affects the way she is perceived in the public:

> A couple of years ago on my way to home after work in the metro, I was about to zonk out. I realized that time someone next to me pointing me out told to their friend: "Those Arabs are very dirty. They sleep wherever." Since then, I do not style my veil like Arabs do. I used to think it is more universal but not anymore (Anon3,2022).

Author continue her story and discuss the social status she is placed by stranger men in the public as a veiled woman through the concept of "Abla" (elder sister). While she is showing her American-Muslim friend around in a touristic place, as two veiled women, a stranger man is calling them "Abla, get out of the way. You walk like you own the road" (Anon3, 2022).

Although the first meaning of the word, abla, is the woman who once have blood tie with and who is elder, it is commonly used in social encounters in Türkiye out of its initial meaning. In the case of non-traditional Muslim women, contextually, it might imply respect as well as it might imply a low social status based on gender. Especially in social encounters between men and women of who are around same age, the word Abla might be used to despite the women party of the communication. By the word Abla, men says, author argues "From my perspective, you are not equal to other women, and you are not in the same level as me" (Anon3, 2022).

On this account Anon3 also discusses the stand taken towards non-traditional Muslim women based on their modest style and how it serves for their exclusion:

If you are a woman, or from another marginalized community, and if you are following a non-trendy or non-fashionable style as a veiled woman: you are challenging standards of presentableness. (…) [It is about] how/with what rules you present your body (…). The word presentable, which was once added to the job advertisements, means that they will not employ someone with a headscarf(veil). Because if you are a woman, you are not judged by how much you know or how much you earn. You have other exams to pass in order to increase your symbolic capital and prestige. (Anon3, 2022).

This paradigm affects the way Muslim women relate with religion and their religious duties. On the contrary to secular perspective, many of the Muslim women says they are veiled with their own choice, so it is intended, not forced. However, as one author argues, it is not a question on religion anymore, but rather on the society: "God have left me to my own devices, but people cannot do the same" (Anon8,2022). The author elaborates further on the topic and concludes that this treatment is related to misrecognition of her bodily autonomy as an adult: "I am an adult (…) how come they do not see that?" (Anon8,2022).

Another author explains her thoughts on this case with following words:

I am veiled because as a believer it is my duty, but I still question that. If some part of my hair come into sight, people criticize me. So, I am wondering, how do those people perceive unveiled people? Like the devil? (Anon9,2022)

The Islamic community has a say not only in the attire of Muslim women but also their other religious practices such as praying and fasting. For example, in contemporary mainstream Turkish Islam, menstruation is considered as a time period Muslim women must avoid worship. Especially "salaat" (daily five-time prayer) and fasting are two of those worships to be avoided. Although there are contemporary Islamic scholars who object to this view, the overall attitude is about not questioning the reasoning behind. This attitude indicates how Muslim women's relationship with Islamic knowledge is

discouraged. They are refrained from questioning further with the fear that one may "go astray." Going astray here refers to diverging from mainstream Islamic thought and practices. This approach serves for Muslim women disassociating with Islam. Anon7 shares her experience on the issue as follows:

> (…) and today I am in a point where my relationship with worship is impaired. From here I look at my past and see an "ambitious" (in terms of keeping up with religious duties) woman. Despite the risk of being declared as a non-believer, you owned fasting during your menstruation. If you did not prefer fasting on that time, many people would think of you as more pious and easy-going just like a woman supposed to be (…) Like that article suggests, "Even if it does not sit right with you," you should trust the sources (Islamic) to not to "go astray." You should not stoop to the contemporary Islamic scholars' interpretations because post-modernism is not any good for anyone." Especially (they argue) feminism should not be involved in the religious practices. Today, I do not share with people that I also fast during menstruation to avoid their imputation: "you are already a deviant, and you apply this to your religious practices as well." (Anon7,2022)

5.5.Being Political: Agency and Empowerment

In the past 10 years, as the symbolism around veil has changed, practicing veil and presence of Muslim women, especially in secular public space, acquired new meanings. Still being the major indicator of Islamic religious identity for a woman, most of the discussion pivot on veil and thus being veiled is loaded with new and sometimes contradicting meanings. Women in RB finds it problematic because at the end of the day, they are the ones to suffer under that load of meanings.

This topic is also related to politicization of the headscarf in the public space from 1980s onward. Especially the activism pursued by veiled Muslim women has been an important turning point in this process. On the other hand, in contemporary Türkiye, politicization of veil has negative connotations. One author explains this situation with following words:

"The statement that every action is political used to be a bit of an exaggeration for me, especially in my early youth. When I decided to practice veil, I convinced myself that it was only about my faith. That was my intention. But my father warned me about otherwise, based on his experience, I was not convinced. Years have passed. In a video posted on YouTube recently, it was mentioned that the headscarf is political, and many women with headscarves reacted to this video, and I would like to say this: Despite the symbol that the headscarf currently carries, it is also a political act to not give up on being veiled. The same goes for all those labels tagged on to you when you decide not to practice veil anymore. However, sometimes it is hard to acknowledge that" (Anon11,2022).

Anon11's statement tells us about the extra weight sticked with veiled Muslim women and her struggle with that. This negative connotation is also related to the discussions during and afterwards of "the quasi-military coup of 1997(also known as February 28 Coup) which imposed severe restrictions on the headscarf, viewing it as a political Islamist symbol" (TRT World,2020). Being defined as a religious symbol, veiled Muslim women's access to most of the public and governmental institutions including Universities were banned. On the other hand, it also reignited the resistance of Muslim women to attain their right to public spaces. In Aslan-Akman's, Turkish political scientist, words:

Headscarved students who engaged in civil disobedience were both reclaiming the public sphere in the 1980s and 1990s, also representing a quest for a new identity comprising "new and more enabling expressions of femininity as a contradictory form" in their encounters with modernity as pious women. They often claimed that they felt emancipated with the headscarf, and that Islam itself could not be held responsible for the distorted practices which subordinated women in society and family (Aslan-Akman,2013:117)

As the quotation suggests, Non-traditional Muslim, as the successors of women who performed civil disobedience in 1980's and 1990's, do not question Islam, but the way it is interpreted and practiced based on those interpretations. Anon11's statement of "it

is also a political act to not give up on being veiled" becomes meaningful right here (Anon11,2022).

In today's Türkiye, the concept of veil is already worn out by seculars who claims it is a political symbol and the Islamists that it is a part of their religious identity and thus cannot be categorized as a political symbol. Therefore, whenever the debate on symbolism of veil is heated, Muslim women strongly oppose to acknowledging veil as a political act. Anon11 expresses her desperation on that. However, questioning if veil is a political symbol as a veiled woman, she continues experimenting with the concept of political and asks: "What else is political except being veiled as a veiled woman?" (Anon11,2022). Then, she gives example of her own writing journey, how initially she wanted to write on "light-hearted" subjects such as "fashion" because she thought it is "less political." However, after a period of avoiding anything, she thinks as political, "something bothered her":

> During that time, some of my book reviews are published in *Agos Kirk*. I was incredibly happy. Actually, it showed where I was standing, I was someone who authored amateur book reviews for *Hrant Dink*'s[8] newspaper. I was listening to my conscience. At that time, I received a few comments, my purpose was being questioned, why, as a veiled woman, I did not get my articles published elsewhere. Sometimes people do not know, sometimes they do not want to see or believe even if they know. I understood that my amateur writings were also a political act.
>
> Someone emailed to me asking what do you think you are serving for (by writing in an Armenian-run newspaper)? I do not think I was specifically serving for an identity or political stand or so, but I got the point of the email. I sent a response saying, I publish articles in other platforms too, why my intention is not questioned then? No response. At that moment, I realized that as a Muslim woman, I was writing for an Armenian newspaper, for the newspaper of Hrant Dink, an Armenian who was threatened, whose complaints were ignored and then murdered, and I was taking stand with a journalist who wanted peace. This was much more political than I thought (Anon11,2022).

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[8] "As editor-in-chief of the bilingual Turkish-Armenian newspaper Agos, Dink was a prominent member of the Armenian minority in Turkey. Dink was best known for advocating Turkish–Armenian reconciliation and human and minority rights in Turkey; he was often critical of both Turkey's denial of the Armenian Genocide, and of the Armenian diaspora's campaign for its international recognition. Dink was prosecuted three times for denigrating Turkishness, while receiving numerous death threats from Turkish nationalists. Dink was assassinated in Istanbul in January 2007 by Ogün Samast, a 17-year-old Turkish nationalist". Girap, Sineha. "Hrant Dink - Alchetron, The Free Social Encyclopedia." In Alchetron.Com, August 18, 2017. https://alchetron.com/Hrant-Dink.

The overwhelming conflict between the spectrum of seculars and spectrum of Islamists on political symbolism of veiling tear non-traditional Muslim women's identity apart at the end of the day. Already being disadvantaged due to their gender identity, they are not "feeling at home" neither in secular public institutions nor in Islamic ones including mosques, family so on and so forth. Although Islamic feminism is a new shelter that accommodate Muslim women in their quest for recognition of their rights, it is still not welcomed neither within the Islamic stream nor by the contemporary secular-feminist movements in Türkiye. As Anon4 shares in her struggle to understand Islamic feminism by citing from the famous book of Zahra Ali: "Islamic feminism; On the one hand, is rejected by feminists who consider religion as patriarchal, and on the other hand, it is seen and rejected by Muslim women and men as the westernization of Islam" (Ali,2014 *as cited in* Anon4,2022). Thus, the space of resistance is also extremely limited for non-traditional Muslim women. On the other hand, regardless of the space they are challenged- religious, secular, public or domestic, non-traditional Muslim women usually seek the answer through Qur'an or the religious narratives. It is interesting to resist by using religion as a tool while most of the criticism placed on them comes through the certain interpretations of religion. For example, on this account, Anon9 while sharing her disappointment with *teyze*'s in the mosques, use references from Qur'an as a counter-response (Anon9,2022). On the other hand, Anon1 reflecting on her mother's pain, tell us about the importance of speaking up the negative experiences even if they do not align with the Islamic norms (Anon1,2023). To sum up, non-traditional Muslim movement can also be read as an attempt of re-interpreting Islamic practices. RB in this sense is an agency in this process and contributing to empowerment of Muslim women.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this study, I aimed at analyzing forms of social exclusion non-traditional Muslim women suffering from in Türkiye. For this purpose, I utilized a blogging page that I have been following for so many years now. This study was important to me because I identify with some of the exclusion forms Muslim women have been experiencing for so long. Moreover, in the current polarized atmosphere of the country, social exclusion and misrecognition are not only problematic in terms of frustrating cooperation in society, but it also triggers the reproduction of already existing asymmetrical power relations in the disfavor of Muslim women. Individuals whose access to recognition is impaired, inevitably become less likely to be heard for making a change through the means of a liberal, democratic world. This phenomenon is a step in the wrong direction because it injures solidarity and thus society and prevents the development of more inclusive cohabiting practices. Therefore, my research objective was to highlight the exclusion phenomenon as experienced by the community in question. Moreover, I aimed to call attention to the suffering of a community that is assumed to be privileged by many.

With this study, on a small scale, I target to draw attention to the challenges of a historically disadvantaged community in Türkiye, and on a larger scale, I intend to contribute to the knowledge of more inclusive cohabiting practice with other subjects in Türkiye.

To sum up, young Muslim women in Türkiye are suffering from social exclusion and this phenomenon is reinforcing the alienation of this group of people. This issue is not only problematic in terms of harming the process of creating a more inclusive society but also significant considering the risks it is posing against the well-being of a historically marginalized and vulnerable population of women.

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