Women’s Islamic Movements and Politico-Religious Empowerment: Accommodation, Dissent, and Transgression in Turkey and Egypt (1995-2016)

by

ASLI KARACA

Submitted to

Central European University
The Doctoral School of Political Science, Public Policy, and International Relations

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Supervisors:
Lea Sgier, Nadia Al-Bagdadi
Word Count: ~103,000
Central European University
Budapest, Hungary
August 2017
# Table of Contents

Table of Contents ..................................................................................................................... 2  
Note on Transliteration ............................................................................................................. 4  
Abbreviations ............................................................................................................................. 5  
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................... 7  
Abstract ..................................................................................................................................... 9  
Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 11  
   Research Question and Case Selection .................................................................................... 15  
   Women’s Islamic Movements .................................................................................................... 17  
   Structure of the Dissertation .................................................................................................... 27  
Part I ............................................................................................................................................ 28  
Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................ 28  
   1.1. Social Movements in Authoritarian Settings and Feminist Corrections ................................................ 28  
   1.2 Visibility of Dissent and Transgression .................................................................................... 37  
   1.3 Acts of Politico-Religious Empowerment ............................................................................. 44  
   1.4 Capacities of Politico-Religious Empowerment .................................................................. 50  
Chapter 2: Methodological Approach ....................................................................................... 53  
   2.1. Scope of Women’s Islamic Movements .............................................................................. 53  
   2.2 Research Design .................................................................................................................. 54  
   2.3. Comparative Dimensions and Case Selection ..................................................................... 56  
   2.4. Data collection ................................................................................................................... 61  
   2.5. Data Analysis .................................................................................................................... 64  
   2.6. Positionality ..................................................................................................................... 65  
Chapter 3: Women’s Politico-Religious Empowerment in Historical Perspective in Egypt and Turkey ....... 69  
   3.1. Islamism and Islamist Women in Egypt since the End of the 19th Century ................................. 69  
   3.2. Initial Formations of Women’s Islamic Movements in Turkey .................................................. 80  
Part II: Women’s Islamic Movements and Politico-Religious Empowerment in Turkey (1995-2016) ....... 89  
Chapter 4: Formation and Evolutions in Women’s Islamic Movements in Turkey (1995-2016) ............ 94  
   4.1 The Central Concern of the Women’s Islamic Movements in Turkey: Headscarf Bans ................. 94  
   4.2. Molarization: Silent Efforts over the Bans during the secularist-AKP clash (2002-2008) ............. 105  
   4.3. Molecularization: Disruptive Repertoires of Contention, New Issues and Divisions within WIMs (2008-2016) .................................................................................................................... 120
Note on Transliteration

I use International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) Arabic transliteration system throughout the dissertation, except for the internationally accustomed styles of personal names such as Hosni Mubarak and for the Arabic words in use in English such as *Quran, ijtihad* or *khul’*. In case of concurrent transcriptions of Turkish and Arabic words, Turkish is written first separated by a forward slash (/) from the Arabic word.
Abbreviations

AKDER: Ayrımcılığa Karşı Kadın Hakları Derneği – Women's Rights Association against Discrimination
AKODER: Aileyi Koruma ve Destekleme Derneği – Association for Protecting and Supporting Family
AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – Justice and Development Party
ASWIC: Association for Studying Women in Civilization– jamʿīya dirāsāt al-mar`ā w-āl ḥaḍāra
AUC: American University in Cairo
BKP: Başkent Kadın Platformu Derneği – Capital City Women’s Platform Association
ÇATOM: Çok Amaçlı Toplum Merkezi – Multi-Purpose Community Centre
CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEWLAC: Center for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance – markaz al-qadāyā al-mar`ā al-maṣrīya
CIHRS: Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies
CWO: Coalition of Women’s Organizations
DEDI: Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute
ECWR: Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights
EEC: European Economic Community
EFU: Egyptian Feminist Union
EIPR: Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
FEPS: Faculty of Economics and Political Science
FJP: Freedom and Justice Party – ḥizb al-ḥurrīya wa al-ʿadāla
GİKAP: Gökkuşağı İstanbul Kadın Kuruluşları Platformu – Rainbow Istanbul Women's Organizations' Platform
GONGO: government organized non-governmental organization
Hazar: Hazar Eğitim Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği - Hazar Education Culture and Solidarity Association
HİKDE: Hanımlar İlim ve Kültür Derneği – Ladies Learning and Culture Association
IIIT: International Institute of Islamic Thought
İKADDER: İstanbul Kadın ve Kadın Kuruluşları Derneği – Istanbul women and women’s foundations Association
Acknowledgements

“The research to this dissertation was sponsored by Central European University Foundation, Budapest (CEU BPF). The theses explained herein are representing the own ideas of the author, but not necessarily reflect the opinion of CEU BPF.”

I dedicate this research to the memories of Buhriye Üçok and Gonca Kuriş and other women who have been courageous to dissent visibly. I thank all of my interviewees in Turkey and Egypt for sharing their views and actions with me. I thank CEU and CEU Foundation for providing scholarship and grants to be able to conduct this research.

I want to express my gratitude for faculty members who have guided me: My supervisor, Lea Sgier has supported me since 2010 with her critical eye on my work and with her friendship. My second supervisor, Nadia al-Bagdadi, also with a critical eye, kept me up with the literature and showed me different perspectives. My panel member, Carsten Schneider has always been encouraging throughout the process. Thomas Rooney from the Center for Academic Writing not only helped with the academic language but lifted up and inspired my writing. His feedback has been priceless. All the possible misrepresentations, mistakes and omissions belong to me, despite this wonderful support network.

I benefited from discussions and support of several people at American University in Cairo, in Egypt. I thank Riham Bahi, Sherene Seikaly, Sandrine Gambline, Sean David Hobbs, Hoda Elsadda, Nihad Fottouh and Martina Rieker. I thank Bahi and Seikaly for hosting me at Political Science Department and Middle East Studies Center at AUC.

I am very grateful to Özlem Altan-Olcay who introduced me to gender studies at Koç University in 2008 and who has supported me after. Comments from Line Nyhagen, Nükhet Sirman, Ayşe Dursun, and Bertil Emrah Oder were very helpful between 2011-2015.

We have joked a lot about the difficulty of Ph.D. life, but it has probably been a rare period in our lives when we had the luxury to focus on our one and unique idea, as Peter would say. Renira, Georgiana, Iza, Manu, Alex, Jelena, Misi, Gorana, Jose, Stefan, Erna, Caitlin, Roland, and Artak have enriched my life. Tamer helped with some Arabic translations, and I enjoyed our discussions.
about the region. Special thanks to Jelena for reading the introduction and helping me to clarify some concepts.

Our Turkey group in Budapest gave me sense of belonging and connection much needed! İşık, Selin, Pınar, Sercan, Didem, Demet, Emir, Eda, and Anıl, with you I had invaluable experiences.

Gizem, Kardelen, Deniz, Özlem, Atacan, Müge, Ayça, Tuba, Berk, and Aytek, your presence and friendship have mattered a lot.

Peter has always inspired me with his never-ending excitement for history, politics, art, and dissent. He has encouraged me to express myself through art, words, music and with further engagement with the dissertation.

My mother Nuray has transmitted me the love of learning and curiosity. My father Kazım has given me encouragement to continue, my brother Nusret has protected me since childhood and often comforted me by showing the rational way. My sister-in-law Aslı has given joy and laughter. My nephew’s arrival reminded me that I should be more independent and productive. My grandmother and late-grandfather have taken care of me and also introduced me the peace and love of learning. My wonderful aunts, uncles and cousins have always been positive and fun. I thank everyone for providing me a delightful ‘home’.

Lamia, Yousra, Randa and Tofee became my family in Cairo. They made me think that ‘home’ is possible far away from ‘the home’.

I also thank my ney teachers, Yavuz Yekta and his wife Nurhan – for further introduction to music and universal love; and İsmail Hakkı and his wife Nilüfer, for friendship and inspiration with music. I also thank Fazıl Say for the musical hand during the writing and contemplation process. His connection to and production for his homeland have inspired me to produce for the homeland too.
Abstract
An increasing religious traditionalism and authoritarianism worldwide, and in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in particular, pose a severe threat to the politico-religious empowerment of women. The threats have made examining women’s Islamic movements (WIMs), one of the most important agents of political-religious empowerment of Muslim women, all the more necessary. What have been the capacities of women’s Islamic movements for increasing and embodying politico-religious power in the Muslim-majority countries in the MENA for the last twenty years? How do institutional configurations of religion and other contextual differences across MENA influence politico-religious empowerment of women and movement patterns of WIMs?

Movement elements and contextual constraints influencing the empowerment capacities of WIMs have been overlooked, as scholars have mostly focused on the Islamic ideologies and discourses of WIMs. As opposed to the emphasis on ideology and agency in the literature on women’s Islamic movements, I analyze empowerment capacities of women’s Islamic movements with a contextual social movement approach. I study the rights advocacy of WIMs as opposed to the women’s piety movements. Conducting a case-oriented comparative study in major cities in Turkey and in the capital of Egypt – two countries with different religion-state configurations, secularization patterns, and governing parties – enables us to see the effects of political institutions and context on the movement dynamics of WIMs and politico-religious empowerment of women.

The dissertation combines multiple data collection tools including personal interviews, ethnography, participant observation, and collection of published, broadcast and online sources. Data analysis is based on historical tracing and discourse analysis. The findings are based on fieldwork in Istanbul, Ankara, and Bursa between May 2013 and January 2016 over a period of fifteen months, and in Cairo over six months in 2014.

Two primary fields of literature have guided the theoretical framework: Social movement literature and literature on power contestations between religion and gender. I deploy the critical perspectives in both kinds of literature, especially those on the specificities of authoritarian contexts in the MENA. The findings of the thesis, however, signal a need for a new conceptual lens in understanding women’s empowerment and movements in authoritarian and patriarchal religious contexts. I argue that the concept of visibility of dissent, incorporated from recent anthropological studies, captures dissenting and transgressive acts of women in broader public
space in authoritarian and patriarchal contexts more fittingly than ‘participation’ or ‘collective action’ concepts in social movement literature, and than the ‘power of presence’ (Bayat 2007) or ‘everyday politics’ emphases in the literature on authoritarian settings. Secondly, I adapt Linda Woodhead’s (2007) typology on religion’s relation to gender to create a typology of politico-religious acts of WIMs, namely accommodating, dissenting and transgressing. Finally, by juxtaposing these acts with their stances on broader political oppression in their contexts, I demonstrate that WIMs can attain several politico-religious empowerment capacities, namely consolidating, reformative and transformative ones. The dissertation provides a contextual- and movement-sensitive analysis of empowerment capacities of the women’s Islamic movements, based on the recent empirical data from two important countries in the MENA.