

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

by

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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– jam‘īya dirāsāt al-mar’ā w-āl ḥadāra

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

CEWLA: Center for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance – markaz al-qaḍāyā 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-‘adāla

GİKAP: Gökkuşluğu 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

KADEM: Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği – Woman and Democracy Association
KSSGM /KSGM: Kadının Statüsü ve Sorunları Genel Müdürlüğü/Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü (current) - Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women
KVINFO: Danish Center for Research and Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity
MB: Muslim Brotherhood
MENA: Middle East and North Africa
MÜSİAD: Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği- Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association
Nazra: Nazra for Feminist Studies – nazra l-il-dirāsāt al-nisawīya
Noon Center: Noon Center for Women and Family Issues - markaz nūn li-qaḍāyā al-mar'ā wa-l-usra
PKK: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê – Kurdistan Workers' Party
POS: Political Opportunity Structures
PSL: Personal Status Laws
RPP: Republican's People Party – Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi
SCAF: Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
SIS: Sisters in Islam
SMT: Social Movement Theories
TEKH: Türkiye Entellektüel Kadın Hareketi - Intellectual Women's Movement of Turkey
The Initiative: Kadına Şiddete Karşı Müslümanlar İnisiyatifi - Muslims against Violence against Women Initiative
TÜRAP: Türkiye Aile Platformu - Family Platform of Turkey
UKADER: Uluslararası Kadın ve Aile Derneği - International Women and Family Association
WGT: Women who Get Together – Buluşan Kadınlar
WIMs: Women's Islamic movements
WLUML: Women Living under Muslim Laws
WMF: Women and Memory Forum - al-mar'ā w-al-dhākira
WWI: World War I

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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.