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YILDIZ TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
M.A. PROGRAMME IN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

M.A. THESIS

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GENDER
DISCOURSE IN ISLAMIC FEMINIST LITERATURE
AND THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE TURKISH
PRESIDENCY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

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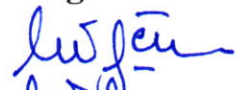



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ABSTRACT

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GENDER DISCOURSE IN ISLAMIC FEMINIST LITERATURE AND THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE TURKISH PRESIDENCY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

Esra Keskin Korumaz

June, 2016

Feminism as a social movement has been known around the globe since the late 1890s. Although it aimed to express the concerns of every woman in the world and emancipate them through academic discussions and legal adjustments, the Feminist movement has become a target for harsh criticisms in later years since it failed to represent women of different races, ethnicities, classes and religions. Because of this underrepresentation, new groups of feminists have occurred since the 1990s and Islamic feminism is one of them. The main purpose of Islamic feminists is to reinterpret Islamic texts with a female perspective in order to reveal the gender equality given in the Qur'an and Islam. They also argue that it is the patriarchal interpretations or religious institutions that shape the way of thinking on women and gender issues. In Turkey, the Presidency of Religious Affairs can be given as the most prominent example for the religious institutions that have an impact upon a great number of people in terms of religious matters, including women and gender issues. Setting out from these claims, this dissertation takes the perspectives of Islamic feminists as the focal point of the study and aims to analyze the publications of the Presidency of Religious Affairs. Through these analyses, this dissertation strives for comparing the gender discourse of the Presidency of Religious Affairs publications and Muslim feminists so as to find out the similarities and differences between the two. Bearing this goal in mind, this dissertation focuses on popular periodicals, Friday sermons and books published by the Presidency of Religious Affairs and looks for how women and gender issues such as her position in creation, marriage, family, public sphere and law etc. are explained and unfolded in these publications to draw a general conclusion on the institution's gender discourse.

Keywords: feminism, gender discourse, gender equality, Islamic feminism, Presidency of Religious Affairs, religion

ÖZ

İSLAMCI FEMİNİZM VE TÜRKİYE DİYANET İŞLERİ BAŞKANLIĞI YAYINLARININ CİNSİYET SÖYLEMİNİN KARŞILAŞTIRMALI ANALİZİ

Esra Keskin Korumaz

June, 2016

Feminizm, 1890'lı yılların sonundan itibaren telaffuz edilmeye başlanmış ve önemli bir toplumsal hareket haline gelmiştir. Bu hareket, akademik tartışmalar ve yasal düzenlemeler yoluyla tüm kadınların sorunlarını dile getirmeyi ve onları özgürleştirmeyi amaçlasa da farklı uluslardan, etnik kökenlerden, sınıflardan ve dinlerden gelen kadınları yeterince temsil etmediği düşüncesiyle sonraki yıllarda sert eleştirilerin hedefi olmuştur. Temsil edilmedeki bu yetersizlik sebebiyle yeni feminist gruplar ortaya çıkmıştır ve İslamcı feminizm de bunlardan birisidir. İslamcı feminizmin ana amacı, İslami metinleri kadın bakış açısıyla yeniden yorumlamak ve Kur'an'ın ve İslam'ın bizlere verdiği cinsiyet eşitliğini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu Müslüman feministler, aynı zamanda kadın ve cinsiyet sorunlarına olan bakış açımızın ataerkil yorumlamalar ve dini kurumlar tarafından şekillendirildiğini de savunur. Türkiye'de ise kadın ve cinsiyet konularını da içeren dini meselelerde pek çok insanı etkileme gücüne sahip dini kurumlar arasında en önemlisi Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'dır. Bu iddialardan yola çıkarak, bu tez İslamcı feministlerin bakış açısını çalışmanın odağına koymakta ve Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nın yayınlarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu analizlerle birlikte, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı yayınlarının ve Müslüman feministlerin cinsiyet söylemleri karşılaştırılmaktadır. Bu hedefi gerçekleştirmek için, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nın yayınladığı dergiler, Cuma hutbeleri ve kitaplar üzerine yoğunlaşarak yaratılış, evlilik, aile, kamusal alan ve hukuk gibi konularda kadının yeri ve rolünün nasıl anlatıldığı incelenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: cinsiyet eşitliği, cinsiyet söylemi, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, din, feminizm, İslamcı feminizm

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

ABSTRACT	iii
ÖZ	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. An Overview and Theoretical Bases	1
1.2. The Purpose of the Study and Literature Review	15
1.3. Methodology, Research Question and Content of the Study	18
2. DEVELOPMENTS OF FEMINISM: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW	23
2.1. Feminist Movement and Its Historical Background	23
2.1.1. The Origins of the Term	23
2.1.2. Western Feminist Movements in Three Waves	25
2.1.3. Feminist Movement in Turkey	30
2.1.3.1. Feminism in Late Ottoman Times	31
2.1.3.2. Feminism in the Republican Times	33
2.1.3.3. Feminism from the 1980s onwards	35
2.2. Religious Communities and Feminism	38
2.2.1. Jews and Feminism	38
2.2.2. Christians and Feminism	41
2.2.3. Buddhists and Feminism	43
2.2.4. Muslims and Feminism	46
3. MAJOR ARGUMENTS OF ISLAMIC FEMINISTS	56
3.1. Theoretical Background of Islamic Feminism	56
3.2. The Controversial Term ‘Feminism’ in Islam	60
3.3. Discussions on the Strategies and Sources of Islamic Feminists	63
3.4. The Main Arguments	67
3.4.1. The Ontological Discussions	67
3.4.1.1. Woman and Creation	68

3.4.1.2. Gender Equality	74
3.4.2. The Practical Issues	81
3.4.2.1. Woman in Marriage and Family	81
3.4.2.2. Woman's Place and Rights in Public	86
4. THE DISCOURSE OF THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE PRESIDENCY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS ON WOMEN.....	95
4.1. The Status and Jurisdiction of the PRA.....	95
4.2. Historical Background and Significance of the PRA	96
4.3. Comparisons of Publications of the PRA and the Discourse of Muslim Feminists on Women.....	97
4.3.1.Woman in Creation	98
4.3.2. Gender Equality.....	109
4.3.3. Woman in Marriage and Family	120
4.3.4. Woman's Place and Rights in Public	127
5. CONCLUSION.....	133
BIBLIOGRAPHY	143
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	156

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Overview and Theoretical Bases

It is an observable fact that majority of Muslim women have been subject to male dominance or victimized by the patriarchal norms of their society which are alleged to origin from their religion. However, Islamic feminists point to the integration of patriarchal discourses or norms into the interpretation of holy texts in order to prove that Islam is egalitarian in essence and Muslim women can be emancipated through this new perspective. Turkey is also a country where Islamic norms, beliefs and practices have always prevailed in political and social organization of the society. As Turkish Muslim women and gender relations have also been influenced by the norms of Islam, the challenges and new claims put forward by Islamic feminists seem related to the context of Turkish Muslim women too.

Bearing the problematic situation of Muslim women in mind, I aim to trace the reflections of the arguments of Islamic feminists in Turkey. Since it is impossible to analyze all publications on the relationship between gender and religion, I aimed to concentrate my attention on a major institution. For this purpose, I chose to analyze the publications of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA) which is a well-respected religious institution in Turkey. It holds a critical position for this study as it constantly produces and shapes the religious discourse on women through its publications, *fatwas* and speeches. By analyzing the publications of the PRA, this study serves its purpose which is to find out whether Islamic feminism has its reflections on the discussions of this institution or not.

Departing from these, I would like to compare the discourse of the PRA publications and International Islamic feminism. However, it should also be noted that the articles and books published by the PRA are written by individual scholars and some PRA experts; therefore these publications may only reflect the opinions of those scholars

instead of the discourse of the PRA. Although there is a close link between the opinions of the PRA experts and the institution, one should refrain from being judgmental against the PRA by just looking at the articles/books mentioned in this study. In this framework, before going into a deeper analysis, I will provide a short overview of feminism and Islamic feminism so as to base the discussion of this study on solid ground.

The word ‘feminism’ has been used and circulated since the 1880s to refer to the struggles to promote the status of women and to eradicate the misogynist constructions in the patriarchal societies (Offen, 1988). Diverging from Western feminist waves, Islamic feminism, the focal point of this study, traces back to the 1990s when a number of Muslim female and male scholars began to question and challenge the patriarchal interpretations of the Qur’an in order to reveal the egalitarian nature of the Qur’an and wipe away the patriarchal system in the Muslim world to emancipate Muslim women (Badran, 2009). As a social movement, Islamic feminism has been highly contested in numerous Muslim and non-Muslim countries since its emergence in the 1990s. Although the name itself seems as an oxymoron at first sight, various scholars have proved that Islam and feminism can go hand in hand. Despite the divergence of Muslim scholars whether to name the movement as feminism or not, most of them such as Asma Barlas, Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Leila Ahmed and Ziba Mir-Hosseini reach a consensus on the egalitarian nature of the Qur’an which can be found out by a close examination of the verses and its Weltanschauung.

Although Islamic feminism was initiated by women in Muslim countries especially in the Middle East, it has turned into a powerful and global discourse influencing women in other parts of the World. Going from strength to strength, Islamic feminism has evolved into a discourse that may contribute to the redefinition of feminism (Badran, 2009). Turkey is also one of these countries influenced by the Islamic feminist discourse and this is one of the reasons why the theoretical framework of Islamic feminism is chosen to analyze the discourse of the publications of the PRA in Turkey. As for Islamic feminism in Turkey, it is possible to trace back the origins of the movement in the 1990s. Like other Muslim countries, the Islamist movement in Turkey has given rise to Islamic feminism. With the establishment of conservative parties, Muslim women found the opportunity to participate in the

public sphere in order to help the politicization process of those parties. Consequently, Muslim women began to be more visible in public and new problems came along with it. That's when Muslim women in Turkey started to question the religious and social norms by seeking for gender equality in the private and public realm (Arat, 2000). Their struggles for elevating Muslim women to an equal status with men without giving up their religious identity can be named as Islamic feminism.

Among the hot-debated issues going on in that period, the headscarf or veiling through which Muslim women gained an opportunity to represent themselves in the public sphere came forward (Göle, 2000) and it seems clear that they have made a great progress in this respect. To describe their efforts, many scholars such as Yeşim Arat and Nilüfer Göle have been using the term so as to define and describe the movement of Muslim women in Turkey since the 1990s (Badran, 2009). Although most of the scholars refrain from calling themselves 'Islamic feminist', they have contributed to the field with their works. Instead of using the label 'feminist' or 'Islamic', some scholars call themselves 'Muslim feminists' or 'Muslim believing woman' etc. However, I decided to use the term 'Islamic feminist' in this study since this term has been used more than others in literature and gained more attention in the field. Therefore, these women were addressed as such throughout the study. On the other hand, we should also know that these terms are used interchangeably in literature.

Another point that should be mentioned here is that we cannot categorize all Muslim female scholars whose opinions or works cited here as Islamic feminists. It is useful to make a distinction between scholars who explicitly involve in the movement and who puts forward analysis and explanations about this movement without attaching themselves to the movement. While Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi Shahla Sherkat, Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal can be put into the first category; Asma Barlas, Margot Badran, Nilüfer Göle, Yeşim Arat benefit the scholars in the second category whose works and analyses have been influential for Islamic feminism and this study.

In this study, I based my analyses on the arguments of international Muslim feminists rather than Turkish ones since Turkish Muslim feminists have not provided a systematic approach and explanations on gender unlike international Islamic

feminists. This lack of intellectual discourse among Turkish Muslim feminists may stem from the specific conditions of Turkey which is a secular state and does not use Islamic law unlike other Muslim countries. Therefore, the position of Turkish women seems comparatively more advantageous compared to millions of women in the Muslim world and they end up with less interest in religious matters that causes hot debates in other Muslim countries.

The arguments of Islamic feminists lie at the heart of this study, therefore it is of vital importance to touch upon its significance for Muslim women and feminism itself. By doing this, we can have a better understanding of how it influences the discourse of the PRA with respect to women and gender issues. Firstly, the studies and arguments of Islamic feminists have shown that feminism is not just a Western concept; rather it transcends the borders and belongs to all women struggling for their rights in spite of their differences in class, ethnicity, religion etc. Another contribution of Islamic feminism is to open up a space for Muslim women to realize that their oppression or degradation results from the patriarchal norms or traditions embedded in the interpretation of the Qur'an rather than true Islam. As a result, Muslim women found a chance to elevate their status in the society without losing their trust in Islam and their religious identities.

Another point is that Islamic feminism has started a kind of collaboration between secular and Islamic feminism. Most Islamic feminists are open to benefit from the thoughts and concepts of different schools. It is evident that Muslim female scholars use the methods and tools of linguistics, history, literary criticism, sociology, feminist theory, hermeneutics etc. which is a token of the collaboration between Islamic feminists and other schools of thought. Thanks to the efforts of Islamic feminists, the issue of gender equality has been discussed through new perspectives and it is clear that new possible interpretations came out. In addition, they have aspired to change the gender-related Islamic laws in order to improve the status of Muslim women in religion and society such as the family law in Morocco.

On one hand, it is evident that Islamic feminists challenge the patriarchal way of thinking in Islamic societies and reinterpreted some critical issues through a female perspective. On the other hand, they define their struggles as a return to the real essence of Islam rather than transforming Islam (Badran, 2009, 324-325). In fact,

they have marked a beginning of a new period in the Muslim world and there is still much to discuss and do. Therefore, they have not accomplished all of their goals yet and their struggles are still in progress.

At this point, a distinction should be made between the two main tenets of Islamic feminism. It would be useful to divide the movement into two parts as the academic struggles of Muslim female scholars and Muslim women movement in society. This study focuses on the arguments and challenges put forward by Muslim female scholars in academia in order to alter the patriarchal practices and beliefs in Islamic societies. Mostly, their target audience is male exegetes, political and religious decision-makers, muftis etc. Although this study mainly focuses on the ongoing academic discussions of Muslim scholars, it also gives place to the movement of Muslim women in the streets of various Muslim countries through which they make their claims and try to persuade their governments or religious authorities so as to make political and legal changes in their societies. Although their fight is not directly linked to the main purpose of this study, it is included in the study in order to provide a big picture of the movement and show the relationship between these two tenets of the movement since some scholars are also involved in the movement in the streets by being a part of women organizations and groups.

Although it is an individual social movement now, it seems clear that Islamic feminism grew out of specific theories and built new theories and concepts on them with their own contributions. I would like to elaborate on these theories such as feminist theory, postmodern feminist theory, the concept of gender, hermeneutics and feminist hermeneutics that help Islamic feminists articulate their own theories in conjunction with their specific contexts. By doing this, it becomes easier to grasp the theoretical background of Islamic feminism, its peculiarities and mindset which is a necessary step to take for the scope of this study.

The first theory to visit is the major theoretical framework of feminism that Islamic feminists mostly rely on. Although Islamic feminism seems to grow out of suspicion and reaction against the feminist theory, it is also true that it has built most of its principles and arguments as a response to the prevalent feminist theories. In addition, feminism has grown large to include many subcategories such as atheist, non-heterosexual, non-white and conservative. Therefore, it is possible to affirm Islamic

feminism as a new brand of feminism too (Moghissi, 1999) which necessitates the exploration of the predominant feminist theories and the positioning of Islamic feminism in accordance with them.

Karen Offen in her article 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach' defines feminism as a concept including an ideology and a movement for creating a sociopolitical change in gender relations in any given society where the domination of male and the subordination of women prevail. When it first began to be widely used in the 1890s, feminism was thought to be all about getting the equal rights with men (Offen, 1988). However, as the word 'feminist' and the movement 'feminism' began to be circulated more, various fractions emerged in the movement such as liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, multicultural, postmodern feminism etc. With these fractions, new definitions of feminist movement have been put forward. For instance; in her book titled 'Feminism Is for Everybody', bell hooks defines feminism as a movement that aims to put an end to sexism and sexual oppression of women in the society (hooks, 2000).

As for the feminist theory, hooks claims that it should show us how sexism prevails in the society and how we can change it through eradicating sexist thinking (hooks, 2000). In addition, Rosemarie Tong, in her book titled 'Feminist Thought', states that the primary goal of feminist theory is to describe the oppression of women and to come up with strategies to liberate women (Tong, 2009). In her book named 'Thinking Fragments', another scholar Jane Flax likewise affirms that feminist theory has several purposes which can be summarized as to analyze the power relations between women and men in the society, to better conceive how women are oppressed in the society and to overcome that oppression (Flax, 1990). Considering these definitions of feminist theory and its purposes, it is possible to claim that feminist theory not only defines the gender relations in the society but also aims to transform the society so as to emancipate women.

As noted above, there have been fractions in feminist movement with its enlargement around the world. According to Rosemarie Tong, these fractions reveal us that feminism is not a monolithic ideology (Tong, 2009). I would like to give a brief summary of these fragmented feminist theories and focus on postmodernist feminist theory since there are some common theoretical grounds that Islamic feminists and

postmodern feminists share. Among these fractions in feminist theory, liberal feminists focus on having the equal opportunities with men and enter the public realms with an equal status. Mary Wollstonecraft's book titled 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792)' can be shown the building block of liberal feminism where the author of the book challenges the existing view that women lack the intellectual and physical capability to take part in the public domain. In brief, liberal feminists are against the discrimination of women and want to participate in academy and market in an equal status with men (Tong, 2009). However, they do not tend to change the patriarchal way of thinking in a radical way, rather they aim to make the rules of the game fair for both sexes.

Another fraction in the feminist theory is radical feminist theory in which power, dominance and hierarchy is marked as the characteristics of patriarchy. Unlike liberal feminists, radical feminists believe that the patriarchal system cannot be reformed; that's why we need to uproot legal, political and social structures of the patriarchal system. Radical feminists lie sexuality and reproduction at the core of their discussions since they are the bases of women's oppression in the society. Sexual Politics by Kate Millett (1970), The Dialectic of Sex by Shulamith Firestone (1970) and Beyond God the Father by Mary Daly (1973) can be regarded as one of the prominent works of radical feminists.

On the other hand, Marxist feminism places capitalism and the private ownership at the heart of the oppression of women, whereas psychoanalytic feminists focus on sexuality as the basis of male ruling, in other words patriarchy. Unlike the previous feminist waves, postcolonial feminist theory addresses the fact that race, gender, class, religion, ethnicity etc. separate women from others as their experiences would greatly differ from each other. Postcolonial feminists are against feminist essentialism which assumes that all women are alike and white supremacy which means white and privileged women have the authority to speak on behalf of all women (Tong, 2009). Among the feminist theories given above, postcolonial feminist theory comes to the fore as both Islamic feminism and postcolonial theory aim to prioritize the individual or local differences of women rather than viewing women as one category bearing the same characteristics all around the world.

Having explained a number of feminist theories that have been influential in shaping feminist thinking, I would like to elaborate on postmodernist feminist theory since Islamic feminists have made use of the arguments of this theory more than any other since the mid-1980s. Due to the fact that there are significant correlations between postmodern theory and Islamic feminism, it is of crucial importance to further explain postmodern feminist theory and compare it with Islamic feminism. For postmodern feminist theory, it is not possible to provide a single explanation for the oppression of women or to prescribe a single way to liberate women since each woman has her own experience and context (Tong, 2009). Therefore postmodern feminist theory embraces plurality, multiplicity and difference unlike the previous theories and states that there is no single way to be a feminist.

In postmodern feminist theory, all feminists fight against patriarchy but power and patriarchal relations are not the same in all parts of the world. That is one of the main arguments of Islamic feminism, too. Islamic feminists refrain from attaching to Western ideals of feminism since the political and social structures of patriarchy operate in a different way and yield a different kind of women's oppression in each specific context. One of the most significant factors to bear in mind is that Western feminism focuses on individual rights and freedom of women whereas Islam is more concerned with the rights and protection of groups. Therefore, feminism in Islam and feminism in the Western world diverge from each other in many terms. In the light of this discussion, it is self-evident that postmodern feminist theory can be a proper theoretical framework for Islamic feminists since it acknowledges the plurality of women's experiences and feminisms.

Another distinct feature of postmodern feminist theory is to be skeptical of any form of certainty and to provide a new kind of criticism that is not based on traditional mindsets (Fraser & Nicholson, 1988). Rosemarie Tong (2009) notes that postmodern feminist theory criticizes the ideals of Enlightenment which epitomized reason by investing in objective and universal knowledge. As a response, postmodernist theorists point out the instability of the self and knowledge which is constantly created by power for the sake of its interests. As Flax (1990) asserts, both feminism and postmodernism have a suspicion on theological, universal, hierarchical or binary ways of thinking. To explore the underlying motives and practices of power, I would like to touch upon two main tenets of postmodern theory, namely deconstruction and

power. By doing this, we can have a clear understanding of the contribution of postmodernist theory to the arguments of Islamic feminists.

Basically, deconstruction refers to the attempt to reveal the several possible interpretations of literary, political or philosophical texts (Tong, 2009). By this means, the utopic idea of universal and single meaning of a text is refuted through this questioning. This new transformation of knowledge turned into one of the theoretical bases for Islamic feminism as Muslim feminists are in favor of the idea that Qur'an is also among these texts whose meaning is manifold. Therefore, they seek to find out other possible meanings or interpretations of it and these efforts can be named as deconstruction. As for deconstruction, it is a must to give place to Jacques Derrida and his ideas with regard to society and how it reproduces itself in certain ways including gender. According to Derrida, the Symbolic order controls society via shaping the minds of individuals and makes them internalize the accepted roles relating to their gender, race, and class. As a result, society keeps maintaining itself permanently (Derrida, 1978). For Islamic feminists, it is possible to add religion as one of the means of society to regulate the life of individuals, especially the roles of women and that's why, we should not take its indications at face value.

As well as deconstruction, power has also become a pivotal part of postmodern theory, and for the scope of this study, it is vital to understand what power means and how it operates in the society. As for power, Michel Foucault in his book named 'The History of Sexuality' (1978) argues that an individual in a society is produced by power relations through creating and managing multiple discourses. Foucault defines power as 'Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; (rather) it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society' (Foucault, 1978, 93). Therefore one requires a concerted effort to realize and conceive what power means and how it shapes individuals in the society. However, it would be useful to look into deeper and find out the features of power that may be fruitful for the discussions of Islamic feminists.

As one of the most prominent figures in postmodern theory, Foucault clarifies that power can take place in various forms and it is intertwined with other kinds of relations such as family, sexuality, kinship, or religion. This way of thinking is also

supported by Islamic feminists who believe that religion is a major means of controlling individuals, especially women through its norms or practices. Another point that Foucault makes is the issue of resistance against power relations which is inevitable wherever there is power (Foucault, 1978). In this regard, Islamic feminism can be viewed as a form of resistance against power or powerful groups in Islam who are mostly males and monopolized the interpretation of the holy texts in their own terms. These male exegetes and the institutions to which they belong can be a token of powerful groups mentioned by Foucault including the PRA in this category provide an insight to the discussion that will be made in the following chapters.

Another concept related to feminist theory and the main discussion of this study is 'gender' and how it is socially constructed in the society. Although there has been no consensus on the definition of the term, most scholars view it as the social construction of our biological sex. According to them, while sex refers to the biological differences between women and men, gender refers to how the concepts of masculinity and femininity are cultivated in a given society and how specific roles are constructed related to these biological sexes throughout history (Rubin, 1975). Hence, Flax (1990) argues that analyzing gender constitutes the fundamental goal of feminist theory which requires explaining how gender is constituted, and how our thoughts related to gender are formed.

Following Foucault, postmodern feminists such as Hélène Cixous or Judith Butler reject the stability of gender and point to the process in which specific attributes are assigned to sexes. In her book named 'Gender Trouble', Judith Butler (1990) states that 'Gender is not a stable identity. It's an identity constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts' (Butler, 1990, 7). With these words, she opposes to the biological determinism and draws our attention to the power of the society that regulates individuals as Foucault explains in his work. Jane Flax likewise touches upon the concept of gender which is not a natural fact for her; rather she views it as a result of social conditions that keep changing throughout history and yielding different forms of male dominance over women (Flax, 1990).

Borrowing from the ideas of Foucault and his concept of the death of the subject, postmodern feminists shake the grounds by eradicating the universal notion of woman. Instead, they offer a model of a concept of multi-strand social identity

involving class, race, gender, religion or ethnicity and they, like Islamic feminists, draw our attention to how patriarchy regulates people, especially women in the society through these factors. As a result, it is possible to say that both Islamic feminists and postmodern feminists regard gender as constructed and reinforced by the society. Besides, they both acknowledge that religion is one of the possible means of patriarchy to control individuals, especially women.

Another scholar that agrees on gender as a socially constructed phenomenon is Chris Beasley who contributes to the discussion in her book titled 'Gender and Sexuality' (2005). Like other postmodern feminists, she focuses on the gendering process in the society and suggests that dividing individuals into gendered categories result in hierarchy between sexes. Intentionally or unintentionally, one of the categories end up with some privileges over the others (Beasley, 2005). This is quite compatible with the discussions of Islamic feminists who believe that the roles assigned to women and men in Islam are not naturally given but they are the repercussions of patriarchal norms or practices in Muslim societies. In addition to this, Islamic feminists agree on that hierarchy between women and men result from this gendering process.

In parallel with postmodern feminist theory, social construction theory which casts doubt on the existence of universal knowledge and places inequality at the center of gender can provide an insight into the discussion of this study. Beasley (2005) defines social construction theory as a rejection of the ideals of modernism which invests in the ideas of a pre-existing core to the self. Unlike modernists, social construction theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir and John R. Searle argue that identities are reproduced and maintained through the social structuring process of power. According to Judith Lorber, the reason lying behind this differentiation between women and men is that it justifies unequal treatment of them. The process of gendering is a social one and is conducted through social process such as approval of behaviors that are considered to be appropriate for a specific sex and disapproval of behaviors or appearances that are not in line with the established norms (Lorber, 1997).

What is a striking point for the discussion of this study is postmodernist feminism and social constructionism highlight religion, law and medicine as the most three

powerful tenets of society that reinforce gender roles by censoring or punishing them through labeling the behaviors of individuals as sinful, illegal or insane (Lorber, 1997). Since this study aims to analyze the discourse of the PRA which can be regarded as the most dominant religious institution holding its power on individuals, the gender theory of postmodernism and social constructionism shortly explained here have utmost significance for the study.

Apart from theories noted above, ‘hermeneutics’ and ‘feminist hermeneutics’ have provided a great assistance to the arguments of Islamic feminists and for this study. In order to understand how Islamic feminists began to question the holy texts in Islam and how they conduct their studies, I will try to elaborate on hermeneutics and its implementations in Islamic feminism. Michael N. Forster defines hermeneutics as ‘the theory of interpretation’ which attempts to explain how we understand texts and utterances (Forster, 2008). Although it was commonly used in the history beginning from the ancient Greece, it gained impetus with Reformation which emphasized on the correct interpretation of the Bible. With this new focus, hermeneutics happened to mean the interpretation of the holy scripts, especially the Bible. Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Gadamer, Hegel and Derrida are among the most prominent scholars that have contributed to the theory of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics can be named as to read behind the text which also requires to explore and analyze the historical context of the text (West, 1995, 113). Departing from this definition, a number of scholars suggest that it is a must to explore the historical conditions and context that prevailed at the time of revelation of the Bible since they believe that the patriarchal norms and practices in that community were gradually integrated into the interpretation of the Bible over time. As for the interpretation of the Bible and other holy scripts, Fiorenza (1997) maintains that the gender roles assigned to women and men are not ordained by God, rather they are the effects of social and political relations in the society.

Although feminist theology was initiated with Christian scholars, it has become more enriched in the recent years with the involvement of women from different backgrounds and in different contexts such as womanists, lesbian, Jewish, Asian American, African American, Latin and Muslim women (Kamitsuka, 2007). Sarah Gimke, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Judith Plaskow, Rita M. Gross, Asma Barlas,

Fatima Mernissi, Amina Wadud can be listed among the remarkable feminist theologians that challenge the patriarchal constructions of religions all around the world and applied feminist hermeneutics in their works.

With respect to religion and feminism, Gross (1993) portrays four critical problems which are consecutively the exclusion of women from religious discussions and interpretation, the existing sexism in religions, the questioning of whether sexism is primordial or not and how religions should reform themselves. In order to get rid of patriarchal structures of religion, she suggests that empathy should be placed at the heart of the study of religion which would prevent evaluating the texts through biased perspectives.

Another scholar who touches upon the feminist interpretation of the Bible is Carolyn Osiek. She determines three approaches with regard to this issue which puts forward the ideas that the Church has used the Bible as a source of power throughout human history, hermeneutic theory of the Bible should be formulated in conjunction with the experience of faith communities, the historical conditions behind a specific Biblical text should also be taken into consideration (Osiek, 1997). In addition to all these arguments, the significance of a hermeneutics of suspicion comes forward as another tenet of hermeneutics of holy texts since it is pertinent to be aware of our biases or presuppositions that a scholar might bring into the text (Fiorenza, 1997).

What feminist theology and hermeneutics contribute to the discussion of this study is their claim which is suspicious of any neutral theology. The questioning of texts in order to find out underlying implications inherent in it helps us see that theology, like any other discourse, is not neutral (Fiorenza, 1997). With its selections of specific texts or language uses, theology holds power on upholding or changing the existing power relations in the society. This argument is completely compatible with the claims of Islamic feminists who argue that women have always been prevented from the access to positions in theological scholarship and men have been the authority to interpret the Qur'an regardless of the interests or desires of Muslim women. Departing from this point, feminist theologians in Christianity, Judaism or Islam attempt to unmask the patriarchal interests or biases in the interpretation of these holy scripts and depict how theology can pick out the parts of these texts and leave others out so as to reinforce their power and norms.

It is evident that Islamic feminists have been influenced by the concepts put forward by a set of theories such as postmodern feminism, social constructionism and feminist hermeneutics. In my dissertation, I will examine Muslim feminist authors in the light of these theories. However, we should keep in mind that Islamic feminists have adapted them by contextualizing them in the Muslim world rather than importing these theories and their tools into their cultures directly. Therefore, feminist hermeneutics of the Qur'an has grown into a significant theoretical framework among Islamic feminists. For instance, Amina Wadud (1999) refers to three basic aspects of Qur'anic hermeneutics in her book named 'Qur'an and Woman'. According to her, the interpreter or the research should consider the context in which the Qur'an was revealed, the grammatical structure of the text and the world view of the Qur'an as a whole text. What Wadud argues with these three principles constitutes one of the backbones of the arguments in Islamic feminism. Most Islamic feminists point to Arabic as a masculine language which uses the masculine article for addressing a group of people and which causes confusion during the interpretation process of the Qur'an since most scholars tend to view these verses as an addressing to only men.

Besides, Muslim feminists like Wadud suggest that we should take the specific conditions or events into consideration since some of the verses were revealed after a specific event happened in that period. Furthermore, the last point Wadud makes is supported by Islamic feminists as they believe the interpretation of the Qur'an should be in line with the general mentality of it and interpreters should adopt a holistic approach in order to transfer the universal message of the Qur'an to ordinary people. By doing this, misogynist constructions or degrading statements against women can be eradicated and the gender-sensitivity of the Qur'an can be revealed.

Leila Ahmed (1992) also emphasizes the instability of the texts by claiming that what a person understands from the Qur'an partly depends on how that person reads it and as a result, different Islams may appear. Likewise, Asma Barlas (2002) claims that it is the perspective of people that leads to the reading of the Qur'an as an unequal or misogynist text for women. Barlas does not accept that a theory of gender inequality can be derived from the Qur'an and describes her hermeneutics as deriving from her understanding of the Qur'an and especially the depiction of God in it (Barlas, 2005).

The first principle Barlas touches upon is '*tawhid*' which means that God is unique and his sovereignty is indivisible. Therefore, the interpretations encouraging male dominance over women or designate men as intermediaries between God and women undermine this principle since there is no ruler other than God. With this principle, the interpretations of the verses that create hierarchy between women and men become void since *tawhid* placed in the Qur'an contradicts this type of interpretations. Another principle to analyze and understand the Qur'an is the fact that God never does any *zulm* (injustice) to people which means transgressing their rights. Departing from this point, it is possible to revisit some verses related to the rights of women and strip them off their patriarchal interpretations. Her last principle is compatible with Christian feminist theologians who are against the representation of God as a male. Whether it is the language or metaphors, there is a great tendency in religions to depict God as a male person. However, Barlas argues that God is beyond sex and gender and therefore it is futile to assign some male attributes to God. Considering these principles, it is self-evident that Islamic feminists do not believe the gender inequality prescribed by the Qur'an, instead they view the Qur'an as a hermeneutic whole and attempt to read it in a contextualized way (Barlas, 2005; Wadud, 1999).

Since that I have given a brief overview of Islamic feminism and its theoretical bases such as postmodern feminism, social constructionism and feminist hermeneutics. I will move onto the methodological part of this study in order to clarify the steps to be taken in the following chapters which include the purpose of the study, the research question and methodology, the significance and limitations of the study.

1.2 The Purpose of the Study and Literature Review

The theoretical framework of this study is inspired by Islamic feminism which, as a social movement, has extended to a wide area including Turkey, Iran and countries situated in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. In addition to this, Islamic feminism offers an alternative for women who live in Western societies and Muslim minorities and who have clashes between conservative Islamic traditions and their new world (Tohidi, 2001).

Another building block of this study is the significance of the PRA as the chief religious institution in the country and its power coming from the state. With its long

history, it is possible to claim that this institution has been active for long years. It was established under the name of Religious Affairs and Charitable Foundations in 1920 to undertake the Office of *Şeyhülislam* (highest authority for religious matters in Ottoman Empire) and has continued to serve in religious matters under different names until today. As a matter of fact, the PRA has a significant role in constructing and perpetuating social and religious norms in Turkey. The ideas and speeches given by its experts are valued by ordinary Muslim people in Turkish society. As some of the scholars put forward, people are inclined to embrace opinions and knowledge coming through the discourse of authoritative and reliable sources such as experts, scholars, or professionals (Nesler & Aguinis & Quigley & Tedeschi, 1993). Consequently, the opinions given and elaborated in the publications of PRA are more likely to be accepted than other sources by the recipients in the country. In addition, it is possible to trace the reflections and ideology of the state with regard to women and gender issues through the discourse of PRA.

In this study, I aim to analyze the discourse of the PRA publications on women and gender issues. As noted above, the PRA is one of the backbones of Turkish state and it is possible to reveal the state's religious ideology on women by reflecting on the general discourse adopted in their publications. In literature, I could not reach any study examining the views of the PRA on women and feminist perspectives in the publications of this institution. By analyzing the magazines and books published by the PRA, I seek to elaborate on the differences and similarities between the arguments of Islamic feminists and the PRA. Thanks to the advance of digital resources, Islamic feminism has become a global social movement and reached a wide range of audience (Badran, 2009). In accordance, I attempt to find out whether the PRA has been affected by the arguments of this global movement or not. By doing this, I aspire to highlight if there are new interpretations in the publications in favor of women rights and their social conditions.

As a matter of fact, Muslim women intellectuals dwell upon a great number of issues ranging from Islamic law to the equality in family. Since the scope of this study is limited, I focus on some critical issues that are placed at the heart of their arguments under two categories; ontological and practical issues. Within these categories, I seek to elaborate on the issues of creation, gender equality, family and marriage, the roles in public place and legal rights. In the selection of topics to be explored, I tried to

include the critical ones that shape and underpin social norms in the daily lives of women. For instance; creation is the building block of misogynist constructions in Christianity, Judaism and Islam since the assumptions related to the position of women in creation causes one to believe that women are of secondary importance. These mistaken beliefs bring forth controversial issues pertaining to gender equality in Islam and the mainstream distrust in gender equality lies at the core of the degradation of women in society. Due to these patriarchal assumptions and interpretations, Muslim women face serious problems and disadvantageous positions in their family, marriage, public realm and law. Unfortunately, all these spheres of life have a significant impact upon the lives of Muslim women and their emancipation. Hence, these categories were chosen to be discussed and analyzed.

In literature review, it was observed that there have been a few studies conducted on the gender discourse of the PRA publications in order to find out its theoretical framework and bases in terms of women and gender issues. However, these studies focus on only Friday sermons and fatwas on women given by the PRA. Among these, the dissertations named as ‘Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı’nın 2000 Yılından İtibaren Kadın ve Aileye Yönelik Süreli ve Basılı Yayınlarının Analizi’ (An Analysis of Periodical and Printed Publications about Women and Family of Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı since 2000) written by Çiğdem Akgül and ‘Kadının Statüsü ile İlgili Görüşlerin Din ve Sosyal Değişme Bağlamında Analizi: 2000 sonrası Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı’nın Kadınlara İlgili Fetvaları (The analysis of the Views Concerning Women’s Status in the Context of Social Change and Religion: The post-2000 t-fatwas issued by the Presidency of Religious Affairs Concerning with Women) written by Hümeysra Malkoç can be given as examples for the studies done in this field.

On the other side, there are three dissertations on Islamic feminism written by MA students in Turkey. These are ‘Feminizm ve İslam İlişkisi: İslami Feminizm’ (The Relationship of Feminism and Islam: Islamist Feminism) written by Özlem İngün, ‘Türkiye’de Feminist Söylem ve İslami Feminizm’ (Feminism in Turkey and Islamic Feminism) written by Sevil Sezgin and ‘Türkiye’de İslami Feminizm Sorunsalı’ (Islamic Feminism Problem in Turkey) written by Ayşe Betül Tanrıverdi. Although they provide us a general framework pertaining to the arguments of Islamic feminists, these studies remain limited because of their descriptive nature rather than

analytical one. In a broader context, it is possible to find a great number of studies and articles on Islamic feminism around the world and most of these studies are related to specific conditions and struggles of women in a variety of Muslim countries.

Having cited the studies and their interests that have been done so far, it seems clear that they do not go into a deep analysis. Therefore, there is a need to conduct an analytical study that fills the gap in the literature and also I could not reach any study done so as to analyze the gender discourse of a powerful religious institution in a Muslim country through the lenses of Islamic feminism in literature review. Therefore, I believe that this dissertation can contribute to the field by offering an alternative type of study in literature as it aims to see the percussions of Islamic feminism in Turkish religious literature.

1.3 Methodology, Research Question and Content

The point of departure for this study is the fact that Islamic feminism is a concept that has not been explored enough in Turkey. However, the Islamic traditions and patriarchal norms challenged by Islamic feminists perpetuate their huge impact on the lives of Muslim women in Turkey, too. Another tenet of this dissertation involves the PRA which is regarded as the ultimate authority for the consultation of religious matters in the country. Therefore, I focus on the examination of the views expressed by various authors in the publications of the PRA on women and gender under considerations of Muslim feminists.

While this study examines the publications of the PRA through the theoretical framework of Islamic feminism, methodologically it applies discourse analysis (DA) and takes the texts in the publications as unit of analysis. In the analysis of these publications, it is aimed to compare Islamic feminist discourse and the PRA's discourse on women and gender issues. I chose to analyze texts and find out the dominant discourse of the publications since I believe that there is a close relationship between discourse and social actions which in return creates and perpetuates the social order in a society.

It would be useful to explain what discourse and discourse analysis mean as it constitutes the main methodology of this study. Stubbs defines discourse as

‘language above the sentence or above the clause’ (Stubbs, 1983, 1). Therefore, discourse refers to any text or utterance that is meaningful regardless of its oral, written or mixed form. From this definition, it is possible to conclude that discourse analysis studies how meanings or ideas around a topic are produced, used or changed through these texts or utterances. Accordingly, Taylor (2001) describes discourse analysis as ‘the study of language in use’. The primary goals of discourse analysis is to reveal how texts are related to specific contexts or cultures, how they reflect social practices and how they represent power, ideology or power relations in a society. In this respect, MacLure (2003) adds that texts create truths which are always affected by the intervention of language.

Deborah Schiffrin (1994) highlights six approaches to discourse analysis which can be listed as the speech act approach, interactional sociolinguistics, the ethnography of communication, pragmatic approach, conversation analysis, variationist approach and structural-functional approach. In addition to these approaches, a new branch of discourse analysis emerged which is named ‘critical discourse analysis’ and it befits the purpose of this study more than other approaches.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) shed light on how social structures and its discursive practices create and maintain their power over less powerful groups. For Fairclough, critical discourse analysis attempt to reveal the interaction of the text, discursive practices and the social contexts in a broader sense (Fairclough, 2000). Critical discourse analysis serves a role of a bridge between the micro-level of society including language, discourse, verbal interaction and communication and the macro-level of society including power, dominance and inequality (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In this methodology, analysts focus on the relationship between discourses and power relations which is at the core of this study. Since the PRA can be considered to hold power over people, its discourse related to women and gender can give away the ideology of the state and how this institution maintains its power in the society.

Another scholar Van Dijk (1996) also suggests that having control over public discourse displays an important symbolic resource and power. I think this statement befits the case of the PRA since it holds a great deal of power and hegemony in terms of religious matters. Thus it, has control over the less powerful or knowledgeable

groups which may influence the social norms related to gender and women issues in Turkish society. The hegemonic status of the PRA and its reflections on women issues through its publications inspired me to conduct this study and contribute to this area.

With this object in my mind, I seek to answer the basic research question which is: What is the discourse of the PRA in its publications related to women and to what level they meet the interpretations of Muslim feminists? Taking this main question as my focal point requires a set of accompanying questions with regard to subcategories. These questions are presented as: What is the discourse of the PRA in terms of creation and gender equality in the Qur'an with regard to the theoretical framework of Islamic feminism? What is the discourse of the PRA in terms of practical issues such as the role and rights of women in marriage, family, public place and law? What are the similarities and differences between both discourses in terms of gender issues?

In order to answer these significant questions, I chose to analyze the book and magazines published by the PRA between the years of 2000-2015. To present the content of my dissertation, following the Introduction chapter, I elaborate on the historical background of feminist movement in general in the second chapter, which is titled 'Developments of Feminism: Historical Overview'. Beginning from the origins of the term, I provide a general framework for the long history of Western feminism and its development in Turkey. Feminism in Western sense can be named as secular feminism in Turkey which traces back to the late Ottoman period and gained momentum in the early Republican period with the efforts of the Kemalist reformers. From the 1980s on, secular feminism diverges from the previous feminist waves and begins to question against patriarchal state and society. Along with this challenging stance, feminist groups in the recent years have adopted more radical strategies and based their arguments on the identity politics that is on the rise around the world thanks to the globalization process. In order to understand Islamic feminism and how it differs from Western or secular feminism, I attempt to provide a historical overview of the feminist movement in general and I also add the relationship between religion and feminism by giving examples from different religions and their controversial traits contested by feminists and theologians.

In the third chapter, titled ‘Major Arguments of Islamic Feminists’, I seek to explore the theoretical background of Islamic feminists by touching upon their strategies and sources. After explaining the stances of Islamic feminists towards calling themselves feminist or not, I discuss the main arguments of Islamic feminists which are categorized under two headings such as ontological and practical issues. Ontological discussions include woman in creation and gender equality whereas practical discussions consist of the position of woman in marriage and family, her place in public and her legal rights. I try to highlight the critical issues put forward by Islamic feminists under these categories so that I can compare them with the issues elaborated in the publications of the PRA in the following chapter.

In the fourth chapter, titled ‘The Discourse of the Presidency of Religious Affairs on Women’, I go through popular periodicals, books and sermons prepared and published by the PRA in a period spreading from 2000 to 2015 and analyze them under the headings of creation, gender equality, family and marriage, public place and legal rights consecutively. Through these analyses, I try to display the gender discourse of the PRA in line with the arguments of Islamic feminists explained in Chapter 3 and reveal the inconsistencies and contradictions given in the discussions of the PRA experts. Lastly, in the conclusion chapter, I endeavor to put forward possible conclusions that can be drawn from the examples given in Chapter 4 and touch upon how this study contributes to this field. After that, I finalize my words by making suggestions to prospective researchers for further studies that can be done in this field.

The chief interest of this study is to examine the discourse of the PRA in its publications through the theoretical framework of Islamic feminism. I am mainly interested in comparing the arguments of the PRA and Muslim feminists in terms of women and gender issues. In fact, Islamic feminist discourse needs to be further explored in Turkey despite increasing studies. Setting out from this less touched and discussed area, this study aims to extend the discussion by comparing the discourse of the PRA and the arguments and reinterpretations of Muslim feminists in recent publications.

For the selection of topics, I touch upon the main tenets of women issues in Islam which have been discussed and challenged by Islamic feminists. Through their

strategies such as revisiting the Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions pertaining to women, bringing light into other possible meanings of the key words taken as granted and adjusting the Islamic laws in order to empower women, Islamic feminists have provided new answers to questions that were commonly asked by the public. I analyze whether Islamic feminists have brought any change into the discourse of the PRA or not. The focal point of this dissertation will be to investigate the interaction between them in terms of their discourse regarding women in Islam.

I believe this study can provide an insight into the discussions of women and gender issues in Turkey where the majority of the population is Muslim and women are in an environment of Islamic traditions and beliefs. However, I add that this study provides an analysis just on the publications of the PRA. Since the discourse of other formal or independent institutions is not examined here, one should refrain from generalizing the findings of this study as a perspective of the whole country.

It is important to note here that 'women issues' is an umbrella term indicating many things ranging from the issues in their private life and legal rights. I tried to focus on some of the highly critical issues contested and challenged by Islamic feminists. Another criterion in deciding which issues to be involved in the study was the frequency of these problems to emerge in Turkey. In this regard, some of the discussions were left out the scope of this study as they do not problematize the lives of women in Turkey. Another limitation of this study is that I chose to analyze the publications between the years of 2000-2015. Since the books and magazines published before these dates are excluded from the scope of this study, it poses a risk of being ignorant of divergent voices of various experts in the PRA. The availability of publications between these years also needs to be taken into consideration as some of them were not available and were not included in the content of this study.

CHAPTER II

DEVELOPMENTS OF FEMINISM: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

2.1 Feminist Movement and Its Historical Background

In this chapter, I will analyze and elaborate on the feminist movement in the Western and Muslim world in terms of its origins, main themes and contemporary developments coming along with it. Before moving onto the discussion of what Islamic feminism and their main arguments are, it would be of crucial importance to have a look at women's movements throughout history in the secular and Muslim world. By doing this, we can have a grasp of the theoretical framework from which Islamic feminism has sprung and how it has contributed to the pillars of feminism. Starting with the origins of the term 'feminism', the chapter consists of discussions on the history of feminist movement around the world including the feminist movement in Turkey and the reconciliation between religion and feminism which has yielded to the emergence of new feminisms in a variety of religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. I will end the chapter by giving place to these religious feminist movements with their peculiarities and challenges.

2.1.1 The Origins of the Term 'Feminism'

Feminism has been a well-known but a controversial concept since its emergence in the late 19th century. Although there has been no consensus on the meaning and the implications of the word as each feminist scholar applies it in an individual sense, it would be useful to go back to the origins of the word 'feminism' so as to understand its essence to its full extent. Such an inquiry would be helpful before moving to the main discussion on feminism as a universal women's movement and how it has been integrated into Islamic thought.

The word 'feminism' can be considered as a recent term since it was first used as 'féminisme' in France in the 1880s (Offen, 1988). Actually, it is the combination of

two French words –femme for woman and –isme for any social movement or political ideology. Feminism should be regarded as one of the revolutionary movements flourished during those years such as communism or socialism which leads us to the conclusion that women's movement was the pioneer of social and political changes, too (Freedman, 2007). In history, the word 'féminisme' was firstly used by Hubertine Auclert in her journal *La Citoyenne* to talk about women's rights and emancipation that was one of the promises of French Revolution (Badran, 2009).

Broadly speaking, the term was coined in France and then feminism spread over European countries, the United States and now it is a commonplace in many parts of the world including the Middle East and Islamic countries. As aforementioned, it has been used in numerous approaches with a wide range of implications since the coinage of the word. In the early years, feminism was perceived as the organized struggles of women for suffrage (Tong, 2009). However, it turned out to be a more comprehensive women's movement as they demanded equality in all aspects by gathering together, organizing conferences and publishing on these issues.

Although all feminist thinkers strive for ways to stop women's oppression and to elevate women's status into an equal one, it is a well-known fact that each of them has adopted varying approaches and inspired many other movements (Offen, 1988) which proves that feminism does not have a monolithic structure. That's why, feminism has been defined with a variety of subdivisions such as liberal, radical, Marxist, psychoanalytic, multicultural, global, postcolonial, eco, postmodern etc. (Tong, 2009). Finally, we can add a new facet of feminism as 'Islamic feminism' which is a social movement and discourse tracing back to the 1990s and used by many Muslim scholars such as Asma Barlas, Fatima Mernissi, Amina Wadud, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Riffat Hassan, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Shahla Sherkat and Mai Yamani etc. (Badran, 2009).

In the following chapters, I will elaborate on Islamic feminism in terms of its historical background, main themes, major challenges and its contributions to the feminist movement. In order to understand the origins, position and criticism of Islamic feminism, first we need to have a grasp of the feminist movement in general and Muslim women's movement in the Middle East and beyond which will be analyzed and discussed in sequence in the following pages.

2.1.2 Western Feminist Movements in Three Waves

In the Western world, the feminist movement has undergone three important phases which could be named as the first wave, second wave and third wave feminism. There have been eminent figures and brand-new ideas, concepts in each of these stages which have given yield to the dissemination of these ideas throughout the world and to influence a great number of women's lives in terms of recovering their rights, self-images and adjusting the myths of femininity that has been socially constructed.

As stated above, each wave has its own priorities, claims and agenda in order to improve women's status in the society and to enable women's liberation. In a nutshell, it can be stated that the first wave feminism which occurred in Britain, the United States and Canada spanned through the late 19th century and the early 20th century by grounding its main claims on equality between both sexes and demanding their formal rights to be acknowledged as full citizens. The ideas, concepts and new claims brought by the first wave feminists paved the way for second wave feminism that refers to the period starting from the 1960s to the early 1980s (Giardina, 2010). Although it started in the United States, it spread through European countries and beyond in a short time. Second wave feminists built upon what first wave feminists had already put forward and they broadened the variety of issues to be questioned and discussed by touching upon sexuality, family, workplace, abortion, divorce, reproductive rights etc.

Finally, third wave feminism which was coined by Rebecca Walker grew out of its criticism against second wave feminism. Third wave feminists challenge the claims of second wave feminists who mainly base their arguments on the experiences of white women and ignore the integration of women of color or third world women. As a strategy, third wave feminists who have embraced postcolonial and post structural theories make an effort to deconstruct sexist language prevalent in the society, to adopt derogatory terms in order to empower women and to include all kinds of women in the movement with their local and personal experiences. To put it bluntly, they do their best to embrace multiplicity, diversity and intersectionality.

To be able to conceive these three waves and their underlying indications, it would be better to touch upon their historical background, prominent names and main

claims as these three waves have spread throughout the world and gave rise to specific women's movements in Turkey and in the Middle East, too. Besides, it would be useful to keep in mind that although Islamic feminism and Western feminism seem to be in contradiction with each other, they share a variety of similarities and connections in terms of their discourse, claims and theoretical frameworks.

To begin with, the origins of first wave feminism come from the social and political chaos following the French Revolution as women in that period attempted to attain equal rights for everyone promised by the French Revolution. Starting from the late 19th century, first wave feminism aimed to alter the hierarchical relations between women and men by grounding their discussions and claims on equal status (Giardina, 2010). Among the prominent names, Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sarah Gimké, Alice Paul can be counted (Campbell, 1989). Under the influence of the period's political atmosphere, women especially in the United States and England got into action to demand their formal rights. Among these formal rights, the suffrage came to the fore and the Women's Suffrage Movement became the building block of first wave feminism which proved to be successful for British women in 1928 via Representation of the People Act and for American women in 1920 via the Nineteenth Amendment.

Throughout the history, there have been inspirational books or figures that moved people and mobilized them. It holds true for the feminist movement too. As for the first wave, Mary Wollstonecraft who wrote the inspirational book named 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman' (1792) highly contributed to the flourishing of new ideas, concepts and issues for women. In the book, she calls for elevating women's status as citizens in the society and it is regarded as the corner stone of the modern feminism. For raising the women's status, she focuses on the education of young girls which, in her opinion, should give the opportunity for them to attain freedom and dignity rather than teaching them how to attract a good husband. This criticism against the mainstream education and beliefs on women are quite brave and revolutionary regarding the conditions of that century.

Another significant development in this period noteworthy to mention here is Longham Place Circle (in the 1850s) in England where a group of well-educated

middle-class women came together to challenge the existing prejudices and notions on women at that time. These women rejected the idea that women were not supposed to work and they should be at their homes as good wives and mothers. Similarly, first wave feminists gathered in the first women's rights convention called as 'Seneca Falls Convention' in 1848 in the United States to end sexual discrimination. The leading figure of this convention was Elizabeth Cady Stanton who campaigned to adjust laws regarding divorce, vote and the rights of married women (Schofield & Sarah, 1984). From these two examples, it can be concluded that women in Britain and the USA formally initiated the women's movement with these conventions and meetings.

Thanks to the achievements of first wave feminists who had opened up a new space for discussing and obtaining the deserved rights of women, second wave feminism flourished and spread through many countries over time. It spanned through the early 1960s to the early 1980s by starting in the United States first. The Civil Rights, Anti-Vietnam War and Student Movements that took place in the 1960s in the United States against racism and racial segregation marked the beginning of second wave feminism. During these movements, women recognized the value of collective action and witnessed how effective it can become in case of common issues in the society. Therefore they began to look for collective actions or solutions to the women question (Giardina, 2010).

On the top of political tension, Giardina (2010) explains that the atmosphere of the 1950s was highly domestic too as there was a perfect nuclear family image constantly depicted by the media and the ideal of domesticity was highly emphasized which resulted in a baby boom after the World War II. Although women were encouraged to give up the jobs they had taken during the war, the number of women joining the labor force was increasing day by day. However, they were underpaid in comparison with their male counterparts. As a result, these restrictive conditions of the period promoted the spirit of fighting against these inequalities for women.

Like what happened in first wave feminism, the arrival of an inspirational book named 'The Second Sex' by Simone de Beauvoir changed the course of women's movement and fuelled the desires of women to challenge the prevalent gender norms. The book was originally written in French in 1949 but it was translated to English in

1953 so women could now easily investigate how the concept of women was socially constructed and they were enforced to be the Other in the society (Thornham, 2001). In her book, De Beauvoir argues that the main reason for the oppression of women was not biological, psychological or economic but it stemmed from the civilization itself as the concept of femininity is described and determined by the society. Her ideas were taken up by many women and female scholars at that time and that's why, her book can be considered as the corner stone of second wave feminism (Giardina, 2010).

Second wave feminists questioned many taboos that had not been discussed until then. Especially, sexuality was at the heart of their discussions. A radical feminist, Kate Millett (1970) alleged that women had all the rights on their own sexual lives and they should free their sexuality from the obligations of marriage and motherhood. Second wave feminists also protested the Miss America pageants in 1968 and 1969 since they likened the women's parade to the parade of cattle and they criticized the emphasis on women's appearance which implies that their look is more valuable than their thoughts, ideas or actions (Freeman, 1975). The underlying reason for these protests was that radical feminists fiercely objected to the female roles as apolitical, passive, fragile and caring given by the society.

Like in each movement, there were some fractures in second wave feminism, too. While radical feminists were the vanguard of the women's movement in Britain, liberal feminism gained impetus in the USA in the same years with the release of the book named 'The Feminine Mystique' by Betty Friedan in 1963. Her book came forward as a reaction against the increasingly prescribed domesticity for women after the post-war period and expressed the discontent among middle-class women because of their underestimated social and political power. In addition to her theoretical works, she founded National Organization for Women in 1966 which became the primary representative of liberal feminists (Thornham, 2001).

Since second wave feminists put emphasis on the universal sisterhood of women, they produced many expressions such as 'sisterhood is powerful', 'consciousness-raising', 'the personal is political', 'the politics of housework' to fortify their arguments. Accordingly, they believed that oppression on women is executed through institutions such as marriage, child-bearing and practices related to sexuality

which empowers men over women (Mann & Huffman, 2005). As a result of this, female oppression becomes a political problem rather than a personal one which became one of the most popular claims put forward by second wave feminism.

On the other side, their emphasis on the sisterhood of women led to harsh criticism over time and women who refrained from a universal concept of being woman or one way of being feminists have tilled the soil for the emergence of third wave feminism (Snyder, 2008). Spanning through from the early 1980s to the present, third wave feminism targets the monolithic structure of second wave feminism. However, Snyder (2008) indicates that third wave feminists believe there is no one way to become a woman and the experiences of women significantly vary from each other depending on their race, ethnicity, locality, class etc.

For their theoretical framework, third wave feminists make use of postmodern and post structural theories which propose that identity is constructed through language, discursive formations and cultural practices. Basing their arguments on the analyses of Lacan, Foucault and Derrida, the third wave feminists call for the deconstruction of all categories as they are essentialist and determined by power relations. As a result, they conclude that identities are produced by hegemonic discourses and consolidate the dominant power (Mann & Huffman, 2005). Departing from these theoretical bases, third wave feminists argue that affirming an identity for woman is not liberating but restrictive and strengthens the regulatory power in this patriarchal society. In addition to these, the release of another inspirational book named 'To be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism' by Rebecca Walker can be cited as the reference guide for third wave feminism since the term 'third wave' was coined by her.

Lastly, I would like to touch upon the contributions of young generation feminists who are called as 'generation X' by some scholars which refers to the young feminists who became adults in the postmodern era, in other words, during the last decades of the 20th century. Unlike their feminist mothers in the second wave, these young feminists highly favor individualism and view sexuality as power tools rather than the tools of objectification. As these new generation feminists are media-savvy, they have found a new space for them to speak out and make their voices heard through the Internet to reach a wider audience (Alfonso & Trigilio, 1997). For

instance; Riot Grrrls is a group of young feminists who have opened a space for them in punk rock by wearing feminine clothes with combat boots. On their bodies or clothes, they have words like 'slut' or 'bitch' to deconstruct the essentialist construction of femininity. Their appropriation of derogatory terms such as slut, whore, spinster, and bitch is of crucial importance for them to criticize the existing sexist language and to invent new forms to define themselves. The example of Riot Grrrls proves us the changing practices of the feminist movement in the contemporary world.

Having elaborated the origins and the long journey of the feminist movement in the Western World, it can be argued that feminism occurred with the pursuit of equal rights and status as men before the laws and in the society. Over the years, women could get their deserved rights and they began to broaden their concerns including sexuality, domestic violence, reproduction rights etc. Fortunately, these demands and challenges against the patriarchal society have given its yields in public and private sphere and now third wave or postmodern feminists concentrate on the new conditions coming along with the postmodern or technology era such as sexist language and media, pornography and the rigidity of identities in our minds. Their questionings and achievements have given rise to many other women's movements beyond Europe and in Turkey.

2.1.3 Feminist Movement in Turkey

Turkey stands out as a unique case in women's movement since it comes from Islamic origins but has undergone a serious modernization process with the proclaim of the Republic. Unlike other Muslim countries, women in Turkey did not have to pay the cost of fighting for their rights during the early Republican period as the secularization of the state had already eliminated many obstacles on their way. Therefore, Turkish feminist movement developed in a different course compared to Western feminism.

However, the peculiarities of Turkish women's movement also bring out various indications and suspicions regarding the position of women. On one side, there is a group of scholars who believe that Turkish women were emancipated with the foundation of the Republic with the Kemalist reforms. On the other side, some scholars argue that Turkish women are emancipated but unliberated (Kandiyoti,

1987) since these mentioned reforms resulted from state feminism, not the actual participation of women. Therefore, these emancipating reforms were limited with the ideology of the state. In addition, Turkish women experienced to gather and seek for their rights in such a late time because of the state's control on them. In the light of these arguments, it can be said that the women's movement in Turkey has followed a different pattern and it can be categorized under three waves which will be elaborated in the following headings.

2.1.3.1 Feminism in Late Ottoman Times

Despite the common belief that the feminist movement started in the early Republican period with the new reforms aiming to improve the status of women, the first feminist ideas and concepts had already been put forward in the period starting with the declaration of Tanzimat Decree in 1839. In the late Ottoman period, a number of reforms were made related to education, bureaucratization, politics and social life. The concerted efforts of the Sultans to modernize the society created a community where literacy increased and new issues with respect to political and social life arose.

For the first time in Ottoman History, a number of selected male students were sent to Europe to get higher education in the late 19th century and these students who were called Young Turks came back to their countries with different mindsets. The discussion of Young Turks generated the emergence of women's issues in the public debate. Later on, women from upper or middle classes who could get proper education in Western types of schools contributed to these discussions and they questioned the inequalities women faced during that period. Çakır (2007) alleges that a feminist consciousness emerged with the hot debates and discussions of these women to attain their identities. It is a noteworthy point that well-educated or upper class women initiated the women's movement in Turkey like the Western feminist movement.

The pivotal issues for these Ottoman-Turkish feminists were about education, providing gender equality and making their voices heard in the public sphere. With these goals in their mind, they demanded to actively participate in the society and public sphere, to destroy the inequality prevalent in their families and public life and to spread the education of women to the far-flung corners of the country.

As for Ottoman-Turkish feminism, it can be safely argued that some eminent intellectuals paved the way for its debut and progress. One of these remarkable figures is Fatma Nesibe who was a spokeswoman in the White Conferences organized in 1911 to discuss the issues of women and she advocated that woman was the opposed sex and her status should be improved in order to have a happy society (Demirdirek, 1999). Another leading woman was Fatma Aliye who wrote the book named ‘*Namdaran-i Zenan-i Islamiyyan (Famous Muslim Women)*’ in 1892 to introduce influential women in Ottoman History to the public. This book stands out among other books written in that period since it was the first history book written by a woman in the Ottoman Empire. She was a great contributor to the discussions on women’s rights and she advocated for expanded rights for women without rejecting the old system. Besides these names, Nezihe Muhittin also helped the flourishing of women’s movement in the Ottoman Empire by writing short stories, novellas and articles in which she analyzed and criticized issues related to being women.

In addition to the leading figures in the formation of Ottoman-Turkish feminism, the existence of women’s periodicals or magazines was a crucial aid in providing a space for discussions on women’s issues and spreading it among women. *Şükufezer* was the first Ottoman women periodical that was first published in 1884 (Yaşar, 2008). The most popular and influential periodicals can be counted as *Terakki-i Muhadderat* (Progress of Muslim Women), *Vakiy yahu d Murebbi-yi Muhadderat* (Time or Training of Muslim Women), *Ayna* (Mirror), *Aile* (Family), *İnsaniyet* (Humanity), *Kadın Dünyası* (The Woman’s World) and *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (Newspaper Peculiar To Women). These women periodicals focused on female education, polygamy and discriminating laws or traditions. Demirdirek (1999) argues that some of these journals were influenced by Western way of living and thinking and they dealt with topics such as child care, family and society, health and hygiene etc. Additionally, the book of Mehmet Zihni Efendi named as *Meşahûri’n-Nisa* should be mentioned here since it gives place a number of famous and influential women in Islamic history.

Although there was no feminism in Western sense, it can be argued that Ottoman women raised consciousness for women’s issues thanks to their opportunity to get education and participate in public discussions. The reforms and modernization process undertook by male elite and the spread of these concepts into a circle of well-

educated women led to the emergence of Ottoman-Turkish feminism during that period which tilled the soil for new generations of feminism in Turkey.

2.1.3.2 Feminism in the Republican Times

The first wave of feminism emerged during the early 20th century with the foundation of Turkish Republic in 1923. The charismatic leader of the new Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, made radical changes and reforms to construct a modern society which was the main goal of the newly founded state (Diner & Toktaş, 2010). In other words, Atatürk and his fellows undertook a serious job to separate the country from its affiliations with Ottoman Empire which was considered by them as backward and traditional and to create a new modern nation elevated to the level of contemporary civilizations. Hence, the position and new image of women lied at the heart of this modernization project as they were the symbol of democratic rights and Westernization of the country.

During this democratization process, women's equality in the public sphere happened to be adopted as a national policy and the ideal woman of Republic who was a full citizen, urban, pursuing careers outside home, unveiled but also dutiful at home, especially at child raising was constantly prescribed by the state (White, 2003). As the state placed the new position of the state vis-à-vis women (Kandiyoti, 1987), women were encouraged to actively participate in public sphere. However, women were not prescribed to leave their responsibilities at home as homemakers and mothers. The reason for this lies in the emphasis on the mothering role of women as they were seen responsible to raise new generations of the Republic who would be patriots and helpful for their nation (Toktaş & Cindoğlu, 2006). Consequently, some scholars suggest that the Kemalist ideal of new Republican women loaded double burden on the shoulders of women in Turkey.

To be able to realize the ideal of the Republican women, many reforms were put into effect. With the replacement of Islamic laws by a secular civil code in 1926, religious and polygamous marriages were abolished, women could initiate divorce and inherit equally with men. They were also given the suffrage in 1934 which shows that Turkey was one of the first countries that gave this right to women in the history (White, 2004). Badran (2002) suggests that the adoption of the civil code has been a radical move because it is really difficult or nearly impossible to make even small

changes to improve women's status in other Middle Eastern countries as they are closely tied to Islamic law which is regarded as the words of God thus impossible to change.

On the contrary to mainstream belief, some scholars allege that women were not liberated during the early Republican period. Çakır (1994) and Demirdirek (1993) claim that women's movement was monopolized by the state and it did not allow for an independent women's movement. Diner and Toktaş (2010) show the case of Nezihe Muhittin as an example of this monopoly. Nezihe Muhittin who was a fierce supporter of the Republican reforms and one of the leading figures in women's issues desired to found a party to advocate for suffrage but the state rejected this demand and recommended her to found an organization instead. That's how, Turkish Women's Union came into being. Tekeli (1992) articulates that the founding fathers of the Republic believed that the equality between sexes was not an issue any more so they made use of this pretext to close down the women's organizations as they became redundant in male politicians' mind. As a result of this presumption, Turkish Women's Union was closed in 1935 as it was found too individualistic and could be a threat to the nation (Arat, 2000).

Along with the state restrictions on women in political life, it can be argued that there had been no room for women as individuals since their contribution to building a modern nation outweighed any other concerns for women. As for this problem, Nükhet Sirman (1989) claims that state feminism portrayed women as patriotic citizens who needed to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the nation since the subordination of individual to the nation was the most dominant theme then. Sirman (1989) thinks that women were linked to democracy rather than civilization and they became the symbol of this modernization and democratization process.

According to Binder and Richman (2011), there remained a large discrepancy between formal rights and the social position of women in Turkey. We can draw a conclusion from these statements that Turkish women were granted formal rights but also they were loaded with new roles and missions to improve the nation. Their individualistic interests were hindered and state feminism created the illusion that it was their national duty to help the nation develop.

Another concern was related to the sexuality of early Republican women. They were expected to downplay their femininity and sexuality as they were supposed to obey conservative sexuality morals. Kandiyoti (1987) depicts the dominant female image of the period as a kind of comrade women who are active in the public sphere and nation-building process but conservative about their chastity and dignity. From these arguments and historical developments, it can be safely argued that although women were granted formal rights during this period, they were discouraged from pursuing their individualistic rights which resulted in a long silence that would last until the 1980s.

2.1.3.3 Feminism from the 1980s onwards

The long political silence of women was broken during the 1980s with the rise of independent women's organizations and their challenging arguments aiming to shake the given values of the state feminism. After a long period of political polarization and fragmentation in the society, military intervened and took over the government. Besides, all kinds of political organizations were dismissed which led to the growing number of women's organizations since they were deemed as nonhazardous compared to other political leftist or rights wing organizations. Hence, many scholars believe that the military coup d'état that took place in 1980 was the primary booster for the rise of women's movement.

According to Nicole van Os (2005), another reason for the rise of women's movement was the imprisonment of the male leaders of the leftist groups which opened up a new space for these women who were former activists within these groups. With the elimination of male leaders, politically active women began to question their positions in the leftist movements as they had left aside the woman question previously for the sake of their political commitments.

Under these circumstances, Tekeli (1992) believes an opportunity for these women to attain a new identity and create a new movement emerged. It is possible to say like their female counterparts in the early Republican period, feminists in the 1980s were mostly urban, well-educated women from upper or middle class too. Thanks to their high education, they could have economic freedom which created opportunities for them to make a difference in fighting for women's rights (Diner & Toktaş, 2010).

In literature, these women seeking to stay away from the limitations of the state can be called as second wave feminists and their major issues could be defined as violence against women, battering and sexual harassment, bringing female sexuality into public debate (Diner & Toktaş, 2010). One of the remarkable events during this period was the time when 3000 women gathered in 1987 and protested against the verdict of a judge who had rejected the plea of a woman to divorce her husband because of domestic violence. The judge decided that men could beat women in order to take them under their control. His verdict caused a great deal of reaction against the violence on women and it was the first time Turkish women came together and were on the streets to speak out for themselves. Diner and Toktaş (2010) evaluates this protest as the turning point of second wave feminism since the silenced women of the early Republican period turned into active women activists who fought for their rights rather than content themselves with the rights given by the patriarchal state.

After this unforgettable protest, women continued their struggles in different ways such as petitions, street demonstrations, press conferences and lobbying so as to adjust and reform the laws that are discriminating against women. Another striking point about second wave feminists in Turkey is that they have broken various taboos existing in the society and sexuality comes first among them. Feminists of the time began to introduce new ways of protesting against sexual harassment. One of the outstanding examples would be the Purple Needle campaign in which feminists distributed purple needles to women to use them in case of sexual harassment in public transportation vehicles.

Another gaining coming along with second wave feminism is the institutionalization of the women's movement from the 1990s onwards. The foundation of a Women's Library (Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı), research centers on women's issues and the departments of Women Studies in big cities like İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir, the women's shelter called as the Purple Roof (Mor Çatı) in 1990 can be cited as examples of this new institutionalization. In addition, the number of women's periodicals or magazines such as *Somut*, *Kaktüs*, *Feminist* grew on a large scale (Diner & Toktaş, 2010).

From the 1990s onwards, the feminist movement in Turkey has witnessed a new phase coming along with the challenges of Kurdish and Islamist women's movement. The reason that underpinned the development of the third wave of feminism was the rise of identity politics in which women began to construct their identities based on their ethnicity or religion etc. rather than accepting a holistic perspective in terms of women's issues (Arat, 2000).

In the case of Kurdish feminism, female Kurdish activists pointed to the dual exploitation they have been exposed to which can be named as the patriarchal system in Kurdish community and Turkish imperialist system that has pressure on Kurdish people (Diner & Toktaş, 2010). Some of these Kurdish women identified themselves with Kurdish nationalist movement whereas some others believed that they were dominated and subjugated by the male leaders in this national movement too. As Kurdish women felt that their femaleness was not represented in Kurdish national movement, they demanded to speak out for themselves and Kurdish feminist movement has increased since then.

Their identity, in other words their Kurdishness united these women who have been highly politicized with the nationalist movement but also have become critical of it. Arat (2000) argues that Kurdish women's movement has liberated itself from Turkish feminism and Kurdish nationalist movement. One of the major criticisms directed against Turkish feminism is that they constantly ignore women of other ethnicities which proves that they have an essentialist understanding of women (Çaha, 2007). This criticism appears to be similar to the claims of third wave feminists who blame second wave feminists for their ignorance of women of color and from other ethnicities. Furthermore, Kurdish feminists separate themselves from Kurdish nationalist movement too as they find themselves in the secondary position in this movement which has been mostly led by males. They complain that women are seen as asexual actors in the nationalist movement and their demands as women are ignored.

Coming to the stage with these claims, Kurdish women have succeeded in forming organizations and publishing their magazines in which they can discuss and challenge the traditions that oppress Kurdish women, racism and the state pressure on Kurdish people. Roza, Jujin and Jin u Jiyan can be counted among these women's

magazines (Çaha, 2007). Also, they established the Independent Kurdish Women (Bağımsız Kürt Kadın Grubu), KAMER, DIKASUM, Kardelen, Selis and VAKA to reflect their subjugation by Turkish state and the oppression they experience in their Kurdish communities. On the top of their institutionalization and mobilization, Bora (2004) argues that Kurdish women have also displayed the essentialist approach of Turkish feminism on women and Turkishness. As being attacked with this salient challenge, it can be said that Turkish feminist movement has attempted to create a space for dialogue between the two groups and there has been more interaction between Kurdish and Turkish feminists since 1990s.

As abovementioned, there have been two groups of women causing a cleavage within the secular Turkish feminism; the former movement is based on ethnicity named as Kurdish feminism and the latter is based on religion named as Islamic feminism. Like Kurdish women's movement, Islamic feminism has challenged Turkish women's movement that is alleged to ignore women of different identities, let it be Kurdish or Muslim. The roots of Islamic feminism in Turkey trace back to the period from the 1990s onwards and it has grown larger through the years. As Islamic feminism is more related to the heading of Religious Communities and Feminism, it will be elaborated in the following pages.

2.2 Religious Communities and Feminism

The relation between religion and feminism has always been complicated, especially in terms of women question since religion has a profound effect on shaping their lives. For this reason, feminists of various religions question and challenge the existing beliefs and practices by reinterpreting these texts. In addition, they attempt to find out the stories of influential women in their religions to prove that women had a significant place in the religious affairs in the past and to produce an egalitarian discourse. To investigate the arguments of feminists in different religions would be helpful to provide us a general framework for Islamic feminism.

2.2.1 Jews and Feminism

Like any other religion, Judaism is claimed to be grounded in patriarchal premises consisting of misogynist constructions. Throughout history, there have been a number of counter arguments against feminism and traditional Judaism (Cohen,

1980). However, the existence of Jewish feminists who refrain from giving up their Jewish identity and hold on to their feminist ideals may show us that there is a possibility to reconcile these two concepts. As for producing arguments, Jewish feminists have been concerned with women's exemption from public worship, studying Torah, women's inability to witness and divorce their husband, their imprisonment to the private sphere.

Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, Rachel Adler, Blu Greenberg, Judith Plaskow can be counted among the prominent names who have shown interest and produced academic works in this field. All these thinkers challenge the low status assigned by Judaism to women and their systematic alienation. Coming along with their radical challenges, Jewish feminists organized conventions and groups to raise consciousness and to have more access to communal professions which had been under the control of Jewish men until then. In addition, these women have produced works in which they criticize Jewish laws, historical texts and propose their own interpretation or make adjustments in them (Cohen, 1980).

One of the problems in Judaism highlighted by feminists is the patriarchal structure of the religion. For instance; Jackson (1997) advocates that when we examine Torah and the interpretation of Jewish law, *halachah*, it is clear that Judaism has been defined and determined by Jewish leaders, namely *rabbis*. She goes further by claiming that almost all of these leaders are men and their interpretation of Torah and laws is conducted through a male point of view. Therefore they lack female perspective and women's voice.

To be able to reconcile feminism and Judaism, Jewish feminists revisit the verses in Torah and the historical stories passed down from generations to generations to reinterpret them through women's perspective in the light of modern world's principles, lifestyle and necessities (Jackson, 1997). Their basic demand is gender-equal participation in their religious affairs and they have made a considerable effort to prove that new interpretations with a female perspective is also probable (Cohen, 1980). By integrating the female point of view into these interpretations, they have opened up a space to reflect their thoughts and needs in the religious sphere.

Another problematic issue to deal with is the exemption of women from public prayers and rituals. The idea that men are easily distracted or tempted by women so

women should absent themselves from public participation in religious prayers lies behind this exemption. The mothering role of women and her servitude to her husband/children are also used as excuses for the reiteration of women's exemption (Jackson, 1997). As the main duty of a woman is taking care of her children, it was thought that it would be inappropriate to call a woman for a prayer when she was busy with something else. That's why, women are also exempted from time-bound prayers outside the home.

Having explained the misogynist constructions placed in Torah and other holy texts to which Jewish feminists direct criticism, I would like to touch upon the new solutions or propositions coming from Jewish feminists. As one of the solutions, Jackson (1997) proposes that we should focus on the language before moving onto a deeper analysis about the holy texts. She argues that the masculine plural form is used for the plural (for a group of people) in Hebrew so it does not necessarily mean that only men are addressed with these lines. We can interpret this as appealing to all humankind including women and men. We should also bear in our mind that the use of plural masculine for a group of people regardless of their gender is also an issue in Arabic which leads to different interpretations of the Qur'an and is manipulated to serve the interests of the patriarchal society which I will elaborate on in the next chapter.

As another solution, they draw our attention to the fact that these discriminating texts can be social rather than divine will. For instance; Greenberg (1976) states that social norms originated in the past were integrated into the *halachah*. Moreover, Henry and Taitz (1988) put forward the idea that many restrictions on the women's roles resulted from social practices and attitudes rather than Jewish scripts. Accordingly, Christ and Plaskow (1979) propose that the relation between women's history and Jewish law should be explored more. The question of how women were shaped, defined and how they responded to *halachah* should be clarified.

As seen above, there are many scholars who point to the social construction of Jewish laws. Jonathan Webber is among these prominent scholars and asserts that Jewish laws, in other words *halachah*, cannot exist separately from social consensus (Webber, 1983). These laws are based on traditions which have transformed into laws throughout time. That's why, Webber (1983) alleges that women's experiences

remain in-between laws and customs. However, he believes that these Jewish laws can evolve over the centuries thanks to social changes and newly occurred needs in modern life. He gives some recent examples to show the change in these laws. For instance; a husband cannot divorce his wife without her consent now or the groom has to give the bride a marriage document which ensures the payment of financial settlements to a wife in case of divorce.

To conclude from these problematic issues and propositions, it can be said that Jewish feminists believe that feminism and Judaism can walk hand in hand. These feminists attempt to reconcile these two concepts without giving up one of them. To be able to do this, they firstly point out the patriarchal structure and highly male interpretation of the Torah and other holy texts. In the light of these pointed problems, Jewish feminists aim to reinterpret these holy texts and scripts through a female perspective to prove that most of the things that are taken to be granted as divine will or unchangeable facts are socially constructed throughout the history. In fact, these claims hold true for Christians and Christian feminists whose concerns are very similar to Jewish feminists' which will be further discussed under the following heading.

2.2.2 Christians and Feminism

Like Judaism, Christianity has also been questioned in terms of women question by feminist thinkers and theologians as well. The roots of feminist theology in Christianity which has challenged the existing way of thinking and perspective on the Bible date back to the early 19th century and new insights have been put forward to interpret holy texts from the late 20th century on (Harder, 1992). It would be possible to find a parallel between Jewish and Christian feminists who have firm belief in their religions but do not refrain from criticizing the patriarchal nature inherent in them.

Contrary to mainstream belief that considers the Bible as highly patriarchal and restrictive for women; feminist theologians believe that the Bible can be interpreted as a text that enables women's emancipation. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1997) puts forward that the Bible is not a static and historical document but it is a progressive text being formed through the experiences of both women and men

throughout history. As a result, it still continues to be shaped according to new situations, priorities and needs of human beings.

As for Christian feminism, it can be argued that women who conducted their own Bible studies with the beginning of the 1880s marked the beginning of it. These women attempted to find counter evidence or interpretation in the Bible against the discourse of inequality and oppression of women by studying the lives of influential women and their roles in Christian history and the Bible. Another remarkable stage of Christian feminism began when women took one step further in the late 20th century and they adopted a questioning approach not only against texts related to women but every text in the Bible. Therefore their major aim has become to reconstruct theology to liberate the faith from the oppression of patriarchal structure (Harder, 1992).

The reinterpretation of the holy texts is the main yardstick for the works of Christian feminists. Concerning this matter, Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1972) who is a prominent figure in second wave feminism lists three reasons why feminist interpretation of the Bible is essential. Firstly, she believes that the Bible has been a tool for keeping women subordinated and this led to the hindrance of their liberation. For her, the second reason is that the Bible has remarkable authority over both women and men which means their lives and experiences have been affected by it to a considerable extent. Last but the most critical reason for her is the integrative nature of religion with other areas of life. Stanton (1972) asserts that reforming laws or institutions is not doable without reforming biblical religion as it constitutes the building block of society and has vast political influence on the society, churches and individuals, especially on the lives of women.

In her book named 'Feminist Theology/ Christian Theology', Pamela Dickey Young (1990) touches upon three statements that most of feminist theologians agreed upon. It would be helpful to have a look at these common points in order to pinpoint the major principles of Christian feminism. The first point is the thought that traditional theology is patriarchal which means the domination of men over women lies at the heart of all political and social relationships in the society. Another consensus among these feminists is the belief that traditional theology has ignored women and their

experiences throughout history. Lastly, they have come to agree that the patriarchal facet of theology threatens women since it strips women of their rights.

The language of the holy books or texts poses a significant problem for feminists in Judaism, Christianity and Islam so we need to revisit our common beliefs or assumptions about them. We need to keep in mind that the languages used in these holy scripts have features or rules peculiar to them and they should be assessed in accordance with the time they were revealed. Departing from this problematic, it is true that the language used in the Bible and the strategies/perspectives used in its translation have been at the core of the discussions of these feminists. In this regard, Fiorenza (1997) advocates that the biblical message was sent to a patriarchal society that's why, it has patriarchal imagery and androcentric language. However, this language form does not mean that women are not included in the biblical message; they are just not mentioned explicitly. Finally, she adds that an adequate translation is not the literal one, word by word, but transferring meaning from one text to another should be the main yardstick for translation.

To her mind, the perspectives or prejudices of translators also influence the rendering of biblical texts. To prove her point, she provides us different translations of the same verse, First Corinthians 11:3 which is literally translated as *"However, I want you [plural] to know that the head of every man is the Christ, however, a head of woman is the man, however, head of the Christ is the God."* However, in different versions, the word 'head' has been translated as 'responsible' as well. Thus the implications of the word changes significantly as the word 'responsible' does not come along with any hierarchical relations between women and men.

With these examples and counter arguments, feminist discussions of Christian theology and egalitarian approaches to the biblical message have been made possible. Feminist theologians in Christianity aspire to spread their hermeneutical approach and contribute to the women's emancipation without denying the Bible or other Scriptures as they are deeply religious and committed to Christianity.

2.2.3 Buddhists and Feminism

Like other religions abovementioned, Buddhism cannot escape from the accusations and harsh criticism with respect to women question. Although Buddhism is believed

to eradicate inequalities among people and transform the society structured within caste system, many feminist scholars criticize and underline the patriarchal doctrines and teachings of Buddhism. The fact that Buddhism has a claim of equality among humans and it is seemingly egalitarian is being questioned and attacked by Buddhist feminists. For instance; Rita M. Gross (1993) claims that Buddhism has a patriarchal and androcentric form. Accordingly, Winnie Tamm (1995) advocates that we should not take egalitarian philosophies of Buddhism at face value since it involves an essentialist view of women.

With the beginning of the late 20th century, many scholars began to question the dogmas and doctrines of Buddhism and it has been harshly criticized since then. Many Buddhist women have started to ask this question: Does Buddhism formulate and maintain sex-role stereotypes and the domination of men over women? Feminists can be said to fall into two categories; the ones who think that tradition and religion is highly sexist, therefore irreversible and the ones who are in favor of a total revolution that requires to get rid of misogynist traditions, symbols and structures (Christ & Plaskow, 1979).

In the second group, there are many scholars such as Rita M. Gross, Diana Y. Paul and Anne Carolyn Klein who have approached the issues of women, sex and gender in Buddhism from a feminist perspective (Owen, 1997). They believe that the concept of equality between sexes and in creation is inherent in Buddhism whose further investigation can yield a new form of feminism (Minamoto, 1991). Similar to Jewish and Christian feminists, Buddhist feminists also invest in the idea that their religion has an egalitarian nature but the lack of female perspective in its interpretation has produced misogynist constructions over time.

While Jewish and Christian feminists revisit their holy books and reinterpret them through a female perspective, the Holy Scriptures are at the heart of discussions in Buddhism too. That's why, one of the biggest controversial issues for Buddhist feminists is the Eight Rules of Honor set by Buddha. As a teacher of social equality and justice, Buddha practised it by building sangha (community) in which equality lies at the core and thus caste system was eradicated. When Buddhist nuns asked for forming a community, Buddha objected severely but then approved it for the sake of equality principle. However, Buddha set the Eight Rules of Honor for the community

of nuns which include degrading enforcements for Buddhist nuns, namely bhiksunis. These rules were set to provide the upmost respect to male authority which consolidates the oppression of women in the religion and society.

Another controversial issue is five hindrances put against women in Buddhism which hold them back from being a Buddha and full enlightenment. These can be ordered as: women cannot be reborn as the God Sakra, the God Brahma, the king mara, a Cakravartin king and a Buddha. This doctrine was strengthened by conservative bhikṣus (monks) to provide the continuance of Buddhist dharma.

Besides, Buddhist feminists oppose to the concept of sexual transformation from a female body to a male body. In Buddhism, a person needs to have thirty two heroic marks of Buddha including retractable horse-penis marks to attain Buddhahood. As women are missing that mark, it is not probable for a woman to become a Buddha. That's why, there are many historic stories filled up with examples of sexual transformation of women to become a Buddha and fully enlightened. Encountering these stories, Buddhist feminists have provided various explanations and interpretations with regard to this transformation. Jeon (1999) evaluates the idea of sexual transformation for enlightenment as a strategy leading to a female emancipation. On the other hand, sexual transformation can be regarded as the representation of a transition from the imperfection and immorality of humans to the mental perfection of Buddha. The reason for this way of thinking is that femaleness and maleness are regarded as binary oppositions in the society. While the former one symbolizes the degraded mind, the latter one represents the perfected mind so the metaphor of sexual transformation for enlightenment is rooted in this dichotomy in Buddhist culture (Paul & Wilson, 1985).

As seen above, religions have constantly been blamed for their patriarchal structures and male-dominant interpretations. Although there are some feminists who think that it is pointless to expect an egalitarian religion, some others attach to the possibility of deconstructing prevalent patriarchal discourses. These feminists agree upon the fact that the language or misinterpretations of the holy texts pose serious problems in shaping the women's lives and status in the society. So as to solve these problems, they propose to reinterpret them with a female perspective and to keep in mind that

the existing religious norms or practices may come from social needs of the time rather than being the words of divine will.

2.2.4 Muslims and Feminism

Like the religions described and placed above, Islam has also been considered to be highly patriarchal. It is believed that Islam as one of the most influential domains in Muslims' lives is used to legitimize the oppression of women via manipulating its power on individuals. However, there have been numerous counter arguments and academic works produced since the late 20th century by a variety of scholars in the Middle East to challenge this view by claiming that Islam is egalitarian in terms of human rights and gives women their deserved rights and equal status on the contrary to the common belief.

This new movement led by Muslim women and men can be called as 'Islamic feminism' which calls for a new perspective in Islam and necessitates the reinterpretation of the Qur'an by integrating a female perspective into it. As can be deduced from the previous pages, the major claims of Islamic feminists display similarities with the arguments of feminists in Judaism and Christianity. Basically, these feminists have a suspicious approach on the established beliefs and rituals in their religion. They point out the need for a female perspective in the interpretation of the holy verses/ texts in order to find out the egalitarian essence of the religion.

By organizing conferences and workshops at the end of the 1990s, Muslim women have opened up a new space to reconcile Islam and feminism. To institutionalize their struggles and constitute a common ground for religious Muslim feminists, Islamic feminists have gathered around various transnational networks (Badran, 1986). Women Living under Muslim Laws (WLUML), Sisterhood is Global Institute (SIGI), Musawah (Global Movement for Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family) and Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE) are among the leading organizations that have promoted and contributed to the women's movement in various Muslim countries.

From the 1990s onwards, Islamic feminism has spread many countries in the Muslim world and altered the status of women to some extent. The movement of Muslim women in various countries, their similarities and differences will be elaborated

under this heading by investigating the leading countries and figures in the movement. Among these countries, Iran comes first as it has been the landmark for the struggles of Muslim women to get the rights they deserved and to make their voice heard among the Middle Eastern countries. Considering the conditions existing in their countries and biases against women, it can be argued that these women put their careers, families and even lives in danger while fighting for their rights and to be accepted as full citizens. On the other side, their struggle has initiated a new discourse regarding women and Islam (Ahmadi, 2006). For this reason, their fight for women rights is worthy of mentioning here.

As for Muslim women's movement in Iran, Ahmadi (2006) claims that the status of women has altered as a result of the changing conditions and newly occurred needs coming along with modernization, so looking for Islamic solutions and reconciliation between Islam and the modern life have been at the heart of ongoing discussions led by Muslim (especially elite or upper class women) and secular feminists, and even political and religious leaders. The need for this reconciliation coincided with the historical conditions peculiar to Iran and Islamic feminism sprang from this atmosphere.

What makes Iran distinguish from other Middle Eastern countries is that it has never been colonized by any Western country or force. Being not colonized is of crucial importance for our discussion since Muslim women who have directed questions to Qur'an or religion to improve women's position have always been made the scapegoat for bringing Western ideas into the country and harming the intactness of the culture in previously colonized countries (Ahmadi, 2006; Najmabadi, 1998). However, the struggles of women for their emancipation are not condemned as being Western in the countries that were not under colonial rule in the history (Badran, 1994). As one of the countries that have not been colonized, in Iran, feminists have not been attacked for bringing Western ideas into the country. On the contrary to other Muslim countries, Iranian Islamic feminists do not hesitate to make use of Western ideas and concepts which proves that one does not have to choose his/her national or religious identity over Western ideas (Ahmadi, 2006). That's why, it inspired many Muslim women not to abandon their struggles and religions for the sake of the other.

In such an environment, they do not hesitate to use secular methodologies to make their claims more valid. As an example of this, Ahmadi (2006) shows that like postmodernist feminists, Iranian Islamic feminists do not invest in the idea of an essential nature of women. Instead, they favor multiplicity of postmodernist feminism which claims that there are multiple roles, truths and realities in this world. The adoption of Western ideas and concepts by Iranian Islamic feminists has provided a dialogue between Islamic and secular feminists which reversed the hatred or antagonism between them existing for many years.

In the light of these conditions, it can be said that the search for the emancipation of women by Iranian women activists has opened up a new space for the reinterpretation of the Qur'an and other sacred texts in relation to women's issues. Najmabadi (1998) denotes that the emergence of feminist readings of these texts in Iran has been so rapid and country-wide that such a significant shift has not been seen before in any other country. Ahmadi (2006) adds that this rethinking with regard to women rights and empowerment has been boosted by the increasing number of women's organizations, institutes and journals. The most well-known Iranian women journal *Zanan* for instance affirms its feminist identity and support for the reinterpretation of the Qur'an and other sacred texts.

Like Iran, countries in the North Africa and the Arab world have been influential in spreading Islamic feminism. The feminist movement in the continent traces back to late 19th century during the nationalist struggles against Western colonization. The leading figures of Islamic feminism in these countries show similarities as the first feminist discourse has been initiated and generated by urban women of the middle and upper class (Badran, 2005). Another common issue among these feminists is the changing conditions of the time and the adaptation to modernity since they were critiques of the fact that women could not benefit from modernity as much as males just because of their gender and they implemented this kind of reasoning to legitimize their struggles and movement (Badran, 1986).

Although there have been secular feminists trying to promote gender equality in North African and Arab countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Sudan and Tunisia, feminists with an Islamic identity and references increased over time. Since most of these countries were colonized by Western countries, feminism is

considered to be a Western construction and secular feminists are highly criticized because of their attachment to Western ideals. However, the rise of Islamic feminists created a new sphere for women question. Accordingly, Wing (2011) advocates that the usage of Islamic parameters by Islamic feminists on the issues of women ensures legitimacy for their movement as the public regard it as a movement emerged in opposition to Western beliefs.

The reasons for the rise of Islamic feminism in these countries can be summarized as the concerns of women about the rise of Islamist movements, the extension of the education into most parts of world and the disillusionment felt by women against their governments consolidating gender discrimination (Badran, 2005). Another concern for these women is the discussion of hijab or veil. The Western intellectuals or feminists have been mistaken by the idea that Arab or Muslim women had to get rid of veil to free themselves and to avoid sexual discrimination. Unlike Western feminists or Egyptian secular feminists, Islamic feminists consider veil as one of the ways to free themselves. Like Egyptian Islamic feminists, Moroccan feminists view veil as a source of power to show their support for women's movement without giving up their Muslim identities (Ahmed, 1992).

As for Morocco, these were again mainly urban organizations where feminists mostly focused on family law by demanding the abolition of polygamy, to attain political rights as full citizens and gain more space in the public domain (Sadiqi, 2010). Sisters of Purity Association is one of the most prominent women's organizations whose demands and struggles have been backed up by numerous female journals, academics and civil society. In addition, Sadiqi (2010) proposes that feminists began to make use of religious framework to support their points and make their claims sounder. They began to put an emphasis on the issue of veiling and included much more references to the Qur'an and Hadiths. Thanks to the efforts of Islamic feminists, *Moudawana* or family code was adapted in 2004.

With the new adjustments, women in Morocco have attained the right for self-guardianship, the right for divorce and child custody. Badran (2002) argues that the new family code is not flawless and is far behind the expectations of feminists in the country. However, the family law includes justice and gender equality demanded and

campaigns by Islamic feminists which has been made possible with the new rereading of the Qur'an from a female perspective.

Like in the Arab world, women in South Asia have been exposed to gender discrimination in their society. What makes this region highly patriarchal and problematic for her is the presence of village and tribal councils that uphold higher positions and importance at local levels which affect women's daily lives every moment. The existence of khap panchayats can be given as an example for this type of councils which are ruled by mainly upper class male members of the society and have strict rules over individuals. Also, any person who transgresses these rules is severely punished (Baxi, Rai & Ali, 2006). In spite of the fact that these councils make decisions in contradiction to the Constitution of India which forbids any kind of discrimination based on gender, they still carry out their rulings and edicts without losing their importance.

Kabeer (2003) points out another problem of the women in South Asia which is the underrepresentation of women in political institutions. Although women have begun their active participation in politics during the national struggles against colonial rule to attain their independence, they were discouraged from political participation after the independence was gained. That is another mutual point among Muslim women in North Africa and South Asia as they were active participants during national struggles however their interests or rights were ignored after the country has gained its independence. This disillusionment is one of the building blocks for the emergence of women's organizations and many formal attempts to restore women's situations.

As happened in Egypt, Iran, Arab and North African countries, the women's movement in South Asia too was firstly led by upper class women and men who could get to obtain a proper education. These first organizations focused their attempts and discussions on the abolition of sati (the burning of a wife when her husband dies) and child marriage, the provision of education for both sexes, the involvement of women in public (Sen, 2002; Kumar, 1993). In India, women showed resistance to the separation of personal laws regulating marriage, inheritance and kinship based on their religious identity. They believe that people should have universal rights rather than being identified according to their religion and women

were discontent with the unjust laws that include gender discrimination and made by *ulema* (Kirmani, 2009).

As for Islamic feminism in South Asia, it traces back to 1990s when women in this region became weary of their general impression created by Western scholars and have begun to engage with Islam in a positive way to further their struggles for gender justice (Kirmani, 2009). Their main focal points on their agendas can be defined as the reform of Muslim personal laws, protecting women's matrimonial rights and creating an understanding among women from all communities and religions. Schneider (2009) asserts that these believing Muslim women are not satisfied with depending on the comments and interpretation of religious authorities; instead they suggest that they should read and interpret the Qur'an for themselves. Göle (2000) adds that their attempts to make reforms in religion and the readings of the Qur'an can be evaluated as a reaction to the crisis of religious authority at local, national and global levels. As laws and the interpretation of sacred texts has always been monopolized by men.

Before moving onto the part on Turkish Muslim feminists, it is of vital importance to touch upon the significance of Islamic feminists who are living in Western countries for a long time and being a member of academia in these countries. Asma Barlas, Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Valentine Moghadam etc. can be given as examples for the category of Islamic feminists who have emigrated into a Western country and get a chance to compare the gender roles or norms in these countries with the ones in their original countries. For instance; Asma Barlas who was born in Pakistan and had the chance to get education in Pakistan and the USA now is the Director of the Center for the Study of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity of the department of Politics at Ithaca College in New York. Besides her articles on Islam and gender, her book 'Believing Women in Islam' is one of the most prominent works put forward in this field.

Another example would be Amina Wadud who has an Afro-American family and accepted Islam in 1972. She studied in Egypt and the USA in universities such as University of Pennsylvania, University of Michigan, Cairo University and Al-Azhar University. Focusing her attention on Islamic and Qur'anic studies, Wadud has worked in various universities in the USA. In addition to her scholarly works, she

challenged patriarchy in Islam in many ways. For instance; she acted as *imam* for a congregation of 100 people including women and men without gender separation. Her book named as *Qur'an and Woman* has led to hot debates in academia since it involves some revolutionary ideas and claims.

Leila Ahmed, likewise, can be counted among these female scholars who live in Western countries. Although she was born in Egypt, she studied at University of Cambridge. Later, she moved to the USA and she became the first professor of women's studies in religion at Harvard Divinity School. Although she does not directly produce works on Islamic feminism, she touched upon gender issues in Islam and women in Islamic history. Her book titled as *Women and Gender in Islam* is among the significant works that may provide an insight into the discussion of this study.

After explaining the movement of Muslim women in various countries in the Muslim world, it is indispensable to touch upon the development of Islamic feminism in Turkey for the purpose of this study. The gathering of Muslim women in Turkey to represent themselves and voice their demands on women's issues without abandoning their Muslim identity started in the 1990s with the rise of political Islam which helped to boost Muslim women's movement. To be able to understand Islamic feminism in Turkey, we should have a look at Islamist movement which has existed since the 1960s (Diner & Toktaş, 2010).

Although political parties with Islamic identity were considered to be a threat against the secularism of the state and closed down, Islamist movement has gained a momentum since the 1990s with the adoption of identity politics. Within the political history of Turkey, two political parties, consecutively The Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) and Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) have achieved great success in changing the course of politics and opening up a space for Muslim women to politicize (Diner & Toktaş, 2010).

Being in power for 12 years, JDP has adopted a new stance towards politics by creating a new party program which favors liberal economy and collaboration with West, seeks to create a more powerful Turkey in the Middle East and the Islamic world. The political leaders and intellectuals in Islamist movement are critical of Kemalist ideology and high secularization of the state. Like in the case of Kurdish

women, the politicization of women by taking part in conservative political parties has provided a chance for them to represent themselves and increase their visibility in the public sphere. Çaha (2007) gives another reason for Muslim women to come together and speak out for themselves which is the dissemination of media and educational network throughout Turkey. With these new opportunities, religious women have become more visible.

With the increasing visibility of religious women in the public sphere, especially in universities, Turkish society and politics faced a new problem: headscarf. Muslim women's fight for wearing headscarf at universities also accelerated the political participation of these women. As above-mentioned, the dissemination of educational networks gave opportunity for religious female students who were educated in modern schools to appear at universities. Çaha (2007) argues that they were held back by Kemalist elites who would view headscarf as a threat to the secular regime.

The first incident came out in 1984 when female students were not allowed to enter their schools in Ankara Divinity Faculty. Beyazıt Square has been the landmark of protests against the ban on headscarf. These veiled women came together and carried out many street demonstrations of which the most popular one was Freedom Chain that took place in many cities at the same time. People came together holding hand in hand and formed a chain throughout the country. Another striking event was that Merve Kavakçı who had been elected could not take her oath in the Grand National Assembly because her head was covered and she was highly protested.

Although Kemalist elites view headscarf as a symbol of revolt against the regime, most scholars argue that women wear headscarf for the sake of religious purposes not political ones. Most scholars claim that women wear headscarf because they believe it is a religious decree cited in the Qur'an. In addition, Göle (1998) notes that headscarf has become a medium for Muslim women to participate in public domain. Accordingly, Çaha (2007) articulates that headscarf has happened to be seen as a symbol of oppression. However, it can be accepted as a personal choice of religious women. From this perspective, headscarf can be evaluated as something liberating women. Arat (2000) points out that unlike most of the secular groups in the country, some secular feminists supported Muslim women to wear headscarf.

With this high political participation, many new organizations were founded and women magazines came out since the 1980s. Among these magazines, there are Kadın ve Aile (Woman and Family), Bizim Aile (Our Family), Prenses (Princess), Kadın Kimliği (Woman's Identity) and Mektup (Letter). In addition to these, Ayrımcılığa Karşı Kadın Hakları Derneği (AKDER) (The Association for Human Rights Against Discrimination), Başkent Kadın Platformu (the Capital City Women's Platform) and Gökkuşáğı Kadın Derneđi (the Rainbow Women's Association) were established to discuss the problems and identities of women who consider themselves as Muslim women and believe in the equality between women and men (Çaha, 2007).

Moghadam (2002) name these women as Islamic feminists who care about problems and challenges that Muslim women face in their Islamic communities. As one of the eminent Islamic feminists, Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal who was the co-founder of the Capital City Women's Platform criticizes the traditional understanding and misuse of the Qur'an which gives rise to domination of men over women. In her writings and books, Tuksal cites the traditions originated from patriarchal culture rather than from Islam as the locus of misunderstanding and women's oppression. She denies the assignment of traditional female roles such as mothers/wives by claiming that there is no gender-based division of labor in Islam.

In addition, Feyza Akınerdem who has academic studies concerning gender and women issues in Islam can be given as an example of Muslim female scholars in Turkey. She graduated from the department of Sociology at Boğaziçi University and completed her doctorate at London King's College. She has a blog named as 'Reçel' where she discusses various gender issues in Turkey. Unlike many scholars, she claims that it is possible for a woman to veil herself and to be a feminist at the same time (Yeşilgöz, 2012). To put in a nutshell, it can be said that Islamic feminists demand to take place in public by pursuing careers and educational opportunities; they reject the traditional roles assigned by the patriarchal culture and the modernization process which assumes to create an essential type of women by ignoring women of different ethnicities, religions or color.

In a nutshell, women in the Muslim world have gone through great transformations and challenges in terms of women's issues. As these women have been highly

dominated by patriarchal nature of their culture in conjunction with legal jurisprudence, they have gathered to make reforms on these laws and cultural attitudes against women. The growing number of feminist organizations and campaigns has been the sign of more achievements in the future. The most striking point in these countries is that Islamic feminism has filled a gap between their religion and women's movement which could provide reconciliation between the public and women's rights advocacy.

CHAPTER III

MAJOR ARGUMENTS OF ISLAMIC FEMINISTS

In the previous chapter, I briefly discussed the feminist movement and highlighted activities of women around the Muslim World in the context of major countries by examining their progress with regard to women's rights. In this chapter, I will examine Islamic feminism as a global social movement in details and its main arguments. I will focus on how Islamic feminists follow or differ from the Islamic tradition and in what ways they brought solutions to the current problems. To begin with, I will elaborate the theoretical background and strategies of Islamic feminists in order to have a more accurate picture of the movement. After that, I will examine the discussions of Islamic feminists that can fall into two categories: ontological and practical issues. Woman in creation, her nature and gender equality will be analyzed under the heading of ontological discussions. Then, I will move onto the practical discussions which include the woman's position in marriage and family, her place in the public sphere and her legal rights. While explaining these issues, I will try to focus on some of the key terms and concepts. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to cover all aspects of Islamic feminism which also include legal and political dimensions.

3.1 Theoretical Background of Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminism has been a contested terrain as it highly differs from secular feminism and existing women's movements. One on hand, secular feminists who fight for their rights on the basis of human rights without consulting Islamic traditions or grounds mostly view religions as ipso facto oppressive for women. On the other hand, in Muslim world it is believed that Western feminism tried to justify their intervention on Muslim societies by using the oppression of Muslim women as an excuse (Ahmed, 1992, 54). Consequently, most people used to consider Islam and feminism to be an oxymoron and both sides of the discussion were unwilling to

initiate a dialogue between each other in the first place. Under these circumstances, Muslim women fighting for gender equality had to choose between their faith and gender until the emergence of Islamic feminism. However, Islamic feminism has been a ground to create secular and religious convergences regarding women and gender issues.

In order to depict Islamic feminism and its theoretical bases, one requires concerted efforts because of the delicacy and multiplicity of the movement. Before moving onto the discussion of the ontological and practical issues discussed in Islamic feminism and how it challenges the mainstream way of thinking about women in Islam, I would like to explore some theoretical bases on which Islamic feminists have grounded their views.

From the 1990s onwards, the term 'Islamic feminism' has been the part of academic discussions and a standpoint for Muslim women who seek to eradicate de jure and de facto gender inequalities in their society without giving up their religious identity. A great number of scholars have contributed to the discussion by coining their definitions, highlighting the key terms and pivotal issues for further exploration. Some of them view Islamic feminism as solely a new discourse, whereas for others it is a global social movement that brings about new dimensions to gender issues. (Badran, 1994; Haddad & Esposito, 2003).

As for the definition of the movement, Badran (1994) gives her opinion and calls Islamic feminism as the first theology-driven feminist discourse that has a huge impact on the lives of ordinary people as well as privileged ones. Although she accepts that there have been feminist theologians in Judaism and Christianity, she claims Muslim feminists have reached a wider range of audience in a short time thanks to globalization. Like Badran, another renowned scholar Tohidi (1998) considers Islamic feminism as a movement of Muslim women, who are attached to their religious identities and try to uncover the deep message of the Qur'an in terms of gender equality by bringing women-friendly verses to the surface to support their arguments, especially to get their rights granted in the Qur'an (Tohidi, 1998).

As a social movement, Islamic feminists have some notions or ideals in common with secular feminists. Like their secular counterparts, Islamic feminists prioritized the equality of genders among their ideals but they have made use of different

sources. As for Islamic feminists, their cardinal principle can be defined as the full equality of human beings in private and public spheres and their primary task is to restore the Qur'anic message and articulate it in the right way (Badran, 2006). Unlike secular feminists who refrain from any religious doctrines or sources, gender-sensitive Muslim scholars have advanced a theory of gender equality inherent in the Qur'an by rereading the Qur'an, revisiting prophetic traditions (*hadith*) and reconsidering Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) through a female perspective. We should keep in mind that although Islamic feminists used a variety of sources to back up their arguments, it holds true to say that the Qur'an is their primary source and lies at the heart of their studies.

Having explained the definition and scope of the movement, it is high time to investigate the motives that lie behind the emergence of Islamic feminism. The rise of Islamist movement, new ideologies and challenges coming along with modernity and the aspiration of Muslim women who have been constantly disappointed by their Islamic governments can be cited among these motives.

As for the origins of the movement, Iranian scholar Ziba Mir-Hosseini points out the rise of Islamist movement in the Arab world and Middle Eastern countries beginning with the Islamic Revolution in 1979 in Iran. For her, the Islamist movement let down Muslim women as they found themselves as second-class citizens in this new political world. The disappointment made Muslim women realize that democratization and modernization of Islamic legacy was deeply needed. Women who thought there were discrepancies between real Islamic rights and the laws regulated by Islamists got into action to defend their rights and it led to the rise of Islamic feminism in these countries (Mir-Hosseini, 2004).

The importance of the rising Islamism and Islamist movement in various countries has been recognized by another scholar, Riffat Hassan too. Hassan (1999) indicates that women have begun to recognize their position in religion restricts them with the increasing pressure of Islamist movement on women. As mentioned in the second chapter, women have been the symbols of political, religious and national movements throughout history such as in the Westernization process that took place in the early years of Turkish Republic or the national struggles in the colonized countries against Western forces. However, women have been disillusioned by the

policies as they were encouraged to be active in public place at the times of war but they were told to go back their homes after the independence was gained or revolution happened. Islamic movement disappointed Muslim women too as they realized that they were manipulated or put into a disadvantageous position with the Islamization process (Hassan, 1999).

Like Islamist movement, modernity affected Muslim women and their position like other countries too. It is possible to say that Muslim world couldn't cope with the challenges and novelties coming along with modernity. Hassan (1999) claims that out of their suspicion against the Western world, Muslims disapproved anything modern and the concept of 'emancipated women' was at the top of these issues. Facing the new conditions and needs of women in the modern world, Islamist governments attaching themselves to old interpretations or doctrines could not adapt themselves to the newly occurred problems and could not give enough answers to women issues. As a result, the rise of Islamist movement and the effect of modernity helped the emergence of feminism in these countries which can be described as a 'dilemma'. In her article named 'Beyond Islam vs. Feminism', Ziba Mir-Hosseini approves this dilemma, too and defines Islamic feminism as the unwanted child of Islamism (Mir-Hosseini, 2011, 6). In other words, as a reaction to the Islamist movement, Muslim women began to engage in academic studies of the Qur'an and theological discussions to ease their contemporary situation and to prove that Islamic tradition is not monolithic regarding gender issues.

As Haddad and Esposito (2003) defines, Islamic feminism is a cross-border movement that brings together all Muslim women seeking to redefine their identity in a more modern manner suitable to their religion and culture (Haddad & Esposito, 2003, 13). Calling the movement as 'cross-border' plays a key role here since most of the Islamic feminists have migrated to Western countries and are away from their origins. For this reason, they are able to compare their traditional teachings with modern concepts in Western countries. The physical and cultural boundaries thus, got blurred and Islamic feminism found channels to reach a global audience. In this way, Islamic feminism overcame East-West dichotomy which has prevailed through years and rendered feminism as a matter of human rights issue rather than a result of Western influence (Haddad & Esposito, 2003). Consequently, Islamic feminism

gradually challenged the existing norms and binary oppositions in people's mind which can be seen as a token of its innovative spirit.

Under this heading, I discussed various definitions and explanations of distinguished scholars with regard to Islamic feminism in order to provide a general framework and display the perspective of the movement. Having depicted the general picture of the movement, I can move onto the specific issues such as the affiliation of Muslim women with the term 'feminist', the strategies applied by Muslim feminists, reactions against them in the Muslim world and their contributions in the ontological questioning of Islamic tradition and practical lives of Muslim women.

3.2 The Controversial Term 'Feminism' in Islam

In the previous chapter, I underlined that the concept of feminism has always been taken with a pinch of salt in the Muslim world and Muslim women seeking gender equality in their religion have been accused of being corrupted by Western ideas. This problematic issue has a huge impact on the struggle of Muslim women, especially in terms of addressing their movement. Since feminism is a value laden term and comes along with various implications, there were always reservations to connect activities of Muslim women to feminism. They questioned whether Islamic feminism is a branch of Western feminism or whether feminism is essentially Western or whether Islam and feminism are compatible. I will elaborate the diversified opinions of scholars on how to name the movement and themselves below.

As for the use of the term 'feminism', some Muslim scholars who try to establish gender equality in Islamic understanding consider those struggles as Islamic feminists. However, some others are reluctant to call this movement as Islamic feminism and they would rather prefer to define it as a woman-centered rereading of the Qur'an (Barlas, 2002). As I have mentioned above, Western feminism is considered to be an attack on the authenticity of Muslim culture and some Muslim scholars working for gender justice refrain from identifying themselves as feminists (Ahmad, 2015). In this section, I will elaborate the claims of these two different groups of Muslim women and I will highlight the underlying indications of their positioning to contextualize the movement of Islamic feminism.

Muslim scholars who favor the term ‘feminism’ are highly convinced that ‘feminism’ is not a Western construction and it has prevailed for a long time in Muslim societies. One of these scholars is Margot Badran who explicitly expresses that feminism is not a Western concept and she emphasizes that feminist movements in Asian and Middle Eastern countries were disguised under the local, national liberation and religious reform movements in the past. She gives the example of Egypt to prove that Muslim women engaged in feminist movement throughout their history. In contrast to mainstream belief, she thinks that Egypt had a pioneering role in mobilizing large masses of women and organizing collective feminist campaigns, and the word “*nisa’iyya*”, which is the Arabic equivalent of feminism, was used and circulated in the country since the 1920s (Badran, 2009). From her statements, it can be deduced that feminist struggles in Muslim countries trace back to older times than we tend to think which can falsify the idea that feminism is essentially Western.

Badran (2009) adds that viewing feminism as an essentialist and monolithic Western construction can be related to political projects that aim to frame feminism in a negative way. Having stated that feminism has existed in the Muslim world through long years, she traces the origins of the term ‘Islamic feminism’ which appeared in the 1990s in various countries. In order to do this, she cites the works of notable scholars such as Afsaneh Najmabadi, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mai Yamani, Yeşim Arat, Feride Acar, Nilüfer Göle who used the term ‘Islamic feminism’ to refer to the Muslim women’s movement (Badran, 2009). As a result, although Badran differentiates secular and Islamic feminism, she finds the term ‘Islamic feminism’ useful as an analytical category to depict a gender discourse articulated in an Islamic framework (Al-Sharmani, 2014). Like Badran, another eminent figure Ziba Mir-Hosseini also approves the use of the term ‘Islamic feminism’ as she does not regard feminism as a complete Western notion. Rather, she prefers to understand feminism in a more general sense and views it as a general concern for women’s issues and raising consciousness about the sex discrimination they encounter in the private and public spheres (Mir-Hosseini, 2011).

In addition to scholars supporting the use of the term ‘feminism’, there are some women activists contributing to the field but do not give a clear opinion with respect to using the term. Omaila Abu-Bakr can be counted among these scholars as she finds the term ‘Islamic feminism’ to be limiting. For her, if Western scholars address

the activism of Muslim women as 'Islamic feminism', the term may be woven with underlying meanings that imply the superiority of the Western world. However, she does not fully reject the term (Al-Sharmani, 2014).

On the other side, there are Muslim women scholars who are strictly against using the term 'Islamic feminism' because of its connotations and hidden implications. For instance; Heba Rauf Ezzat is among scholars who place feminism in opposition to Islam and view it in connection with the domination and hegemony of the West. Rather than calling the movement as 'Islamic feminism', she proposes to use the term 'Islamic Women's Movement'. Moreover, Grami (2013) claims that Muslim women do not need to identify themselves with the ideals of Western feminism since they are potent to liberate themselves without getting any help from other sources.

Speaking of prominent scholars in Islamic feminism and their stance towards the word 'feminism', it is pertinent to mention Asma Barlas who has been a highly influential name and whose works have inspired a great number of Muslim women. Although her writings and ideas are regarded as the building block of the movement, she insistently rejects to be labeled as an Islamic feminist. One of the reasons for rejecting this label is her condemn of ethnocentric practices of feminism as she believes that feminism fails to represent women of color like her. To differentiate herself from feminists, she calls herself a believing woman who "derives her understanding of equality and of patriarchy from the Qur'an, not from any feminist text" (Badran, 2009, 16).

Another point worthwhile to mention here is that feminism as a discourse, in Barlas' view, does not let any possibility to theorize about gender equality from any other alternative paradigms. The tendency to call anyone speaking about sexual equality or women's liberation as feminist is a token of the foreclosing practices of feminism. The case of Asma Barlas is quite suitable to exemplify this problem as she cannot get rid of the label of feminism in her life even though she clearly states her opposition to it. In this issue, she demands for autonomy to define oneself rather than surrendering to reductive politics of feminism (Badran, 2009). From these statements, it can be deduced that although she confirms her gender-sensitiveness, she does not accept to be defined in accordance with the hegemonic discourses of Western society.

Although most of these scholars have been labeled as Islamic feminists, some of them are against being defined with that term. The reason for this is the suppositional relation between feminism and Western thought which leads for Muslim women to deny any affiliations with Western feminism. On the other hand, it is evident that some of Muslim women scholars are comfortable with the term ‘feminism’ as they view it as a wider definition and do not limit its connotations with the Western world. As a result, it can be alleged that the divergent voices in feminist movement appear in the movement of Islamic feminism too. While Muslim gender-sensitive women carry on their studies and try to attain gender equality in their religions, they prefer to be called in different ways just like some Western feminists who reject labels such as radical, liberal, Marxist etc. However, we should keep in mind that Islamic feminists’ efforts and struggles have improved the laws and public opinion on women in a certain way irrespective of how we name them and their movement.

3.3 Discussions on the Strategies and Sources of Islamic Feminists

Having explained the theoretical background and different stances towards naming the movement, I will dwell upon various strategies of Islamic feminists in accomplishing their goals and challenging the patriarchal structure of Islam. To uncover the deep message of the Qur’an which is totally egalitarian in their opinion, Islamic feminists focus on verses related to gender issues and equality in the Qur’an. In addition to these, they deal with *hadiths* and *fiqh* to prove that most of the existing interpretations trace back to the patriarchal norms and practices at the time of their revelation. Under this heading, I will examine the strategies that lie at the core of the arguments of Islamic feminism.

Firstly, the reinterpretation of the Qur’an from a female perspective is a cardinal one among the strategies of Islamic feminists. Muslim feminists argue that if we have a woman-centered rereading of the Qur’an, it would be possible to find a powerful source to provide gender equality in the society (Ahmad, 2015). In her book named as ‘Inside the Gender Jihad’, Amina Wadud points to the nature of the holy texts. To her mind, the text is silent and waits to be interpreted and here the perspective of the interpreters comes in. She argues that the answer we get from the text depends on the questions we ask it. For her, if we have a narrow vision, we will get narrow answers. On the other hand, if we are open-minded in terms of interpreting the text, we can

end up getting more open answers with regard to gender equality (Wadud, 2006,). As a result, it is evident that Islamic feminists put emphasis on the perspective through which interpretation takes place and they acknowledge that the degradation of Muslim women stems from the lack of female perspective during this interpretation process.

Islamic feminists agree that integrating a female perspective into the interpretation of holy texts can provide new answers in terms of women and gender to us. By doing this, it would be possible to weaken the male authority that has monopolized the interpretation of the Qur'an so far. In addition to female perspective, Islamic feminists suggest that it is vital to strip the holy texts from the societal norms or dogmas. In this regard, Barlas points out that the Qur'an is not a patriarchal text but the patriarchal norms and practices prevalent in the society at the time of its revelation have become to replace the real teachings of the Qur'an and came to be reflected in the Qur'anic interpretation. It also affected the consolidation of Islamic jurisprudence that still shapes millions of Muslim women's lives (Barlas, 2002). Therefore, this interpretation process should be taken seriously and the universal message of the Qur'an should be kept in mind rather than surrendering ourselves to the dogmas perpetuated in the Muslim world.

Likewise, Amina Wadud regards the Qur'an as a text in process rather than a fixed one. As one of the leading figures of Islamic feminism, Wadud touches upon the 'historicization' of the Qur'an which means that most of our interpretations of it depend on historical conditions or contexts rather than universal values of the Qur'an. She gives examples of slavery, wife beating and polygamy to show that although they were stated in the Qur'an and applied under some specific conditions, they are not acceptable in today's world. She argues for the possibility of questioning the religious texts and believes new perspectives would help change the inferior status of Muslim women with fresh insights. When she faces criticism because of her arguments, she asserts that this questioning process would be a celebration of the Qur'an rather than rejecting it (Wadud, 1999). We should keep in mind that the major source and strategy of Islamic feminists is the Qur'an and its interpretation.

In addition to the Qur'an and *fiqh*, the *hadiths* have been the site of contestation among Islamic feminists in terms of gender equality. Fatima Mernissi and Riffat

Hassan are among these names who evaluate *hadiths* and their indications on gender justice. In her book named as ‘The Veil and The Male Elite’, Mernissi (1991) revisits some of the renowned *hadiths* related to gender issues in order to reveal the hidden meanings of them and recover their misogynist interpretations by contextualizing them. Moreover, Hassan (1999) states that Muslim men monopolized the task of interpreting the texts to define the ontological and sociological status of Muslim women for a long time. As the realm of religious thought lacks a female perspective, these interpretations and Islamic tradition perpetuates the subordination of the women in the religion and society. Here again, we encounter the problem of interpretation by the same majority or lacking the representation of some parties.

With this belief, Islamic feminists think that revisiting different types of religious texts or traditions such as *fiqh* or *hadith* to contextualize their apparent and underlying indications would make it possible to resurrect women-friendly aspects of Islam (Ahmad, 2015). So as to achieve this, Islamic feminists such as Asma Barlas and Wadud offer to historicize these religious texts by considering the time and place that they were revealed and the fact that they have been subjected to interpretation throughout the years. If the historical background and conditions behind a specific *hadith* are known, it would be easier to contextualize it. Moreover, it may help us to make a distinction between the universal message of these sayings and some of their aspects appealing to the needs of people in that period.

In addition to revisiting the holy texts and *hadiths*, Islamic feminists focus on *ijtihad* (independent reasoning of Islamic laws) and how it can influence the status of women with a more open-minded approach. Here, the ideas of Abdol Kerim Soroush who has adopted a distinctive approach to Islam and the exegesis of sacred texts should be given place since his ideas have been highly regarded and followed by many Islamic feminists. Mir-Hosseini (1999) alleges that the radical discussion of Soroush on what is essential (*zati*) and accidental (*arazi*) in Islam has given a new course to the ideas of Islamic feminists. His argument is based on the distinction between the things in Islamic tradition that are considered to be essential that cannot be changed and the things that are considered to be accidental that happened to come as a result of the special time and place, indicating the period when Mohammed was born and lived.

To shed light on this distinction, Mir-Hosseini (1999) gives an example for essentials and accidentals. According to Soroush, *tawhid* which means the oneness of God is an essential since it cannot be changed and we cannot think of otherwise. However, the fact that Mohammed was born and lived in Arabia which means that the language of the Qur'an is Arabic is an accidental as he would have been born in another culture with a different language. The Arabic has shaped the general framework of the Qur'an for us while reading and interpreting it. Tabrizi (2004) indicates that for Soroush, the ones who try to interpret the Qur'an without taking its historical background and context into account become too rigid in their beliefs that they think Shari'a cannot be changed or adapted according to today's context or needs of modern world. His ideas have contributed to women issues to a great extent in Iran as he argues that rules on women's issues such as allowing polygamy, giving rights of divorce and custody of children to men are accidentals of Islam rather than being the essential. For him, they are time-bound and should not be carried out today without being altered or reinterpreted which is quite compatible with the propositions of Islamic feminists.

Other distinguishing strategies can be summarized as the use of the conceptual tools of postmodernism, to recover history in which women were included and capable individuals, to reject the marginalization of Muslim women in public and male-dominated religious spaces, to analyze the Qur'anic message and to purify it from cultural norms and practices of the past and to collaborate with secular feminists around the world in order to reach a wider audience across the globe.

Thanks to the efforts of Islamic feminists who have applied various strategies to accomplish their goals, it would be possible to say that the public and government in many Muslim countries have more concern with women now. It is fortunate that Islamic feminists can negotiate with the religious authorities in these countries to provide more space for women in public domain and to improve their situation. The change of family law, *Moudawana* in Morocco can be a sign of this bargaining process. Also, raising the minimum marriage age and securing the women's rights in divorce and child custody have been made possible through the struggles of Muslim women. Although these developments are not enough to strip women's status of the patriarchal norms to the fullest extent, it is evident that Muslim women's movement has gained momentum and continues to have an effect upon their lives.

3.4 The Main Arguments

As mentioned above, Islamic feminists have concentrated on some pivotal issues to empower Muslim women by referring to the Qur'anic texts. I would like to categorize these discussions into two categories. The first group is related to the questioning of ontological issues such as the creation of human beings, female nature and gender equality inherent in the Qur'an and Islam. Departing from these ontological and philosophical discussions, the second group aims to bring changes in the practical lives of Muslim women who are deprived of their rights given by the Qur'an. The woman's place in family and public sphere, dressing and the veil, the right to work outside the house, to participate in the public rituals and her legal rights in divorce and heritage are among these practical issues.

In order to accomplish the goal of this study, I will elaborate these main issues pertaining to the status of Muslim women in two categories and how Islamic feminists express their opinion. I would like to relate the discussions on these pivotal issues to the discourse of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in the next chapter by analyzing its publications with regard to the position of Muslim women in public and private sphere.

3.4.1 The Ontological Discussions

Islamic feminists have focused on a variety of ontological questions and its indications with regard to woman in Islam. Their major concern is to search and provide answers to the questions of equality between sexes. Moreover, they attempt to find out the roots of misogynist constructions in Islam and the Muslim world. That's why; they have revisited many verses and other religious sources in order to explore the issue further. The status of woman in creation, female nature and gender equality are among the ontological issues to be discussed. However, I will analyze the arguments of Islamic feminists under two headings; woman and creation and gender equality since the scope of this study is limited. Among numerous issues, I chose creation and gender equality as I believe they lie at the core of the discussions of Islamic feminists. Furthermore, I think that these two categories can help us understand the principle of equality planted in the Qur'an.

3.4.1.1 Woman and Creation

Among the ontological questions related to women, creation comes to the fore since creation story is regarded as the legitimizing source for the degradation of women in many religions. The depiction of creation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam shares some similarities and it is believed to be the root of numerous misogynist constructions in religion and society. In this regard, various scholars have revisited the verses in holy texts in order to reveal the egalitarian terms of their religions. For Islamic feminists, the verses explaining the creation of human beings by Allah are cardinal ones. They think that these verses have been misinterpreted by the male scholars and they conceal the egalitarian nature of the Qur'an owing to the lack of a female perspective. The concerted efforts of Islamic feminists in reinterpreting the Qur'anic texts stem from the belief that the appropriate interpretation of these verses can have a huge impact on Islamic jurisprudence and Shari' a. As a result, Muslim women can become independent individuals and the negative connotations of being a woman can be restored.

As stated above, creation lies at the heart of alleged misogyny in the Qur'an. Therefore a great number of scholars pay attention to this issue. One of them is Riffat Hassan who places three common suppositions at the core of women's oppression. These can be defined as the assumption that women were created from the Adam's rib so they are derivative, the assumption that a woman, namely Eve, was the responsible for the Man's fall so all women are potential seducers and lastly the assumption that woman was created for man so her existence is instrumental. For Hassan, the belief that Eve was created from Adam traces back to the account of creation in Genesis 2:18-24 in Christianity. However, she acknowledges that Islam has a different take on creation and adds that human creation is always depicted in egalitarian terms in the Qur'an (Hassan, 1999).

To prove that the Qur'an is egalitarian, Hassan (1999) goes back to the etymological origin of the word 'Adam'. She points out that Adam comes from the Hebrew word '*Adamah*' meaning 'of the soil' and she goes on with the claim that the term 'Adam' is used as a collective term for all human beings in Hebrew and the Qur'an (Hassan, 1999, 254-255). To back up her argument, she states that the word 'Adam' was used to refer to all human beings in twenty one cases out of twenty five in the Qur'an. I

think this striking point should be noted and kept in mind while evaluating the verses related to creation and gender equality. If it is made sure that the word Adam was used to appeal to all human beings, then it is possible to change the mainstream belief that women were not addressed with regard to many issues in the Qur'an. By doing this, a new perspective can be brought into the interpretation of the related verses which can liberate women by eradicating the perpetuated patriarchal norms in religion.

In addition to arguing the word Adam is not a gendered one, Hassan touches upon the general accusation of Eve for the Fall of Man in Christianity and Judaism. Unlike the interpretations in these religions, she believes that it is possible to read the verses related to the Fall story in a different way. Firstly, she gives examples of creation story from the verses such as Surah 2; Al Baqarah: 35-39, Surah 7: Al-A'raf:19-25 and Surah 20: Ta-Ha: 115-124 where there seems no dialogue between Satan and Eve to seduce Adam to eat from the forbidden tree unlike the stories in the Bible and it is clear that the act of disobedience is committed jointly by Adam and Eve.

Upon examining the related verses, Hassan concludes that the Qur'an does not narrate the Fall story in the same way with other Holy books. Rather than calling Eve as the seducer and the initiator of the evil acts (the word evil comes from the word Eve), the Qur'an blesses both Adam and Eve as our ancestors and affirms that they jointly transgressed the rules of God. Her conclusion should be noted as a breakthrough since it is quite contrary to what Christianity has depicted until present. Her interpretation differs from the mainstream way of thinking in another issue too. Regarding the 'Fall', Hassan objects to the idea that human beings were expelled from the Paradise as a punishment. Instead, she proposes that the Qur'an has a different perspective on it. With regard to this issue, she examines Surah 20: Al-Baqarah: 30 in order to prove her point and she concludes that Adam was always meant to be the God's vicegerent on the Earth so the use of the term 'fall' would be wrong when the Qur'anic framework is taken into consideration (Hassan, 1999). From these statements, it is evident that there is no original sin so Eve and all women coming after her should not be seen as sexual seducers. With this interpretation, it is possible to eradicate the building block of the misogynist constructions in various religions and societies.

To put it bluntly, the concept of the original sin, in other words ‘Fall’ is among one of the most disputed issues in theology and Islamic feminism. Like Hassan, Barlas cites the fall story as the locus of women degradation in Christianity and she emphasizes that Islam does not use the word or the concept of ‘fall’. In Christianity, Eve is blamed for tempting Adam to eat from the forbidden tree and for the alienation of man from God. That’s why, woman is seen as ‘Other’ in Christianity whereas the Qur’an does not depict the woman as the temptress of the evil. According to Barlas, Islam puts forward a different perspective regarding the expulsion of Adam and Eve. She claims that the Qur’an does not call this event as ‘fall’, rather it regards the expulsion from Paradise as an opportunity to seek for God’s mercy and to reach salvation through their moral deeds (Barlas, 2002). By looking at the arguments of these two scholars, we can understand that Islamic feminists agree on the idea that the creation story is the primary source of misogynist constructions in religion and it has retained its indications up to now.

Like Riffat Hassan, Amina Wadud focuses on the linguistic facet of the creation by examining the key words stated in the related verses. Before going into a deep analysis on woman in creation, she begins her argument with the claim that man and woman are two components of Allah’s creation and they are given the same value and equal potential. In addition to this, she reminds us that to be able to understand ‘creation’ in full details is beyond human language and comprehension (Wadud, 1999). Therefore we should not take any word at its face value and be wary of metaphors or figurative speech hinted in the Qur’an. The lack of this awareness may be the cause of numerous interpretations prevalent in Islam leading to the subjugation of Muslim women.

To examine ‘creation’ in a detailed way, she refers to Surah 4: An-Nisa: 1 with the translation of Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1977) as well as her alterations in it. I think An-Nisa whose literal translation is ‘Woman’ in Arabic is one of the most critical Surahs in the Qur’an for our discussion since we can find a great deal of information with regard to woman and her role in Islam. I would like to note that sparing a complete Surah for the sake of women is another token of the sensitivity of Islam in terms of gender equality and valuing women. The verse is translated as the following:

And min His *ayat* (is this) that He created You (humankind) min a single *nafs* and created min (that *nafs*) its *zawj*, and from these two He spread (through the earth) countless men and women (4:1).

To understand the verse in full, Wadud (1999) suggests that the word '*min*' here can be translated in two ways; 'from' or 'of the same nature as'. She notes that if we take the first meaning of the word as 'from', the idea that man was created first and woman was created from him so her existence is derivative comes to the fore. However, if we stick to the second meaning, the verse reads as your mates are of the same nature/kind as you. Therefore, it can be deduced that woman and man are equal counterparts of each other. I think this nuance between these two interpretations of the same word can show us that we should not take every interpretation for granted and consider other possibilities of a critical word. This example proves us that we should be wary of sticking to one of the possible meanings of a word and we should revisit the terms or interpretations we embraced without a second thought. Additionally, this can be a good example of why Islamic feminists revisit religious texts and reinterpret them as one of their strategies mentioned above.

Another key word Wadud analyzes here is '*nafs*' since it is cited as the origin of humankind in the verse. As for the usages of the word, Wadud claims that there are two usages of the word; common and technical. In the common usage, it is translated as 'self' whereas it refers to the common origin of humankind in the technical usage. With regard to the indications of the word, Wadud claims that there is no reference to the origin of the humankind with Adam or there is no statement that Allah began the creation with the *nafs* of a male person, namely Adam. Rather than signifying the male origin of the humankind, the verse proposes us a gender-neutral creation by emphasizing the common origin of all human beings (Wadud, 1999). I would like to also note that even though the word '*nafs*' has been translated as 'origin' in various translations, many interpreters have added the name of 'Adam' in brackets in their translations to emphasize that all human beings including Eve come from him.

Lastly, she defines the word '*zawj*' which is used to mean 'spouse', 'mate' or 'group' in the Qur'an. In the mainstream belief, it is thought that the '*zawj*' here refers to Eve as she was created after Adam. However, Wadud points out the linguistic level of the word to prove that '*zawj*' does not necessarily refer to Eve or woman. She argues

that the word '*zawj*' is grammatically masculine and conceptually it is neither masculine nor feminine. Also, she adds that there are some examples of the same word used for plants and animals too in the Qur'an (Wadud, 1999). As a result, the common belief that Eve was created from the rib of Adam can be rejected on the basis of her arguments as the '*zawj*' is used as a gender-neutral term in the mentioned verse. From the statements of Islamic feminists, we can conclude that the grammatical structure of the language Arabic shapes our way of thinking related to the verses and their indications. However, as most Islamic feminists propose, we should focus on the universal message of the Qur'an by considering the metaphors or the figurative speech used in it.

Having explained the four key terms in the related verse, Wadud moves on with the discussion pertaining to the ontological understanding of the Qur'an. To emphasize that everything is created in pairs, she gives examples from several verses in the Qur'an. For instance; 'Allah created you from dust, then from a little fluid, then He made you pairs' (35:11), 'Verily He has created the (two) spouses (*zawjayn*): male and female' (53:45) and 'And all things we have created by pairs (*zawjayn*)' (51:49) etc. From these verses, we can conclude that the essential dualism lies at the heart of creation. Each created thing depends on its *zawj* and Allah does not distinguish between them (Wadud, 1999). In conclusion, all human beings come from a single origin and there is a contingent-pair system in creation that man and woman are essential pairs and depend on each other. If we look from this perspective, it would be possible to provide an egalitarian basis for the creation of human beings and eradicate the common misunderstandings related to it.

Asma Barlas (2002) is another renowned scholar who focuses on the interpretation of the term '*nafs*' and examines Surah 4: An-Nisa:1 in order to demonstrate that woman and man are coequals in creation. Barlas has chosen the translation of the Qur'an by Yusuf Ali (1988) and focuses on the word '*nafs*' like Wadud and Hassan. Before moving onto a deeper discussion on the implications of the word, I think we should look at the whole translation of the verse by Ali.

Reverence your (*Rabb*) who created you from a single *nafs* (Person) created, of like nature (its) *zawj* (mate) and from them twain scattered (like seeds)

countless men and women; -Reverence God, through Whom ye demand your mutual (rights).

In her interpretation, Barlas agrees with Wadud on the meaning of the key words such as *min*, *ayat*, *zawj* and *nafs* in this verse. Like Wadud, Barlas focuses on the theme that women and men were created from a single Self or origin and they are described as contingent pairs in the Qur'an which lies at the heart of Qur'anic epistemology. For her, we should understand the teachings of the Qur'an pertaining to gender equality and sexual relationships through this epistemological framework. She continues with the claim that the word '*nafs*' can be interpreted as God's self which includes all contradictory attributes in itself. From this perspective, it is not possible to deduce that woman was created from or after man. Consequently, she emphasizes that there is no single *ayah* that explicitly states that woman and man were created from different substances or there is a hierarchical relationship between woman and men in creation. By doing this, she challenges the foundations on which theories of male superiority are grounded and shows that the Qur'an is actually antipatriarchal (Barlas, 2002).

Another crucial point that Barlas makes here is related to binary oppositions prevalent in the language and as a result in our way of thinking. With regard to this issue, Barlas claims that the Qur'an does not acknowledge man and woman as binary oppositions but treats woman and man as their contraries. This means the Qur'an does not view 'man' as the prototype of humanity and 'woman' as lacking the qualities or physical traits of man. Therefore, we should not evaluate the existence of woman as derivative or lacking some qualities. On the contrary, man and woman should be seen as two categories created by God and they are given the same amount of consideration and potential (Barlas, 2002). In this regard, it is seen that there is a consensus among Islamic feminists who argue that Allah has given woman and man the same responsibilities and potential as each of them has a significant meaning in creation.

In the light of these discussions, it is possible to challenge the common beliefs and interpretations pertaining to the position of woman in creation. I think the interpretations with regard to woman in creation are the backbones of the patriarchal thinking which makes woman 'Other' in religion and society. As Islamic feminists

have put forward, taking multiple meanings of a word depending on the context into consideration would yield different interpretations. By doing this, it is possible to find out new ways to liberate Muslim women from the rigidity of religious doctrines which constitutes the main area for the struggles of Islamic feminists.

3.4.1.2 Gender Equality

When the issue of gender equality in Islam comes into question, it is inevitable to revisit one of the most cited verses, Surah 4: An-Nisa: 34 which has been the locus of hot debates for a long time. As it consists of various critical terms that have been translated in different ways by interpreters and each translation gives yield to significantly different conclusion, it is of vital importance to revisit the verse and discover other possible interpretations of it. Firstly, I would like to give place to the translation of the verse here in order to understand how they differentiate from each other.

In the book named ‘Rights of Women in Islamic Shariah’ by Rafiullah Shehab (1986, 117), the mentioned verse is translated as:

Men are the managers (*qawwamun*) of the affairs of women because Allah has made the one superior to the other and because men spread of their wealth on women. Virtuous women are, therefore, obedient: they guard their rights carefully in their absence under the care and watch of Allah. As for those women whose defiance you have cause to fear, admonish them and keep them apart from your beds and beat them. Then, if they submit to you, do not look for excuses to punish them: note it well that there is Allah above you, Who is Supreme and Great.

In this verse, the Arabic word ‘*qawwamun*’ lies at the core of discussions on the gender equality in Islam. Whenever the issue of equality comes up, most of the Muslim scholars cite this verse and especially this term to point out the seemingly hierarchy between men and women. The word ‘*qawwamun*’ has been translated into English in many different ways such as “the managers of the affairs of women”, “protectors and maintainers of women”, “in charge of women” or “sovereigns or masters of women”. A great number of scholars have stated their opinion on the

meaning of the word '*qawwamun*' which can be an egalitarian foundation for the arguments of gender equality in Islam.

Riffat Hassan is among these scholars and she argues that the linguistic meaning of '*qawwamun*' is 'breadwinners' which does not imply any hierarchical relations between sexes. What she deduces from this word is that men ought to be the breadwinners of the family as women shoulder a heavy burden in terms of child bearing and rearing. Instead of regarding this verse as the main yardstick for discouraging women from working outside, Hassan emphasizes that it does not necessarily abolish the chance for women to provide for themselves. For her, what lies at the heart of this verse is to help women from another familial obligation during pregnancy or raising their children. From this perspective, this verse is a token of the Islamic division of labor in the family or society (Hassan, 1999). As seen, her own interpretation of the word '*qawwamun*' highly departs from the mainstream interpretations and beliefs. By revisiting the critical verses and how they have been interpreted through years, Islamic feminists like Riffat Hassan come up with new definitions and indications through which the Islamic jurisprudence and other perpetuated practices come into question. Thanks to this questioning, the gender equality inherent in the Qur'an can be revealed and enunciated in clear terms.

As for the indications of the term '*qawwamun*', Wadud (1999) comes up with new explanations by revisiting the related verse and examining the specific conditions stated by Allah. Before moving onto the discussion of the term, she refers to the translation of the verse by Mohammad Marmaduke Pickhtall (1977) which is stated below:

Men are (*qawwamuna* 'ala) women, (on the basis) of what Allah has (preferred) (*faddala*) some of them over others, and (on the basis) of what they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are (*qanitat*) guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As for those from whom you fear (*nushuz*), admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them.

To be able to uncover the whole message given here, Wadud focuses on two conditions stated in the verse. The first concern for her is the word '*faddala*' meaning preference and the second one is that men support women from their property. To her

mind, if a man fails to financially support a woman, the man cannot be a *qawwamun* over her. To investigate further, she analyzed the meaning of the word '*faddala*' to show them 'preference' mentioned here is not related to the superiority of one gender over another. In this regard, she highlights that the verse does not state 'they (masculine plural) are preferred over them (feminine plural). Instead, the verse reads that some men are preferred over some women in some manners and also some women are preferred over some men in some manners. As a result, Allah's preference of some people over others is not an absolute thing and it is not possible to talk about a gender-based emphasis (Wadud, 1999).

Having elaborated the first condition stated in the verse, Wadud (1999) carries on her arguments with the second condition which is the statement that men should provide for women from their material means. She takes the issue of men being *qawwamun* of women at societal level and considers it as a means of reaching the collective good pertaining to the relationship between women and men in the society. To back up her argument, she regards 'marriage' as the most important institution in the social life and she believes that each member of the family has certain responsibilities. For her, the most significant responsibility for women is child bearing as the existence of Muslim *ummah* and humanity depends on it. In that case, this verse gives women an opportunity to get rid of financial obligations and an ideal environment to fulfill her primary responsibility in the society. The condition that men should provide physical protection and material support frees women from a double burden on their shoulders. However, she finalizes her words by saying that with the modern world, life conditions and responsibilities of each gender have radically changed. Therefore this ideal obligation of men can be evaluated in a different way now. For her, this division of labor aims to create a balanced society but it may bring new indications in the contemporary world (Wadud, 1999).

On the other hand, some of the interpretations of Wadud are highly criticized since she places the mothering role of the women at the core of their lives which may support the traditional division of labor in Islamic societies. In addition to that, the concept of 'breadwinner' has changed in the recent years. With the new conditions coming along with modernity, the number of women working outside their home has increased with a considerable amount. That's why; we can argue that more women have become the breadwinners of their family as well as men. That new dimension of

the modern world should be taken into consideration while discussing the term '*qawwamun*' and its implications for Muslim women.

With regard to the concept of *qawwamun*, Barlas agrees with Wadud and Hassan on that this term reads as 'breadwinners' rather than 'managers', 'in charge of' or 'providers' etc. Departing from this point, she concludes that the Qur'an holds men responsible for providing and maintaining women with their economic resources. On one side, the Qur'an does not charge women with providing for their families. On the other side, she makes sure that it does not hinder women from the opportunity to support themselves. For her, this nuance should not be overlooked. With this interpretation, it is possible to eradicate the mainstream belief that women cannot work outside the home and it is sinful for a woman to do that. In addition to this, we should keep in mind that being the breadwinner of the family does not necessarily mean being the head of the family. Barlas claims that there is no explicit statement in the Qur'an that defines man as the head of the household but the word '*qawwamun*' has been interpreted in this way which assigns this role to men in patriarchal traditions (Barlas, 2002). Finally, it is worthwhile to note that most Muslim scholars interpret this verse as a source for forbidding women from working outside the house. The indications of this long-term belief can be found in the works of numerous Muslim scholars and the publications of Presidency of Religious Affairs which will be analyzed in the next chapter.

Another issue that Islamic feminists focus on is the distinction made between women and men in terms of their capacity and potential. In this regard, Wadud (1999) claims that people tend to think women and men differ from each other not only in anatomy but also in their characteristics, social roles and capacity. However, she believes that the relationship between Allah and a person is not stated in gendered terms in the Qur'an. What makes people distinguish before Allah is *taqwa* and his/her spiritual aspirations rather than their gender. To prove that women and men are given the same capacity and responsibility in the Qur'an, Wadud revisits Surah 2: Al-Baqarah: 286 which is translated as:

Allah does not tax a *nafs* beyond its scope. For it (is only) that which it has earned, and against it (is only) that which it has deserved.

As shown in this verse, she notes that the Qur'an gives every individual the same capacity in his/her relationship with Allah. This argument is a very valuable one since there have been numerous interpretations and hadiths (the authenticity of some of them is being questioned) that imply the inferiority of women over men. Wadud argues that these misinterpretations place a grave difference between women and men which suppose that the existence of woman is secondary so derivative. Looking from this new lens, Wadud believes it would be possible to eradicate stereotypes of women in the religion and reveal the gender equality inherent in the Qur'an (Wadud, 1999, 34-35).

With respect to gender equality in the Qur'an, Asma Barlas and Amina Wadud both claim that the only difference between people is related to *taqwa* rather than a gendered one. To begin with, Wadud (1999) gives an example from Surah 49: Al-Hujurat: 13 which is translated into English by Pickthall as:

We created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed the most noble of you from Allah's perspective is whoever (he or she) has the most conduct (*taqwa*).

Wadud (1999) believes that the word '*taqwa*' can be interpreted as 'piety' or 'consciousness of Allah'. According to her, this term reflects both the actions and attitudes of believers in accordance with the world view of the Qur'an. As the verse starts with the creation of people, then approves the existence of the pair as female and male. Finally, the verse ends with the significance of *taqwa* pertaining to the person's value in the sight of Allah. In here, Wadud comments on the issue of *taqwa* by claiming that Allah does not use categories created and used by people to distinguish among themselves such as class, gender, race, wealth etc. Contrary to the common norms, Allah makes a distinction between people on the basis of *taqwa*, in other words, their piety (Wadud, 1999). This interpretation may bring new perspectives into the interpretation of gender equality in the Qur'an and till the soil for positive changes in the perception and practical lives of Muslim women.

Barlas, likewise, touches upon the concept of *taqwa* to explain the gender equality given in the Qur'an. She proposes that Allah does not designate women and men as opposites or the existence of women as derivative. To prove her point, she cites many verses as examples and draws our attention to the moral praxis of the Qur'an

which hold women and men responsible for the same liabilities and identical moral standards. Her main point is that if women lacked of attributes needed to reach knowledge and rational thinking, they would be treated by Allah in a different way and they would not be judged by the same moral criteria. Looking from this perspective, it is evident that women and men possess the same capacity, potential and attributes before God (Barlas, 2002).

Furthermore, Barlas (2002) defines *taqwa* as the essence of our moral personality that keeps us from evil and encourages us to be virtuous by intellectual and reasoning capacity. In accordance with this definition, she believes that Allah does not make a distinction between women and men on the basis of their gender attributes but their *taqwa*. I think Surah 33: Al-Azhab: 35 given by Barlas as an example should be mentioned here to understand the concept of morality in the Qur'an and to see women and men are viewed as equals in terms of achieving *taqwa*. The verse was translated as the following in Yusuf Ali's translation (1988):

For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in God's praise,- for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward.

Like Wadud, Barlas (2002) believes in the pairing of women and men on the basis of not their biological difference or capabilities but their belief and piety. Besides, this pairing can be a token of God's designation of people who are bound with the same responsibilities and viewed as equals of each other regardless of their sexes. Finally, she dwells upon the belief that women are created for men so their existence is instrumental rather than an independent one. To refute this argument, she gives Surah 9: At-Tawbah: 71-72 as an example in which it is stated that:

The Believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another; they enjoy what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey God and His Apostle. On them will God pour his mercy: for God is exalted in power, Wise, God hath promised to Believers,

men and women, Gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting Bliss but the greatest bliss is the God Pleasure of God: that is the supreme felicity.

Hassan (1999) concludes that this verse can be regarded as the main token to prove the gender equality in creation since men and women are viewed as equals in the sight of God without creating any hierarchy between these two sexes. For her, the underlying indication of this verse is that men and women are equal creatures who are prescribed to live in harmony and righteousness together. With all her statements and exemplified arguments, Riffat Hassan questions the existing norms and interpretations of the Qur'anic texts with a female perspective and alleges that the Qur'an is essentially egalitarian but has been subject to misinterpretation throughout the history.

Under this heading, I dwelled upon some of the key points for the discussions of Islamic feminists such as gender equality, the capacity of women, the alleged superiority of men over women, the relationship between individuals and God and the difference between individuals etc. I have tried to highlight the verses that most of Islamic feminists refer to in their studies and my major aim was to display the other possible meanings of the prioritized words in the related verses. The major strategy of Islamic feminists is to show the underlying implications of verses so that they could alter the patriarchal Islamic traditions.

To conclude, Islamic feminists analyze the specific words such as *qawwamun* and *taqwa* in order to prove the Qur'an is essentially egalitarian and the only difference between individuals stems from their degree of piety and their good deeds. As for the word '*qawwamun*', Islamic feminists agree on that it refers to breadwinners rather than managers or protectors of family. With this interpretation, it is possible to deny that men are in charge of women (their wives) and they are the head of their families. These scholars also emphasize that this verse does not hinder women from working outside the home. However, their arguments lack of the discussion on the current circumstances coming along with the modernity and the increasing number of working women. In addition, Islamic feminists discuss the concept of *taqwa* which defines the differences between individuals before God and which makes it clear that women and men have the same potential or capacity as human beings. Therefore, we

can understand that people are not defined in gendered terms but on the basis of their acts and piety. Thanks to these arguments, Islamic feminists have pointed out other possible ways of interpreting these issues with a fresh look including the female perspective.

3.4.2 The Practical Issues

In the previous heading, I have tried to explain and categorize the arguments of Islamic feminists in terms of ontological matters such as the position of woman in creation, her nature, gender equality etc. While discussing these issues, I have noted that most Islamic feminists regard them as the source of the degradation of women in Islam. According to them, a great number of Muslim interpreters have been influenced by the patriarchal norms during the interpretation process and their interpretation yielded numerous misogynist constructions in their religion. While Islamic feminists discuss these ontological questions, they also draw out attention to their indications and enforcements in the practical lives of Muslim women. The rights of Muslim women in marriage and family, their right to work outside their home, their capability to witness, their choice to veil or not, their right to inherit and their right to participate public rituals or prayers such as Friday prayer etc. can be counted among these practical issues. Since each of these matters is critical and needs to be analyzed in a very meticulous way and the scope of this study is limited, I will choose some of the critical issues and try to highlight how they are related to the arguments of Islamic feminism.

3.4.2.1 Woman in Marriage and Family

One of the most controversial issues related to marriage and the position of women as a wife in Islam is ‘wife-beating’. With regard to this issue, most Muslim scholars go back to the Surah 4: An-Nisa: 34 stated above to legitimize the practice of wife-beating by referring to the word ‘*daraba*’. However, as happened in the translation of other verses, Islamic feminists argue that the word ‘*daraba*’ can be interpreted in many different ways rather than beating. In this regard, Hassan (1999) claims that ‘*daraba*’ means ‘holding in confinement’ which is a prescription for a husband in case that all or most of Muslim women reject to bear a child as a sign of a general revolt in the society. It is a well-known fact that Islam highly values child bearing, since it is the primary way of maintaining the Muslim *ummah*. That’s why, it is

stated that the husband can give his wife a kind of punishment in this case. However, the type of punishment and how it is going to be executed have been described in details. According to this description, Hassan enunciates that '*daraba*' refers to 'keeping her confined in her home' rather than beating her severely (Hassan, 1999). In the light of this new reinterpretation, it is possible to shake the grounds on which many Muslim men base and legitimize their violence against their wives and to save millions of Muslim women who are subjected to domestic violence.

With regard to the same verse, Wadud (1999) also touches upon the advised procedure for the couples at the time of a divorce. The first solution stated in the verse is a verbal one as the husband and the wife can get help from an arbitrator to solve their problems. The second solution is a more distinct one as husbands are prescribed to separate their beds as a cooling-off period to reflect on the problems and the last solution, to be executed in extreme conditions, is to scourge (in the translation of Pickthall) them. As for the word '*daraba*' which has been translated as 'beat' or 'scourge', Wadud enunciates that it does not necessarily mean violence or physical force. To prove her point, she gives examples from the Qur'an where the word '*daraba*' is used to mean 'to give or set an example' or 'to strike out on a journey'. From the various meanings of the word and the stories including prevalent violent practices against women at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, Wadud concludes that this verse does not permit violence on women but radically restricts the existing practices to bring mutual respect into the relationship between women and men (Wadud, 1999, 76). It is a significant point we should bear in mind that the advices of the Qur'an relating to the divorce is much more humanitarian and peaceful than the existing practices at those times. That's why; Muslim scholars such as Wadud and Hassan highlight these specific conditions to help us understand the context of the verse better.

Like the scholars above, Barlas also touches upon the indications of the word '*daraba*' in her book. She begins with making a distinction between '*daraba*' and '*darraba*' in Arabic. While the former one means 'to strike' or 'to set an example', the latter one means 'to strike repeatedly'. Then, she draws our attention to this differentiation and proposes that this verse should be regarded as a restriction on the ongoing violent practices on women rather than a verse allowing for women-battering. Considering the conditions prevalent at that period where men did not need

any permission to abuse their wives, we can say that this verse which allows for striking her as the last resort should be viewed as a kind of limitation on their acts. Another point to keep in mind is that the word '*daraba*' can be translated in other possible ways. Hence, we should refrain from sticking to a specific meaning of the word and behaving in a way that is contradictory to the teachings of the Qur'an (Barlas, 2002).

To challenge the belief that the Qur'an gives license to men for wife-beating, Islamic feminists analyze the verses related to ideal marriage in Islam. One of these is Asma Barlas (2002) who asserts that the Qur'an prescribes marriages where there is mutual love, respect and the couple finds '*sukūn*'. One of the significant verses which signify the harmony between woman and men in marriage is stated below:

(God) created you helpmeets from yourselves that you might find (*sukūn*) in them, and God ordained between you love and mercy. Lo, herein indeed are portents for folk who reflect (30:21, Pickthall).

Islamic feminists think that this verse can be a token of the ideal marriage described in the Qur'an. If we take the Qur'anic understanding of marriage into consideration, it is clearly seen that wife-beating does not befit into the world-view of the Qur'an. As a result, the word '*daraba*' here can be evaluated as a restriction on the violent male practices on women prevalent during that period. As mentioned before, it is vital for us to consider the conditions and specific events at the time of the revelation. By doing this, it would be easier to contextualize the verse and its implications in a better way (Barlas, 2002). Additionally, it would be helpful to examine the relationship between the Prophet and his wives to find out how he behaved women. Since he was sent to the world as the representative of God and he was supposed to be a good example for Muslim *ummah*, his kindness and sensitivity to women should be taken into consideration before we jump into any conclusion related to this critical verse.

Another main tenet that influences Muslim women's daily lives is 'divorce'. It is known that a great number of Muslim women suffer from the lack of legal rights to initiate a divorce or enquire full custody for their children. In addition to that, they do not have any guarantee for their financial benefits. With regard to this issue, the term '*darajah*' has always been put forward by Muslim exegetes so as to privilege men

over women. Furthermore, to legitimize the claims on the superiority of men over women, Surah 2: Baqarah: 228 has become one of the most cited verses by Muslim scholars. As a result, Islamic feminists have focused on this verse and its underlying implications in order to reveal its deeper message. Firstly, it would be useful to give various translations of the verse and then I will give place to the arguments of Islamic feminists regarding this verse. In Nurettin Uzunoğlu's translation of the Holy Qur'an (2012), the verse is interpreted as the following:

Divorced women must wait, keeping themselves from men for three menstrual courses. It is unlawful for them, if they believe in Allah and the Last Day, to hide what Allah has created in their wombs. In that case, their husbands would do well to take them back, if they both desire a reconciliation. And (women) have rights similar to those of (men), in kindness; and men are a degree above them. Allah is Mighty, Wise.

In the translation of Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1977), the same verse is interpreted as:

Women who are divorced shall wait, keeping themselves apart, three (monthly) courses. And it is not lawful for them that they conceal that which Allah has created in their wombs if they believe in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands would do better to take them back in that case if they desire a reconciliation. And (the rights) due to women are similar to (the rights) against them (or responsibilities they owe) with regard to the mar'uf, and men have a degree above them (feminine plural). Allah is Mighty, Wise.

In Yusuf Ali's translation, it is interpreted as below:

Divorced women shall wait concerning themselves for three monthly periods. Nor is it lawful for them to hide what Allah created in their wombs, if they have faith in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands have the better right to take them back in that period, if they wish for reconciliation. And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable: but men have a degree (*darajah*) (of advantage) over them. And God is Exalted in Power, Wise.

As seen above, the word '*darajah*' meaning degree, level or advantage pertaining to men in case of a divorce has been regarded as a legitimizing source for the superiority of men in the society and in the act of divorce. Unlike its general interpretation, Islamic feminists argue that the word should not be taken at face value and we should consider its underlying implications too. For instance; Hassan (1999) points the primary biological difference between women and men since a woman can bear a child while a man cannot. She adds that the main message given in the verse is that women should wait for a reasonable time before remarrying as they can be pregnant at the time of a divorce. To prevent obscurity and doubts related to new born babies, Allah commanded in that way. From this interpretation, it is deduced that the word 'degree' at the end of the verse does not signify any hierarchical relation in creation or nature between women and men. On the contrary, it indicates a fact that men, ipso facto, do not have any possibility to become pregnant so they do not have to wait before remarrying. Therefore '*darajah*' as the Arabic counterpart of degree refers to the advantage of men over women in case of a divorce rather than creating male superiority (Hassan, 1999).

Like Hassan, Amina Wadud in her book '*Qur'an and Woman*', alleges that the word '*darajah*' does not indicate any hierarchy between the sexes, it is a statement of man's advantages with regard to divorce. The first advantage for her is the man's biological difference as it is not possible for them to be pregnant as mentioned above. Another advantage of men over women is that men can pronounce divorce against their wives without consulting to any authority whereas women have to apply to a judge or arbitrator to be granted a divorce (Wadud, 1999). Considering these two advantages of men in case of a divorce, it should be noted that the degree or advantage of men over women mentioned here is only related to the subject of divorce rather than a universal claim on the superiority of men (Wadud, 1999). Finally, she adds that valuing one gender over another in an unrestricted way is in contradiction with the principle of equity established in the Qur'an. That's why, interpreting the word '*darajah*' as a sign of the superiority of one gender over another transgresses the teachings of the Qur'an and Islam. For this reason, the word should be assessed in relation to the subject of divorce and it should not be generalized into all spheres of life (Wadud, 1999).

With regard to men's advantage or degree over women, Barlas (2002) examines the translation of Yusuf Ali and focuses on the critical four themes given in the verse. These are waiting period before a divorce, the possibility of an arbitration or reconciliation, the need for kindness and the equal rights of spouses except the degree of men over women. Barlas shows that the word '*darajah*' has been interpreted in many ways. For example; Wadud (1999) interprets this advantage as the men's priority to claim divorce against their wives. On other hand, Hassan (1999) views it as the advantage of men to remarry without waiting for a certain period of time. From these various interpretations, Barlas concludes that the advantage or degree mentioned here refers to the rights of husbands in divorce rather than an ontological difference between females and males (Barlas, 2002).

Although most Muslim scholars regard this verse as a means of making divorces easier on behalf of men, Islamic feminists point out that the verses limit the number of times a man can divorce his wife. Their claim is that Allah restricts the number of divorces which was manipulated by men during that period and this restriction makes it very hard to divorce your spouse. In the light of these discussions, it is evident that the verses examined above not only limits the existing violent practices on women but also attach equal value to both sexes. By examining the terms *daraba* and *darajah*, Islamic feminists make sure that on one side the Qur'an treats women and men in a different way because of their biological differences or the circumstances peculiar to that period but on the other side it never entails a hierarchical relationship between women and men. If we consider the interpretation of the verses pertaining to divorce and family, here again the significance of historicizing the verses by pondering on the context becomes evident.

3.4.2.2 Woman's Place and Rights in Public

There are many controversial topics that can be discussed under the category of woman's place in public. These topics may include woman's place in public prayers, veiling, her career outside the home and holding positions in religious offices etc. Since the discussion of each topic requires concerted efforts and may go beyond the scope of this study, I would like to focus on the issue of veiling as it has become the locus of hot debates between conservative Muslims and Islamic feminists. Here, I will give place to the ideas of numerous Islamic feminists who challenge the existing

beliefs on this issue by revisiting the critical verses and investigating their underlying indications.

Asma Barlas (2002) is among those scholars who have brought a new perspective into the interpretation of 'veiling'. According to Barlas, the female body in Muslim societies is viewed as sexually corrupt or pudendal. Because of its potential to seduce men, her body should be hidden from the gaze of Muslim men. However, Barlas and other Islamic feminists object to this idea and claim that female body is not depicted as dangerous or corrupted in the Qur'an. In her book named as 'Believing Women in Islam', she touches upon two sets of ayah related to the issue of veiling on the basis of specific and general contexts. First verse she cites pertaining to veiling is Surah 33: Al-Ahzab: 59 which can be stated as:

O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their *jilbab* over their persons (when abroad); that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested.... Truly, if the Hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is a disease ... Desist not, We shall certainly stir thee up against them. (Ali, 1988)

Barlas (2002) claims that this verse should be interpreted in its specific context as the word '*jilbab*' here meaning cloak given here to protect women from non-Muslim men rather than to hide her from Muslim men and their gaze. The importance of the specific conditions related to the time of revelation and the events upon which a verse was revealed comes up here again. If we do not take these details into consideration, our interpretation would carry the risk of being one-sided or influenced by the patriarchal norms instead of the Qur'anic teachings.

Accordingly, Barlas touches upon the existing circumstances in the society back then and states that the sexual abuse of female slaves was highly widespread during those times. Therefore, believing and free Muslim women had to find a way to protect themselves from non-Muslim men who felt free to abuse female slaves. In addition, we should keep in mind that the word '*jilbab*' means covering the neck and bosom in daily usage rather than covering the hands, faces or feet of women which have become a tradition in many Muslim societies. I think it would be useful to view this verse as providing a kind of protection for Muslim women who did not have legal opportunities to pursue their rights in case of a rape or sexual abuse back then

(Barlas, 2002). As a result, we can conclude that the Qur'an advises women to veil themselves not because their body is corrupted or abject but because to provide them protection in their society. However, the question of whether women should continue to veil themselves even if they have legal rights in the modern world to protect themselves or not has not been answered in a detailed way. I think this void may lead to the perpetuation of controversy against Islamic feminists and their arguments in the Muslim world.

Another verse cited by Islamic feminists is Surah 24: An-Nur: 30-31 which was translated by Yusuf Ali (1988) as following:

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them: and say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their (*khumur*) over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to

With regard to this verse, Barlas (2002) claims that the Qur'an teaches that both women and men should dress modestly. However, the word adornment does not specify the parts of female body to cover and to display. That's why, there is no consensus among these bodily parts among Muslims and there are some extreme practices in numerous Muslim countries such as covering the face or even the feet of women. In here, Barlas argues that the word '*khumur*' refers to covering the neck and bosom of women and relates these extreme veiling practices with the patriarchal norms rather than the teachings of the Qur'an. On other hand, I would like to note that all Islamic feminists agree that the Qur'an teaches that women and men should dress modestly.

Like Barlas and other Islamic feminists, Fatima Mernissi (1991) emphasizes that the verse related to '*hijab*' and 'veiling' came upon to protect the Prophet's wives and his privacy. In her book 'Women and Islam', Mernissi touches upon the Surah 33: Al-Azhab:53 by explaining the background of the event causing this verse to reveal at that night. To begin with, she notes that this verse was revealed during the year 5 of Hijra which was troublesome for the Prophet in many aspects. In summary, this year had witnessed the defeat of Muslim army at Uhud which caused doubts and

suspensions over the leadership of Muhammad. People in Medina were restless because of their losses and they began to question the pros and cons of opening doors to Muslims which obviously led them to a war against one of the most powerful tribes.

Another factor causing troubles was the fact that people would constantly visit Muhammad's home and left no private space for him and his household. At his wedding night with Zaynab, he invited all his community for a dinner and spent night with them. However, three men continued chatting without noticing the time and the willingness of the Prophet for privacy with his bride. Upon this problematic situation intervening the Prophet's private life and his household, the Prophet asked his Companion Anas Ibn Malik to separate the space between them with a curtain and the verse started to be revealed at that time.

Mernissi firstly draws our attention to the literal meaning of '*hijab*' which is 'curtain' in Arabic and takes the literal meaning of the word considering the background of the revelation. What is of crucial importance is that the curtain was prescribed to separate not a man and a woman but two men, namely the Prophet and his Companion. Furthermore, if we take the other lines, it is clear that the family of the Prophet was addressed in the verse pertaining to separation of the space. The reason for this would be the threats of non-Muslim men to marry the Prophet's wives after his death (Mernissi, 1991). Regarding these circumstances, we can argue that the claims of Islamic feminists on this verse are quite similar to the conditions stated in it. In brief, Islamic feminists enunciate that this verse was revealed to protect Muhammad and to give him help in such difficult situations.

Having summarized the underlying indications of the verse, Mernissi (1991) claims that to regard 'veil' as a scrap of cloth that men want their women to wear in public so as to hide their women from other men's gaze is a reductionist approach. On the other hand, the word '*hijab*' used here is a multidimensional term which has meanings such as to hide something from sight, to mark a border and the realm of forbidden. As a result, using this verse as a legitimizing source for the confinement of women into the private sphere and for their hindrance from the society through veiling even her hands and feet cannot be acceptable. The interpretation of this

specific verse in a manipulative way is related to the patriarchal norms rather than the Qur'an itself.

Amina Wadud is among the scholars who do not regard 'veiling' as obligatory and she agrees with Mernissi on the issue that *hijab* or veiling has been overemphasized throughout history and now it is impossible to imagine a Muslim woman without *hijab*. Wadud (2006) states that she prefers to veil her head not because of religious obligation but because of her personal likes and feelings. Contrary to the mainstream belief and exegesis in Islam, Wadud does not relate any religious significance or morality to veil. Rather than fulfilling an order of Allah, veiling signifies a religious identity or affiliation of a Muslim woman which does not guarantee any protection or respect for her. Since 'veil' or '*hijab*' has been subjected to various interpretations and it is a value laden practice, Wadud claims that it has become a sign of approval or disapproval in the society. Furthermore, she does not agree with the idea that veiling herself brings modesty into your life, as you can be and look modest without headscarf too. To back up her point, she cites Surah 7: Al-A'raf: 26 which states that 'the best dress is the dress of *taqwa*' and concludes that morality of a woman cannot be defined by looking at her veil which is a declaration of Islamic ideology rather than a religious obligation.

To put in a nutshell, the claims of Islamic feminists on the issue of veiling highly differ from each other. On one hand, some Islamic feminists argue that *hijab* or veiling was prescribed just for the household of the Prophet Muhammad. Also, they add that the verses related to veil came upon the specific conditions prevalent at that period and it is now not an obligatory religious deed for Muslim women. However, these Islamic feminists do not make sure whether Muslim women need to veil themselves in today's world or not. On the other hand, some Islamic feminists highlight that Muslim women have to veil themselves as it is obligatory in Islam but they deny the practices that enforce women to cover their face and feet. For those, men and women have to wear modestly but the body parts that women have to cover are not clearly named in the Qur'an and it is open to discussion. Although most Islamic feminists agree on the prescribed modest clothes of Muslim men and women, they do not reach any consensus on the restrictions of the veiling practices which can be seen from their clothes and styles in their daily lives too.

Having discussed the position of woman in public place, I would like to move onto the discussion of her legal rights. As for the woman's rights in Islam; the issues of inheritance, witness, polygamy, divorce and child custody can be analyzed under this heading. Since the scope of this study is limited, I would like to take the claims on witnessing as my focal point and clarify the arguments of Islamic feminists on this issue. The major discussion in terms of inheritance comes from the assumption that one male witness equals to two female witnesses, in other words only two women can be equivalent of one man. This idea stems from the mainstream interpretation of Surah 2: Al-Baqarah: 282 which was interpreted by Muslim scholars as a token of the devaluation of women and their capacity in Islamic exegesis. Before moving onto the challenges brought by Islamic feminists with regard to witnessing, I would like to give place to some of the translations of the verse mentioned above in order to understand the issue better.

In Nurettin Uzunoğlu's translation (2012), the verse was translated as the following:

.... If the debtor be a feeble minded or weak person, or unable to dictate, let his guardian dictate for him in fairness. Call two witnesses from among your men, and if two men (are not at hand), then one man and two women of such as you approve as witnesses, so that if either of the (women) commit an error, the other will remind her....

It would be helpful to note that it is one of the longest verses in the Qur'an where the details of business contracts and the institution of notary in the primitive terms were depicted. What is of concern for our discussion here is the number of witnesses depending on the sexes. These critical lines were translated as such in the translation of Yusuf Ali (1988):

.....If two men be (not at hand) then a man and two women, of such as you approve as witnesses, so that if the one errs (*tudilla*) the other can remind her.....

In another translation by Pickthall (1977), the controversial lines were translated as below:

And if two men be not (at hand) then a man and two women, of such as you approve as witnesses, so that if the one erreth (through forgetfulness) the other will remember.

According to Islamic feminists, the different treatment of women in this verse was related to the incapacity or distrust on women by Muslim exegetes and it was taken as evidence to legitimize the degradation of women in the society. As I elaborated under the heading of creation, it has become a commonplace to think that women were created after and from men. Therefore their existence is derivative and they are not viewed as full human beings with the same capacity as men. The urge to interpret this verse related to witness in such a similar way can be regarded as a sign of patriarchal drives behind the interpretation of holy texts in Islam which underestimates the potential of women in public matters and restricts her to the private sphere.

Unlike mainstream Muslim interpreters, Islamic feminists have brought a new perspective into this issue by going over the critical verse and paying attention to the specific conditions given in the verse. As for the issue of witness, Wadud (1999) firstly emphasizes that the details stated in this verse is only applicable to financial contracts and this should not be generalized into a rule for every situation. For her, the reason for these details pertaining to witness in financial transactions would be the inexperience of women in highly androcentric sphere of life such as trade, finance etc. back then (Wadud, 1999). If we consider the existing conditions and division of labor in those times, the interpretation of Wadud would make sense to us. During that period, women were only associated with family and home. That's why; they could not get enough opportunities to work outside their home and to participate in business life. Consequently, it would be reasonable to assume that women did not have enough experience in financial matters and that would be the reason why this verse requires the presence of two women in return for just one man for witnessing in financial matters.

Another point Wadud makes is that this verse protects women from the coercion of men who would easily force one woman to change or disclaim her testimony in accordance with his will or benefits. However, with the two female witnesses, it is less likely for a man to force them to act upon his words. Also, in case of two women

witnessing together, women would remind each other to tell the truth not to cause any injustice during the legal procedure (Wadud, 1999). From this perspective, it is possible to view this verse as favoring women rather than as a source of degradation of women.

Another scholar that touches upon the right of women to witness and the mainstream belief that despises women by assessing her as the equivalent of the half of a man is Jamal Badawi. In his book 'Gender Equity in Islam' (1995), he deals with the issue of female testimony and revisits another related verse in order to provide a counter argument. He gives Surah 24: An-Nur: 6-9 as an example that shows women and men are equal to each other in testimony too. Here is the verse translated by Yusuf Ali (1988):

And for those who launch a charge against their spouses, and have (in support) no evidence but their own, - their solidarity evidence (can be received) if they bear witness four times (with an oath) by Allah that they are solemnly telling the truth; And the fifth (oath) should be that they solemnly invoke the curse of Allah on themselves if they tell a lie. But it would avert the punishment from the wife, if she bears witnesses four times (with an oath) by Allah, that (her husband) is telling a lie; And the fifth (oath) should be that she solemnly invokes the wrath of Allah on herself if (her accuser) is telling the truth.

The first argument of Badawi is that Allah does not make any reference to the gender of witnesses but equals the testimony of males and females in this verse. In the case of adultery which can be stated as one of the most challenging cases against women in Islam, Allah does not specify the gender of witnesses which proves that there should not be any generalization against female testimony by underestimating their capacity or honesty. His next argument is related to the verse 2:282 stated above. Similar to Wadud, Badawi draws our attention to the specific condition of the verse as it is closely related to the financial transactions in which women of the time would be considered as quite inexperienced because of the roles of women during that period (Badawi, 1995). Since Muslim women were not heavily involved in the financial transactions back then, it is possible to understand the specificity of this verse according to his interpretation. Therefore, the danger of generalizing the

particular becomes evident again as it restricts women into the private sphere by devaluing her potential and reasoning.

As for the validity of female testimony, another scholar named Mohammad Fadel (1997) provides us a different perspective. He confirms that the verse 2:282 in the Qur'an has been misinterpreted and has become to imply that women are more prone to make a mistake or forget when compared to men. As a result, the implication that men are more credible than women underlies here. To underpin the eradication of this common-sense reading, he gives examples of various Muslim scholars so as to show that this verse is not universally acceptable and not applicable for all cases.

One of his chief points is that there have been numerous women who were highly influential in the transmission of Islam and new legal doctrine in the history. Aisha bint Abi Bakir who was the youngest wife of the Prophet Muhammad can be regarded as the most prominent example of these women. Thanks to her individual qualities, she succeeded in not only transmitting the new religion but also becoming the authority to interpret law. According to Fadel (1997), her active involvement in the production and reproduction of the religious science is a valid proof of how women can contribute to the political and legal realms of Islam. Fadel claims that Muslim women continued to take part in the branches of the religious sciences after her which can be a token of the full validity and capacity of women in Islam. That's why; it is a futile attempt to question and undervalue the ability of women to witness.

His next argument is that the law entails its discrimination against female witnesses by making the use of her testimony difficult in the court. By doing this, the law ensures that men are encouraged to participate in legal and public transactions. That's how the law fortifies the traditional division of labor in the Muslim world and confined women into the private sphere. Rather than focusing on the verses related to female testimony, Fadel sheds light on the underlying reasons for the discouragement of Muslim women from witnessing and taking place in public sphere. According to him, there is no reason to underestimate or question the capacity of women in terms of witnessing if we take these historical and ideological factors into consideration (Fadel, 1997). Therefore, it is possible to provide a gender-neutral interpretation pertaining to the female participation in law.

CHAPTER IV

THE DISCOURSE OF THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE PRESIDENCY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS ON WOMEN

4.1 The Status and Jurisdiction of the PRA

The Presidency of Religious Affairs is a state institution which is in charge of conducting religious matters and providing religious services to Muslim people in Turkey. In the Ottoman period, there was the Office of the Grand Mufti (*Şeyhülislam*) which was abolished with the proclamation of the Republic. Although it is considered to be the continuation of this Ottoman institution named, which held all the authority in religious matters, the PRA had a limited function in the secular establishment.

Among the aims of the PRA, it is possible to claim that it is not only a bureaucratic institution but also it envisions providing religiousness that is based on morality. In addition to these, the PRA carries out religious affairs concerning the prayers, faith and morality. Furthermore, it is concerned with informing authentic religious knowledge and administrating worship places. Meeting the needs of Muslim citizens in Turkey and balancing the religious liberties and demands of society can also be counted among the major purposes of the PRA.

The PRA is a public institution and part of the state organization which causes controversy among scholars since some of them believe that if state interferes with religious matters, it may be in contradiction with secularism. However, Bardakoğlu (2009), one of the presidents in recent years, argues that the PRA has a vital position at this point since there is a need to balance liberties and demands in the society. According to Bardakoğlu, the PRA both protects religious liberties and has a control on religious demands coming from the society in order not to disturb social order which is questioned by the critics.

Besides, he argues that the PRA is an independent situation since it makes efforts to find sound and original religious knowledge and disseminate it to the people in the country. He denies that the PRA has been influenced by the intervention of the secularism or the organization of the state which has been another controversial issue for years. Lastly, he names the PRA as a civil institution as it came out of the needs of Muslim citizens to get authentic religious knowledge and therefore it has a democratic basis (Bardakoğlu, 2009). However, we should keep in mind that there are opposing voices against his claims. Unlike Bardakoğlu, some scholars argue that the discourse of the PRA is highly affected by the discourse of the state and the principle of secularism is distorted by the existence of the PRA and its intervention in religious matters.

4.2 Historical Background and Significance of the PRA

The PRA as a Republican institution continued the Ottoman the practice to some extent but also adapted itself to the new conditions coming along with the secularization of the state. The institution uses the word ‘diyanet’ meaning piety rather than the word ‘din işleri’ (religious affairs) in Turkish which reveals the efforts of the institution to provide religious foundation based on morality (Bardakoğlu, 2009).

What is significant for this study is the gender discourse of the PRA since it is among the most powerful institutions and help reiterate the stereotypes and misbeliefs in the society. As for this issue, the previous president claims that it adopts a policy that aims to be an active agent in solving women’s problems by raising awareness and sensitivity in the society. Furthermore, it desires to enlighten people against religious misunderstandings or misinterpretations by negotiating with various institutions and organizations in order to strip religion off its bad connotations. For the PRA, the ultimate aim is to create a world where people can live in harmony and peace and whose building block is Islam. (Bardakoğlu, March, 2007 issue of Diyanet Europe).

Although the scholars and experts working in the PRA defend that it is an independent and scholarly free institution, there are some questions concerning its autonomy. Another dispute would be related to its objectivity in choosing the materials and sources in order to inform and disseminate the religious knowledge. For some, the gender discourse of the PRA is also questionable since it mostly

reflects male perspective and does not consider alternative approaches to gender in Islam open-mindedly. Having stated its significance for women in Turkey, I will try to analyze its gender discourse and compare its compatibility with the arguments of Islamic feminism.

4.3 Comparisons of Publications of the PRA and the Discourse of Muslim Feminists on Women

To begin with, it would be useful to look through the institutional structure of the PRA in order to explore the position of women in the institution. According to statistics given by the PRA in 2015, the number of staff working in the PRA is 117.378. However, the rate of female staff is quite low in comparison to the male staff. On the official website of the PRA, it is seen that there are various Directorates such as High Board of Religious Affairs, General Directorate of Religious Services, General Directorate of Hajj and Umrah Services, General Directorate of Religious Publications etc. Among these, the most prominent one is High Board of Religious Affairs of whose board members, chairman and deputy experts are male. The only female in this board is Ülfet Görgülü as an expert in the board.

As for the other directorates, an exact number for female staff could not be reached. On the other hand, it is seen that the only part of the institution where the number of female staff is much higher in Family and Religious Counseling Services. A report of 2014 says that the number of female staff in these services is 1251 whereas there are 580 men working in these services. In the recent years, the PRA has taken some actions in order to increase the number of female staff and to assign women high positions such as deputy muftis and female preachers. However, it is still criticized as it does not assign any woman as directors, chief of boards or muftis. Besides, the number of female staff is found to be unsatisfying despite the changes made in the recent years.

Under this heading, the gender discourse of the PRA publications will be analyzed in conjunction with the arguments of Islamic feminists given in the previous chapter. Although each heading consists of various subcategories to be explored, I focus on some of them since the scope of this study is limited. Under the heading of woman and creation, the story of creation, the Fall and the origin of humankind will be touched upon. In terms of gender equality as a separate heading, the status of men in

the family, working women and the concept of *taqwa* will be elaborated. As for the position of women in marriage and family, her right to divorce and the alleged superiority of men will be discussed. In addition to these, the legal rights of women to witness and the notion of veiling as an obligatory practice will be analyzed under the heading of women in public place and the legal rights of women.

Before moving onto the findings of this study, it should be kept in mind that the views expressed in the publications of the PRA may only reflect the individual opinions of these authors rather than the official statements of the PRA. Since it is beyond the scope of this study to go through all the publications of the PRA, some of the publications that seemed to be relevant to the subjects discussed by Islamic feminists have been selected. That's why; it is appropriate to say that the case of this study was limited with the expressions of some of the scholars or experts selected with a link to the PRA. In this regard, their opinions may reflect the discourse of the PRA or their individual perspective. Therefore, we should not take all the claims placed in this study granted as the official discourse of the PRA.

Another point to be noted is that most of the works of Islamic feminists have not been translated into Turkish. In literature review, it was found that only three books of Fatima Mernissi have been translated into Turkish with the names of *Kadınların İsyanı ve İslami Hafıza*, *Haremden Kaçan Şehrazat* and *Peçenin Ötesi*. Another book translated into Turkish is *Kuran ve Kadın* written by Amina Wadud and published by İz Publication House. In addition to these, a number of scholars from Divinity schools and Women Studies have translated some articles related to Islamic feminism, especially the works of Margot Badran. However, it is possible to claim that Turkish readers, scholars and experts of the PRA are not highly familiar with the concepts and challenges brought out by Islamic feminists in general. Therefore, the underrepresentation of these ideas in Turkey should be kept in mind while looking for the reflections of Islamic feminism in the publications of the PRA since it may be more difficult for them to have interactions between each other.

4.3.1 Woman and Creation

As clearly stated in the preceding chapter, the notion of creation in Islam brings along a variety of issues such as the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, the incident of the Fall, the role of Eve in it, and the origin of humankind etc. As for these issues,

Islamic feminists such as Wadud, Barlas, Hassan and Ahmed revisit the related verses and reinterpret them through female lenses and I elaborated on their challenges and strategies in the previous chapter. Having explained the theoretical approaches of Islamic feminists, I would like to touch upon the publications of the PRA that provide explanations on the creation of humankind and the role of woman in the Fall story. I will place the related arguments in two categories as the short articles written in popular periodicals such as *Diyanet Aylık* (Diyanet Monthly), *Diyanet Avrupa* (Diyanet Europe), *Diyanet Aile* (Diyanet Family) and the books written by various scholars and published by the PRA in different time periods.

The origin of humankind and the (non)existence of hierarchy between woman and man in creation lie at the heart of this heading of the study. Islamic feminists have provided an alternative interpretation with regard to the ontological status of woman in Islam and challenged the arguments and interpretations of Muslim scholars who believe that woman was created from the rib of man and therefore her existence is derivative and secondary. Rather than being an individual on their own, women are thought to be created in order to serve and please men by most Muslim scholars whose ideas have been accepted by the majority of the public and integrated into the social norms and the practices (Barlas, 2002; Wadud, 1999; Hassan, 1999).

To challenge the mainstream beliefs in relation to the existence of women in Islam, Islamic feminists highly focus on Surah 4: An-Nisa: 1 which was translated by Yusuf Ali (1988) as the following:

Reverence your (*Rabb*) who created you from a single *nafs* (Person) created, of like nature (its) *zawj* (mate) and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; -Reverence God, through Whom ye demand your mutual (rights).

The discussion of the word '*nafs*' has been given in the previous chapter, now I would like to move onto the discussion on the origin (*nafs*) of humankind placed in the publications of the PRA and draw your attention to the diversified opinions of the experts and scholars in these publications.

To demonstrate, I would like to start with the books published by the PRA and explore their perspective on the creation of women and gender hierarchy in the

Qur'an. The first book to analyze would be '*Uncovering Islam*' written by Şaban Ali Düzgün and Eşref Sağlık and published in 2004. In the book, it is stated that Allah created Eve from the material He created Adam so there is no difference between women and men in creation. Furthermore, the authors clearly reject the mainstream belief that Eve was created from the rib of Adam. Besides, they claim that women and men are equally accountable to God and are of the same value before God (Düzgün & Sağlık, 2004). As seen, the writers of the book do not touch upon the translation of the critical words that pose problems which is a general tendency among the PRA experts but they agree on non-hierarchical existential relationship between women and men.

Another book titled as '*The Prophet Muhammad and Human Dignity*' published by the PRA in 2013 consists of various articles by a range of experts on the issues of creation and dignity of humankind. In this book, two different meanings of '*nafs*' are given as the word means the human soul or essence in the first place and it also refers to basic qualities that shape the carnal desires of people against which a human can resist and pass this trial of life through her/his willpower (Dönmez, 2013). The first meaning of the word seems compatible with the arguments of Islamic feminists like Amina Wadud who interpret the word '*nafs*' as the origin of humankind rather than Adam or man per se through which the alleged hierarchy between genders is eradicated (Wadud, 1999).

The same idea of gender equality is also put forward in another book named as '*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığının Ailenin Korunması ve Kadına Yönelik Şiddetin Önlenmesi Konusunda Görüş ve Yaklaşımları*' (The Opinion and Approaches of Presidency of Religious Affairs on the Protection of Family and the Prevention of Domestic Violence against Women) prepared by the High Council of Religious Affairs (HCRA) (*Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu*) and published by the PRA in 2015. In this book, Mehmet Görmez (2015) who is the current President of the PRA argues that God created Adam and Eve from the same material which is 'dust' and denies that God created Eve from Adam.

Islamic feminists have interpreted the term '*nafs*' as 'origin' or 'Self' so far whereas Görmez focuses on the material used in the creation of human beings rather than directly interpreting the key word here. This is another strategy of the PRA experts

who do not interfere with the translation of the critical words in order to avoid hot debates and reactions that may come from society.

In line with this strategy, Görmez admits that Muslim women are systematically degraded in the Muslim world and lists three problematic approaches as a source of the secondary position of women in Islam. According to him, the first approach is a reductionist and sexist one that narrows the problematic issues into the question of women and does not take the big picture into account. The second approach is an orientalist or neo-orientalist one that departs from the assumption that the position of women in Islam is a disadvantageous one and doesn't struggle to improve it. Unlike the first and second approach, the third one supposes that Islam has given women all her rights and ignores the contemporary problems of women. Görmez opposes to these approaches and claims that woman, together with man, is placed under the heading of *eşref-i mahlukat* (the highest of created beings) rather than in the category of 'gender' in the Qur'an (Görmez, 2015).

Through these words, Görmez argues that it is against the Qur'an and the authentic hadiths to claim that women are of secondary importance and they were created from men for their pleasure. His arguments completely befit the arguments of Islamic feminists such as Riffat Hassan who places mistaken assumptions at the heart of misogynist constructions. For her, the belief that Eve was created from the rib of Adam and for his pleasure lies at the core of women's degradation in the society (Hassan, 1999). Additionally, his emphasis on the position of women as the highest of created beings in the Qur'an appears to be in line with the arguments of Asma Barlas who entails that women and men are contingent pairs in creation and they are dependent upon each other. That's why; each of them has her/his specific role and significance before God and belittling women seems incompatible with the epistemology of the Qur'an (Barlas, 2002).

Analyzing the articles and books stated above, the gender discourse of the PRA seems to be based on egalitarian grounds and it regards human beings as a whole category instead of making distinctions between women and men in terms of their existence, capability or dignity. However, it is also possible to encounter arguments that completely contradict with the arguments of other experts and scholars whose opinions were given above. One example would be the book titled as '*İslam'a Giriş*'

(Introduction to Islam) written by Muhammed Hamidullah in 1961 and reprinted by the PRA in 2015. In the book, Hamidullah proposes that the Qur'an always reminds us that God created everything in pairs and each of them has her/his own duty. To prove his point, he cites Surah 4: An-Nisa: 32 which is translated as:

“To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn...”

After these words, he adds that God does not aim women and men to be fully equal but designs a specific division of labor and skills between women and men. For him, women have a fragile '*fitra*' (nature) and that's why, their skills and duties will vary from the men who are stronger and capable of undertaking a heavier burden than women in life. Hamidullah (2015) finalizes his words by saying that there are natural inequalities between women and men. Therefore they complement each other due to their diversified nature, needs and capabilities. Through these words, the writer takes the complementary nature of women and men as the focal point of his discussion and leaves the issue of gender equality in the shadow.

In addition to Hamidullah, Servet Armağan who is the writer of the book named as '*İslam Hukukunda Temel Hak ve Hürriyetler*' (Fundamental Rights and Freedoms in Islamic Law) published by the PRA in 2011 claims that women and men are not equal in creation since they are created with different characteristics and skills. He also adds that there is a great cause for this distinction which leads to different regulations and treatments in law too. After explaining the different treatments of women, Armağan concludes that women have less legal rights pertaining to some issues but they are also exempt from a set of significant obligations which is a token of the justice of Islam (Armağan, 2011). Therefore; it is completely natural to be inequalities between genders due to their natural dispositions.

Another book dedicated to the creation of Adam named as '*Hazreti Adem: İlk İnsan*' (Prophet Adam: The First Man) by Mustafa Erdem approves the equality of women and men in creation. However, it also does not deny the religious doctrines or assumptions coming from Judaism and notes that we can consider this kind of information as historical knowledge. With regard to the creation of Eve, Erdem (2015) claims that there is no Qur'anic statement that acknowledges the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam. However, he adds some authentic hadith books affirm that woman is created from the crooked rib and she can be broken if you try to fix that

crookedness. Although the author states that there is no explanation related to this crooked rib or to whom it belongs in the Qur'an, he leaves some space for the possibility that woman can be created from the rib indeed.

On top of that, Erdem (2015) suggests that we can make use of the verses and stories placed in Torah since the Qur'an and hadiths do not provide us a detailed explanation for the creation of woman, especially the involvement of the rib in the creation story. He claims that the creation of Eve is explained in a more detailed way in Torah so the beliefs or doctrines related to it have been integrated into Islamic literature since it is a common tradition for Islamic scholars to borrow the explanations from Torah if it does not contradict with the information given in Islamic sources. That's why; the belief that Eve was created from the rib of Adam while he was asleep and for the pleasure of Adam who was bored in Paradise became widespread in Islam too.

As a supporting argument, he cites Surah 7: Al-Araf: 189 in which it is stated that Eve was created so that Adam might take rest in her or dwell in security with her. This argument perpetuates the common belief that Eve was created for the pleasure of Adam and view her existence as instrumental which is one of the main arguments that Hassan (1999) rejects and claims as one of the main sources for the degradation of women in Muslim world. As a conclusion, Erdem (2015) reminds the readers that it is beneficial to take this widespread belief and explanation as historical knowledge since there is no counter argument or evidence to deny it in Islamic sources. In other words, he does not deny the mainstream beliefs pertaining to the creation of woman but also does not venture into accepting them. Therefore; his given explanation is more ambiguous compared to other scholars and experts.

Looking through these books with a diversified discourse on gender, it is possible to observe that the assumptions shared and transmitted by societies lie behind the misogynist constructions in religion. Among these assumptions, we can find the ones explained by Riffat Hassan in the previous chapter which can be summarized as the belief that Eve was created from the rib of Adam, Eve was responsible for the Fall of man as a seducer and woman was created from man to please and meet the needs of him (Hassan, 1999).

Some of these misogynist assumptions can be tracked down in some publications of the PRA since they attach to commonly accepted beliefs and interpretations. For

instance; some authors do not refrain from using the information coming from Christianity and Judaism even though they are not given or placed in the Qur'an. This approach may lead to certain problems over time since some patriarchal interpretations or social norms may be integrated into the interpretation of the Qur'an. By doing this, the misogynist beliefs and norms may be strengthened because of this approach and it would be impossible to distinguish Qur'anic information from the speculative norms or interpretations over time.

Unlike the books written by individual scholars, the PRA popular periodicals refrain from making bold statements in terms of women and gender issues. It is clearly seen that the popular periodicals of the PRA base their arguments on egalitarian grounds and they do not express any contradictory opinion on this issue. For instance; in May, 2014 issue of Diyanet Family, the expert named Hatice Kübra Görmez (2014) cites Surah:7 Al-Araf: 189 so as to prove that Eve and Adam were created from the same material or essence. The verse is of crucial importance for this study since a couple of scholars or experts cite it repeatedly in order to trace back the origins of creation and to reveal the equality in creation.

Looking at the different translations of the same verse, it is possible to interpret the word '*nafs*' as the single or common origin of humankind like Wadud and Barlas argue in their works (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002). By this way, the gender equality in creation is revealed and the arguments in favor of the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam are denied. In May, 2014 issue of Diyanet Family, Hatice Kübra Görmez prefers to pick up this meaning and likewise emphasizes that women and men are created from the same material and there is no male superiority given in creation.

In another issue of Diyanet Monthly (November, 2015) Betül Şatır argues that woman can be regarded as an ultra-person who has an important role in the reproduction of human beings. In addition to this, woman is addressed as the miracle of God in terms of her physical and mental traits. The most striking point of the article is the claim that women are endowed with angelic characteristics but we tend to put a spotlight on their evil attributes. From these words, we can conclude that the creation of woman is highly appreciated and she is given the same value as man, even she is described as a more sophisticated or spiritual person than man. The capability of giving a birth and mothering can be cited as one the reasons for this

high respect and dignity of women in creation. Likewise, in August, 2013 issue of Diyanet Monthly, İsmail Başaran emphasizes that all human beings are created from the same material and the origin of all humankind is one and the same. Their origin and biological features do not differ from each other. Therefore, it is not possible to claim one group of people superior to another one including man and woman.

Similar to the issues mentioned above, in the October, 2013 issue of Diyanet Monthly, Muhammet Ali Asar articulates that woman and man are created from the single and same essence as it is acknowledged in Surah 4: An-Nisa:1. What is of striking point here for the discussion of this study is the linguistic rules and features of Arabic as the language of the Qur'an. Asar (2013) here points our attention to the fact that the word '*insan*' (human being) refers to all human beings including woman and man in the Qur'an. It sounds similar to the argument of Hassan who touches upon the word 'Adam' used repetitively in the Qur'an and proposes that this word is used to appeal to all human beings, not just Adam itself (Hassan, 1999). However, this argument has been criticized by scholars who advocate that the word '*insan*' used to refer to all human beings and the word 'Adam' are not the same linguistically. In addition, the masculine article is used in the verses appealing to a group of people or a crowd however, we should bear in mind that this is just a result of linguistic elements of Arabic rather than the exclusion of women from the verses. As a result, it is evident that the linguistic elements of Arabic should be taken into consideration while interpreting the verses which reminds us the arguments of Abdol Karim Soroush who makes a distinction between what is accidental and essential in Islam. To his mind, the fact that Muhammad was born in an Arabic country, therefore the language of the Qur'an is Arabic is accidental and we should be aware that its linguistic elements may reflect some facts in a different way. Hence, we should be careful while interpreting Islamic texts.

In general, the biological differences between women and men are usually shown as the locus of gender discrimination and the undervaluation of women's capacity. According to Hassan (1999), another factor leading to this degradation comes from the hierarchy in creation since the first human being was a man and the existence of woman is viewed as secondary. In the article written by İsmail Karagöz in March, 2008 issue of Diyanet Europe, we can encounter a striking statement related to this point. Here, Karagöz (2008) points out that there have been human beings born

without a father (except Adam) but not a mother. By saying this, he wants to emphasize the indispensable role of women in the social order which has been established by God. He also adds that there is an individual surah (An-Nisa) dedicated to women in the Qur'an, not men which is a token of Islamic revolution dignifying women. Therefore, it is of vital importance to appreciate the existence of women as a blessing of God. This article comes to the fore among other ones in terms of appreciating the role of women in creation and divine social order.

In the light of these articles and books, it can be concluded that the experts and scholars publishing their studies under the heading of the PRA have not reached a consensus on the source of humankind. Although there is a great emphasis on the single origin of human beings and non-hierarchical relationship between women and men in creation in the popular periodicals of the PRA, the scholars or writers who have published their own books under the name of the PRA diverge from other scholars and tend to cite 'man' as the origin of human beings from which women came into existence later. Through these discussions, it is possible to claim that the gender discourse of the PRA on creation is not unanimous and the ideas of the scholars are fractured which harms the credibility of the PRA publications for some readers.

Another building block of the discussion on creation is the Man's Fall or the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Paradise. As Hassan (1999) and Barlas (2002) argue, Eve is held responsible in Judaism and Christianity for the expulsion of human beings from the Paradise since there are some verses describing the conversation between Satan and Eve and it is mostly believed that she was the first one to err and to seduce Adam for eating from the forbidden tree. However, Islamic feminists reject this accusation which views every woman as a potential seducer and they attempt to give examples from the Qur'an in order to prove that it is not possible to define this incident as 'Fall' and both Eve and Adam were liable in transgressing the order of God. Surah 2: Al-Baqarah: 35-39, Surah 7: Al-A'raf: 19-25 and Surah 20: Ta-Ha: 115-124 can be counted among these exemplary verses cited by Islamic feminists (Wadud, 1999).

As for the gender discourse of the PRA on creation and the expulsion of human beings from the Paradise, I will analyze the books that have been published in

different years through the publishing house of the PRA and touch upon their general stance towards the role of Eve in the Man's Fall and therefore the misogynist constructions related to this story. The first book I would like to analyze is *Uncovering Islam* written by Şaban Ali Düzgün and Eşref Sağlık. With regard to the accusation of Eve for tempting Adam, the writers claim that both Adam and Eve made a mistake when they ate from the forbidden tree and they were equally sinful. In addition to that, the writers draw our attention to the depiction of Eve in the Qur'an which does not figure Eve as a seducer and responsible for the Fall of man. Another point they make is that Muslim people should not believe in the Original Sin because the Qur'an holds every individual equally accountable to God and assigns him/her the same responsibilities, punishments and rewards. Therefore, Islam diverges from other religions by refraining from the portrayal of Eve as a temptress and all women as natural seducers (Düzgün & Sağlık, 2004).

Another book that deals with the same issue is *Prophet Adam: The First Man* by Mustafa Erdem mentioned above. In the book, the author argues that Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree so that he could get a chance to be sent to the Earth and to be the vicegerent of God there (Erdem, 2015). Therefore, the concept of the Fall or the Original Sin is not approved here which seems to be in accordance with the arguments of Islamic feminists. For instance; Barlas (2002) and Hassan (1999) also deny the concept of Fall in Islam since they believe that Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree because they were meant to be the vicegerent of God on Earth and this was a part of their destiny. In addition, the author emphasizes that the notion that Eve seduced Adam to eat from the forbidden tree is not compatible with many of the verses given in the Qur'an. Surah 20: Ta-Ha, Surah 7: Al-A'raf and Surah 2: Al-Baqarah consist of verses pertaining to the mistake of Adam and Eve which prove how mistaken the patriarchal interpretations and assumptions are.

With respect to the story of Fall, the disagreements found in the PRA books before fades away since they adopt the same approach towards the concept of Original Sin, the Fall and the role of Eve in it. Clearly, they argue for the equal responsibility of Eve and Adam in eating from the forbidden tree and strive for eradicating the false accusations on Eve. In this regard, it seems that the PRA experts have a consensus on depicting Eve as an erring human rather than seductive woman which befits the

widespread belief among Muslim people who esteem Eve more than people of other religions and call her as ‘mother’ of the humankind.

In the magazines of the PRA, the same emphasis on the misbelief pertaining to the Fall and the Original Sin could be realized. In June, 2014 issue of Diyanet Family, the expulsion of humankind from the Paradise is given a significant place in the article of Hatice Kübra Görmez and it is stated that the notion of the Original Sin is not an Islamic thought; therefore women cannot be regarded as scapegoat for this incident. After that, various depictions of Eve and the Fall are given from Torah and New Testament in order to show that these include some misinformation such as the seduction of Adam by Eve intentionally and the conversation between Eve and Satan. Then, these stories are compared with the verses depicting how Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree.

As a consequence of this comparison, it is concluded that Islam differs from other religions in terms of creation story and it is self-evident that there is no the concept of the Original Sin, Fall or Eve as a temptress in the Qur’an. To back up this argument, some of the verses are cited and it is stated that Adam and Eve were created from the same material and in pairs to find peace and love in each other. Furthermore, they were subjected to the same divine messages and they erred together. What is crucial for our discussion is that the article strictly rejects the idea that Eve was the first one to eat from the forbidden tree. Instead, it is emphasized that the Qur’an does not specify the person who sinned in the first place. Moreover, they made this mistake not because of a rebellion against God, but a moment of forgetting. After that, they were sent to the Earth and they asked for the forgiveness of God as a result of which they gained the opportunity to be the vicegerent of God in the world (Görmez, 2014). Additionally, the writer denies the alleged conversation taking place between Eve and Satan like Hassan (1999) who clearly rejects this idea and argues that this assumption roots in In this respect, the arguments stated in the article are compatible with the claims of Islamic feminists who attempts to reveal that the Qur’anic view of Eve diverges from the patriarchal interpretations of other religious sources.

After analyzing the books and popular periodicals published by the PRA, it is seen that they do not have a uniform gender discourse since some scholars or experts may

put forward a completely different idea that contrasts with the main message that the PRA attempts to give in terms of gender equality. The popular periodicals of the PRA tend to highlight gender equality in the Qur'an and Islam whereas the books written by individual scholars can claim the opposite.

Although the discourse of the PRA experts seems to be parallel with each other at first glance, we encounter contradictory arguments in a detailed analysis. For instance; some scholars have a varying approach to the creation of women despite the seeming unanimity among the PRA experts. It seems clear that a great number of the PRA experts deny the mainstream belief that Eve was created from the rib of Adam and they invest in the idea that both man and woman were created from the same material (*nafs*). Furthermore, they do not believe in the concepts of the Original Sin and the Fall as they are considered to be against the teachings of Islam. Therefore, they do not depict Eve and all women as natural seducers or tempters.

On the other hand, some PRA experts do not refrain from acknowledging the use of information coming from other religious sources in Christianity and Judaism even though their validity has not been approved in Islam. According to these scholars, it is appropriate to make use of this type of knowledge when there is no detailed description in the Qur'an. Moreover, some PRA experts put forward that are completely in contrast with the expressions of other scholars in terms of creation and gender equality. For some scholars, women and men cannot be their equivalents since they were created with different skills and disposition. That's why; they have different roles and duties in this world which falls completely incompatible with the arguments of other PRA experts stated above. From these examples, it is clear that contradictory and varying arguments take place in the PRA publications.

4.3.2 Gender Equality

Under the heading of gender equality, Islamic feminists have revisited some critical verses and provided a new interpretation with a female perspective in order to strip them off their patriarchal interpretations and emancipate Muslim women. Among these Qur'anic verses, Surah 4: An-Nisa: 34 ranks as the most significant one in which men are assigned as the '*qawwamun*' (provider, maintainer and the head of family) of women. As seen in the previous chapter, Islamic feminists have put forward their own interpretations related to this term and proposed that it has a

limited meaning and directly connected to the pregnancy of women. As a counter argument, Islamic feminists have touched upon a variety of verses in order to reveal the egalitarian nature of Islam and the Qur'an. Surah 2: Al-Baqarah 286 and Surah 33: Al-Ahzab: 35 can be given as examples for this.

To begin with, Düzgün and Sağlık ground their equality arguments on the claim that Eve and Adam were created from the same material therefore they are equal beings in creation and hereafter. As for the rights of women, the writers emphasize that Islam has given women the right to have their own property and to use her earnings, to inherit, to choose her husband, to divorce her husband if her husband makes her marriage life miserable (Düzgün & Sağlık, 2004)

After explaining the rights of women, they cite some verses from the Qur'an so as to prove how Islam views women and men as equal counterparts rather than creating hierarchical relationships between them. Surah 51: Az-Zariyat: 49 in which it is stated that 'Allah has created every living being in pairs (male and female)', Surah 17: Al-Isra: 70 in which it is said that 'Allah has honored the children of Adam: both male and female' and Surah 3: Al-Imran: 195 which follows as 'Allah will reward both men and women in their life after death' are given as exemplary verses that naturally attaches the same value to women and men before God. In addition to these, they remind the readers of the fact that both women and men are obliged with the same religious obligations and there is no difference in how God applies his mercy and forgiveness to women and men. With regard to this equal treatment of God, Düzgün and Sağlık cite Surah 33: Al-Ahzab: 35 which is translated by Yusuf Ali (1988) as follows:

For Muslim men and women, for believing men and believing women, for devout men and devout women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward.

Taking the stated verses into consideration, it is seen that the writers of the book highly emphasize the egalitarian nature of the Qur'an. Their arguments appear to be

compatible with the discussions and claims of Islamic feminists such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas who invest in the idea that the only difference between women and men is their level of piety, not their genders (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002).

Another book whose gender discourse is egalitarian grounds is named '*The Prophet Muhammad: Human Dignity*' published by the PRA in 2013. In the book, it is highlighted that women and men are created as a whole and the religious obligations are equally incumbent upon women and men. In order to fortify this argument, a part of the speech of the Prophet Muhammad in his Farewell Sermon is given place which is stated below:

Observe the rights of women and fear God in this matter. Women have been entrusted to you by God and their honor and *decency* have been legitimate to you under your oath to God. You have rights over women, and women have rights over you.

The last call of the Prophet Muhammad, especially the last part of his speech, has been constantly cited in significant articles and books so as to show the significance of gender equality since the Prophet touches upon it even in his last speech. From this example, we can deduce that Islam places women in equal grounds as men and if we go through these critical verses and examples, it is possible to prove the sensitivity of the Qur'an in terms of the equal relationship between women and men.

To strengthen the argument of gender equality in the Qur'an, Islamic feminists as discussed in the previous chapter point our attention to Surah 2: Al-Baqarah: 286 in which it is stated that 'Allah does not tax a *nafs* beyond its scope. For it (is only) that which it has earned, and against it (is only) that which it has deserved' and Surah 49: Al-Hujurat: 13 in which it is said that 'Indeed the most noble of you from Allah's perspective is whoever (he or she) has the most conduct (*taqwa*)'. Islamic feminists such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas claim that the only criterion to distinguish human beings from each other is their level of *taqwa* which can be translated as 'piety' or 'faith' (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002). Therefore, the value of each person is contingent upon his or her piety rather than gender. This argument falls compatible with the discourse of the articles and the books published by the PRA since they also

put emphasis on the concept of *taqwa* and affirms that it determines the religious and spiritual value of a human being before God.

The theme of *taqwa* and its significance for Muslim believers is frequently seen in the publications of the PRA, too. By putting emphasis on this concept, the scholars and experts attempt to construct a Muslim world where men and women are seen as a whole on the axis of human beings and the only distinction made between them is not a gendered one but dependent on their level of piety. However, it is also the same scholars who approve a hierarchical relationship between women and men in the family which I will discuss in details in conjunction with the term '*qawwamun*' below. Before that, here are some examples from different articles published in the popular periodicals of the PRA which focuses on the notion of *taqwa* in Islam.

In July, 2014 issue of Diyanet Monthly, Adil Bor cites a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad states that 'God does not look for your appearance or beauty, but your faith and deeds'. Through this hadith, Bor endeavors to signify the importance of *taqwa* for a believer in order to deserve the appreciation and blessing of God. While ending his words, he concludes that the mental and spiritual decay of Muslim world results from the ignorance of the societal facet of *taqwa* which is cardinal to form a safe community. While stating the difference between human beings, he does not specify their gender, instead he notes that their piety or faith will lead them to salvation (Bor, 2014).

Ejder Okumuş (2009), likewise, concentrates on the concept of *taqwa* in September, 2009 issue of Diyanet Monthly and argues for the gender equality given by Islam. He believes that the Qur'an embraces the same perspective on women and men, also cites Surah 49: Al-Hujurat: 13 to back up his argument. In addition, he alleges that Islam stands for equality between genders in terms of their ontological status, legal rights and liabilities. He finalizes his words by referring to Surah 3: Al-Imran: 195 where God promises to reward both women and men after death (Okumuş, 2009).

Having explored and analyzed the publications of the PRA, it is seen that the scholars and experts provide arguments in favor of gender equality given in Islam. To prove their point, they highlight the fact that religious obligations are equally incumbent upon women and men since they will be equally rewarded or punished in line with their actions in this world. As a backbone of their argument, they focus on

this equality in religious obligations and claim that the equal treatment of women and men by God is also valid in creation.

In order to fortify their arguments, these scholars make use of the word '*taqwa*' which means 'piety' or 'faith' in Arabic. Like Islamic feminists, the PRA experts view the level of piety or faith as the main yardstick to determine how religious a person is by giving examples from related verses, authentic hadiths and the life of the Prophet. By determining '*taqwa*' as the only criterion to distinguish human beings from each other, these experts also acknowledge that the only distinction that can be made among human beings is not a gendered one, but based on their level of piety. Therefore, it seems clear that there is a consensus among the PRA experts on the equal value of each person before God regardless of their gender.

As for the gender equality, it is indispensable to touch upon the notion of '*qawwamun*' which is stated in Surah 4: An-Nisa: 34 and discussed in details in the previous chapter. Although most Muslim scholars tend to interpret this verse as 'men are the provider, maintainer or in charge of women' which clearly puts men in a superior position against women, Islamic feminists point our attention to the rest of the verse in which the pregnancy of women is mentioned. According to Islamic feminists, it is also possible to read this verse as giving freedom to women not to work and not to have financial responsibilities when they are pregnant (Wadud, 1999; Hassan, 1999). By doing this, God aims to free Muslim women from double burden on their shoulders. In addition to this, Islamic feminists refrain from accepting the idea that men are assigned as the head of the family in all matters and they also propose that this term should be reinterpreted since the number of working woman has been increasing constantly with the onset of the modern world (Barlas, 2002). Hence we should not stick to the first dictionary meaning of the word and also we should look for the reinterpretation of this verse with a new perspective in order to answer the needs of modern society.

With regard to the notion of *qawwamun*, it can be observed that the discourse of the PRA publications is not consistent with each other. Although there are various articles and books that clearly approve the gender equality in creation and nature, the opinions of scholars and experts diverge from this egalitarian discourse when it comes to the relationship within a family. It is possible to observe that numerous

articles acknowledge man as the head of the family and there is a clear distinction made between the role of a wife and a husband in accordance with their skills and disposition. Bearing this in mind, I would like to move onto the analysis of the publications of the PRA with regard to the gender hierarchy in a family.

In the book named as '*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığının Ailenin Korunması ve Kadına Yönelik Şiddetin Önlenmesi Konusunda Görüş ve Yaklaşımları*' (The Opinion and Approaches of Presidency of Religious Affairs on the Protection of Family and the Prevention of Domestic Violence against Women) written by the High Council of Religious Affairs (HCRA) and published by the PRA in 2015, the term '*qawwamun*' is elaborated and its indications are further explored. In the beginning of the discussion, it is enunciated that this verse was sent within the context of relationships in family. Although there is a statement which denies the position of man as the superior of his wife, it still gives some kind of superiority to men over women since men are held responsible for the financial maintenance and protection of women.

In the article, this position of man is regarded as a responsibility rather than superiority or rights of man as he is ordained to protect his family in all terms. As mentioned above, the emphasis on gender equality fades away when the role of men and women in a family shows up. This part in the book ends with the statement that man is basically a created being to whom God entrusted his family members who are sensitive and prone to be exploited. From these words, we can conclude that men are considered to hold a higher position over his wife because of physical or mental abilities and the fragile nature of women.

The same inconsistency reveals itself in 'Introduction to Islam' written by Muhammed Hamidullah in 2015. As for the gender equality, the writer begins his words by claiming that God created everything in pairs, including women and men who have their own duty and skills. According to him, it is this variance in their disposition that avoids the possibility of full equality between them. He adds that women and men complement each other but they are not fully equal counterparts of each other. Hamidullah (2015) is also among the scholars who interpret the word '*qawwamun*' as the provider of women and he suggests that this role comes along with a number of responsibilities for men. Therefore, it is vital for married couples to make sacrifices for the maintenance of their family. This way of thinking normalizes

the situation where men have superiority or more rights over women and highly departs from the arguments of Islamic feminists.

Like Hamidullah, Servet Armağan also touches upon the role of men in family and he assures that man is the head of the family. Since he interprets the term ‘*qawwamun*’ as the provider of men, he proposes that woman is contingent upon man and he has the right to make the final decision in family issues. To back up his argument, Armağan (2011) shows Surah 4: An-Nisa: 34 as an example and highlights the following sentence ‘Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means’ in order to legitimize the superiority of men over women.

Through these examples found in the PRA books, it is seen that they do not make a clear statement in favor of positioning men over women. However, they highly emphasize and appreciate the responsibility of man in family. Since man has to financially support his family, he is de facto assigned as the head of family which brings male superiority up in family. It is also felt that even the motherhood of woman which is frequently described as the major responsibility of woman is overshadowed by the role of man as the maintainer of family in these books.

In addition to the books mentioned above, the notion of *qawwamun* and its indications in the division of labor in the family is shed light on in the popular periodicals of the PRA too. We can follow the traces of the contradictory discourse of the PRA on women in these magazines including Diyanet Monthly and Diyanet Family. In January, 2013 issue of Diyanet Family, an interview with Mehmet Emin Özafşar by Faruk Görgülü takes place. While the interview begins with the emphasis on the importance of starting a family and its significance in Muslim society, Özafşar goes on his words by claiming that man is the head of family which imposes upon him some rights and responsibilities.

To his mind, man is the one who is liable to protect his family and family laws, to maintain the wealth of family members and to meet the needs of family members financially. Because of his liabilities, he has a heavy burden on his shoulder and thus; his wife and other family members should appreciate him more in order to relieve his stressful situation. Although he ends his words by saying that there should not be rigid distinctions between the world of men and women, it seems clear that he cannot

help himself favoring the role of man in the family and shows his financial support as a legitimate source for his superiority over his wife and other family members (Görgülü, 2013).

Another magazine published by the PRA, Diyanet Europe, touches upon the notion of *qawwamun* and put forward opinions that are in line with the mainstream interpretations. In March, 2008 issue of Diyanet Europe, İsmail Karagöz (2008) affirms that women and men are equal in terms of religious liabilities, however there is a kind of positive discrimination against women because of their difference coming from creation. For instance; men are in charge of providing the basic needs of their wives such as food, drink, clothes and shelter which automatically makes them the head of family.

Looking through the publications of the PRA, it seems clear that they assign man as the head of his family by referring to the word '*qawwamun*' and translating it as the head of the family, maintainer or provider of women. In this respect, there appears to be a big difference between the arguments of the PRA experts and Islamic feminists since Islamic feminists limit this role of man with the cases of pregnancy where women should not worry about financial needs of the family (Wadud, 1999). On the other hand, the PRA experts generalize this interpretation into all cases and do not question the role of man as the head of family whereas some of Islamic feminists argue that providing financially does not necessarily mean being the head of the family (Barlas, 2002).

Even if we accept the arguments of the PRA experts on the head of family, it is clear that they need to revise and reconsider their explanations because of the changing conditions in the modern world. Since the PRA experts base their arguments on the fact that men financially maintain their families, and therefore they are the head of family; they need to take the increasing number of working women in Turkey and around the world into consideration. With the blurring lines between the roles of women and men in the contemporary world, a crucial need to revise these old-fashioned interpretations shows itself here. Actually, this lack of adaptation or capability to meet the current needs of Muslim women has led to the emergence of Islamic feminism and the concept of *qawwamun* can be shown as a good example for this.

Speaking of the role of men in the family as a provider or maintainer, it is inevitable to question the role of women too. Islamic feminists asked questions in terms of woman's role in the private and public realm which starts with the question whether women can work outside or not. Most Islamic feminists have come to conclusion that the related verse should be reinterpreted and we should realize that the providing role of men does not avoid women from working outside their homes. With the newly occurred needs and indications of the modern world, it seems crucial to reinterpret this verse so as to meet the needs of Muslim women in the contemporary world where the female and male roles have radically changed.

With the modernization process, the division of labor in family and the roles of spouses have dramatically changed. The number of women working outside has been steadily increasing for various reasons. For instance; modern women have to financially support their families in order to survive hard living conditions or they desire to pursue a career outside their houses or they seek for other types of satisfaction other than bringing up their children. With the new way of thinking in the modern world where women are encouraged to become independent and emancipated individuals, it is of vital importance to reinterpret the issue of working women in Islam with a fresh and updated outlook.

In addition to this, the role of man as the head of the family should also be reconsidered since providing financial means to the family does not necessarily require him to be in charge of every other person in the family. Moreover, husbands share the responsibility of providing their families with their wives now; therefore, it is not applicable to legitimize their dominance in the family just because of their financial gains. Because of the blurring lines between the roles of women and men in family in the contemporary world, the interpretation of the word '*qawwamun*' and the related verses should be revised.

In the analysis of the PRA publications, it is seen that the number of articles that mention influential and successful Muslim women throughout history is quite high. Although we may consider this high number as a promising discourse on women at first sight, we should also realize that the PRA puts emphasis on the fact that these Muslim influential women worked in spreading Muslim beliefs and hadiths rather than working outside their house as breadwinners. On one hand, it is obvious that the

PRA encourages women to work for the sake of Islam through these articles and books. On the other hand, it does not put so much effort into the question of whether they should work outside and have economic freedom or their main job is to take care of their children or not.

With respect to influential Muslim women, Diyanet Family provides us various examples of influential Muslim women who strived for the victory of Islam over the years. In November, 2013 issue of the magazine, Hatice Kübra Görmez writes about the life of Aişe who was one of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad. According to Görmez, the life of Aişe reveals us how an ideal Muslim woman should be and what attributes she should have. Aişe was one of the most influential women in that period and she narrated most of the hadiths which survived until today. In addition, she contributed to the interpretation of the verses pertaining to women and ensured the eradication of misunderstandings with regard to women. Clarifying the achievements and contributions of Aişe, Görmez attempts to prove her point which entails every woman to learn and teach for the benefit of Islam. By doing this, Görmez shows that Muslim women have always been active and contributed to Muslim world in different ways (Görmez, 2013).

Another example would be found in September, 2014 issue of Diyanet Monthly where Hilal Görgün discusses the notion of women in Islamic thinking and she suggests that women have always contributed to Islamic knowledge through their narration of authentic hadiths. She gives the example of Khadijah who was the first person to believe in the revelation of Muhammad and she also explains that the household of the Prophet including women and children were among the first disciples in Islam. Therefore, there is no gender discrimination in terms of learning and spreading Islamic knowledge.

With these examples, it is shown that women and men are on the equal basis in terms of learning and teaching Islam. However, we encounter the same inconsistency stated above when it comes to the issue of working women outside their home. Islamic feminists blame the patriarchal interpretations as the locus of the restriction of Muslim women into the private realm and keeping them away from being active in the public realm (Görgün, 2014). In the issues of the PRA popular periodicals, it is common to see articles encouraging working women, however this emphasis fades

away in the books of the PRA written by various scholars and experts who refrain from allowing women to work in high rank jobs.

Having stated a number of articles and the opinions of the PRA scholars on the issue of working women, I would like to move onto the analysis of the books with a varying approach to working women. In their book, Eşref Sağlık and Şaban Ali Düzgün express that men are assigned as the provider or caretaker of the family. They also add that Islam gives women the right to develop their skills and work within the limits of Islam (Düzgün & Sağlık, 2004). However, the nature and indications of these Islamic limits are not described further. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that although their argument may seem as emancipating at face value, they do not put forward a fortified idea to prove their point.

Servet Armağan, likewise, affirms that women have equal rights as men since they are able to conduct all kinds of legal transactions, to use and make decisions on their properties, to trade, to sue and to work outside their home in his book. In contradiction to this statement, he notes that it is generally accepted that women cannot hold positions such as judge and governor (Armağan, 2011).

Another type of approach to working women comes from Halide Yenen who writes about the right of women to work outside their house in September, 2009 issue of Diyanet Monthly. She begins her words by listing the reasons that lead women to work in business life and the potential problems that they end up with. According to her, the most crucial reason that pushes women to work is the attempts of men to use their financial power in order to control their wives and household and to deprive her of self-esteem. What is of striking is here that she alleges that women feel themselves safer in their houses because of their natural disposition because nothing can be more rewarding than feeling that they are the home-maker of their house and the mother of her children for women. Through these words, she implies that women work because men do not appreciate their work or efforts enough which causes women to question their capacity or ability and to prove themselves by working at and outside the home (Yenen, 2009).

As seen with these examples, the discourse of the PRA on working women seems to have contradictions in itself. While the articles placed in the magazines support working women and try to empathize with them, some of the individual books

published under the name of the PRA stick to the traditional interpretations and refrain from empowering Muslim working women to the full extent. That attitude towards working women does not match with the arguments of Islamic feminists who believe that there is no verse condemning or limiting working women and restrict the interpretation of *qawwamun* with the case of pregnancy (Barlas, 2002). As a conclusion, it can be deduced that the PRA publications do not deny that women can work outside of their houses but some of the articles imply that women would be happier if they stayed at home and took care of their children. Therefore, it is possible to say that the message of the PRA publications in this sense is not completely clear.

4.3.3 Woman in Marriage and Family

In the previous chapter, I have given place to the arguments of Islamic feminists on woman in marriage and family which have concentrated on the issues of violence by husbands and the rights of women in case of a divorce. In this respect, Surah 4: An-Nisa: 34 where the word '*daraba*' (beating) has become controversial and Surah 30: Ar-Rum: 21 where the mutual relationship between a husband and wife is defined with '*sukūn*' (peace) and Surah 2: Al-Baqarah: 228 where men appear to have a *darajah* (degree) over women in divorce come to the fore as most cited and debated verses. The interpretations of these critical verses are provided in the previous chapter, therefore I would like to carry on the discussion with the analysis of the opinions of scholars and experts in the PRA on the position of women in marriage and family without revisiting the underlying indications of these critical words and verses.

The term '*daraba*' that takes place in Surah 4: An-Nisa: 34 lies at the heart of the discussions on the status of women in marriage, especially the practice of wife-beating in the Muslim world which is legitimized through this verse. In this critical verse, it is stated that 'As for those women whose defiance you have cause to fear, admonish them and keep them apart from your beds and beat (*daraba*) them'. Although this verse has been shown as the legitimate source for beating women throughout history, Islamic feminists revisit the term and finds out its other possible interpretations. While Hassan (1999) reads this term as referring to holding women in confinement rather than beating her, Wadud (1999) focuses on another

interpretation of the word which is ‘to give or set an example’ and Barlas (2002) likewise claims that the term may refer to setting an example for people too.

Although the articles and books do not touch upon other possible meanings of the word ‘*daraba*’ and they do not deny that a man can beat his wife as a last resort, they put a great emphasis on how the practice of wife-beating is against Islamic thinking and Qur’anic inscriptions. It is obviously seen that the campaign against wife-beating has been conducted throughout years in various articles, books and Friday sermons provided by the PRA. As a response to the claims that seem to legitimize wife-beating in the family, the scholars and experts of the PRA highly emphasize the mutual love, understanding and peace between spouses put forward which is prescribed in Islam and demonstrated by the life of the Prophet. The word ‘*sukūn*’ meaning peace is frequently enunciated in order to describe the relationship between wife and husband by referring to Surah 30: Ar-Rum: 21 in which it is stated that ‘He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility (peace) with them’.

In January, 2013 issue of Diyanet Family, Ekrem Keleş revisits the word ‘*aile*’ meaning family in Turkish and Arabic and explains that the etymological meaning of the word means ‘to be in need of something’. According to him, the origin of the word self-revealing since family is a societal structure or union where each of the spouses needs the protection and love of the other one. By doing this, he defines the ideal relationship between women and men in the family which should be based on mutual understanding, mercy and love in Qur’anic accounts and his explanation seems to be compatible with the arguments of Asma Barlas who bases the ideal marriage on egalitarian grounds where each spouse needs the love and tranquility of the other one (Barlas, 2002). Keleş also cites Surah 30: Ar-Rum: 21 and the word ‘*sukūn*’ to affirm that marriage in Islam does not allow any of the spouses to hurt the other one and it is based on love rather than hierarchy or violence (Keleş, 2013).

In July, 2014 issue of the same magazine, the interview with Nazlı Özburun who is a family therapist takes place where she argues that woman and men are matched so as to give each other tranquility or peace (‘*sukūn*’ in Arabic and Turkish). Like Keleş, Özburun also cites the verse pertaining to ‘‘*sukūn*’ between spouses and she adds that the Qur’an ordains to place love and mercy between woman and man and views it as

the ayah of God. Therefore, it can be misleading to claim that Islam is in favor of violence against women and the ideal relationship between spouses should be in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an (Özburun, 2014).

In addition, the other popular periodical of the PRA named Diyanet Monthly deals with the same issue. In December, 2014 issue, İbrahim H. Karşlı who is a member of High Council of Religious Affairs points out that the violence and other problems in the family stem from the negative perception on women since it is common to encounter derogatory terms and opinions about women in Turkish culture. For him, this kind of perception plays a role in insulting women and because of her secondary position, violence against women happened to become a normal thing. Like other scholars mentioned above, Karşlı (2014) condemns violence against women and gives examples from the life of the Prophet. Furthermore, he repeats the words of the Prophet Muhammad which assign men who behave their wives well as the most honorable in society. From these words, it is clear that Karşlı is against violence on women even though he does not touch upon the critical verse including the term '*daraba*'.

Similar to the ideas of the scholars stated above, Bilal Esen, in January, 2011 issue of Diyanet Monthly, as an expert in Religious Affairs rejects all kinds of violence whose source is not based in law. To his mind, religion reminds us of a Supreme Being to whom we are liable and visions us a life whose center is the Exalted Creator. With this framework in mind, human beings perceive that God created a great number of beings and there is no distinction between them in terms of their race, language, color or gender. As a result, we come to realize that the only way to reach superiority before God can be through *taqwa*, in other words through being moral and virtuous individuals. As a consequence, he denies all kinds of violence in Islam and gives the rationale for gender equality in Islam (Esen, 2011).

Until here, I tried to give place to the opinions of scholars who despise the practice of wife-beating in the Muslim world without revisiting Surah 4: An-Nisa: 34 where the word '*daraba*' is stated. Like other critical words such as *nafs* or *qawwamun*, the PRA experts refrain from providing us a detailed explanation on why wife-beating is not advised in the Qur'an by clarifying the term *daraba* and how it should be interpreted. In this regard, in September, 2009 issue of Diyanet Monthly, Ejder

Okumuş cites the critical verse where it seems that men are allowed to beat their wives in case of their disobedience without touching upon the term *daraba*. While Islamic feminists reinterpret this verse and draw our attention to the fact that the Qur'an does not free men to beat their wives but it should be seen as a limitation on the ongoing violent the practices which were very common considering the time of revelation (Barlas, 2002). Okumuş (2009) also interprets the verse in the same way by claiming that the Qur'an limits the practice of wife-beating with the situations where women risk the unity of the family and the motive underlying this verse is the protection of family.

In addition to this, Okumuş suggests to learn and get examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad who behaved his wives well and never hurt them. According to him, the life of the Prophet should exhibit a model for Muslim people to understand how to behave women and what kind of attitudes they should have. He finalizes his words by stating that all kinds of approaches that are violent or insulting on women are against the teachings of the Qur'an and Islam (Okumuş, 2009).

Like the articles placed in magazines mentioned above, the issue of violence between spouses and how Islam envisages ideal marriage come to the fore in many times. On the Friday Sermon that took place on 20th of February, 2015 with the title of 'Kadına El Kalkmaz' (No one can raise a hand against women), it is stated that violence has spread all around the World and it is especially women and children who are mostly subject to violence. It is statistically defined that 39% of women and 43% of children are exposed to violence in their families. In addition, the audience is reminded of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad who stated that 'The blood, property and chastity of a Muslim are forbidden to another Muslim person'. That's why; the security of life and honor of women is sacred and untouchable in Islam. Like Islamic feminists, this sermon also points out how the Prophet Muhammad set an example in his life with respect to his behavior and attitude against women. Lastly, it is emphasized that the Prophet did not insult or hurt anybody throughout his life; therefore it is obvious that Islam does not approve the practice of wife-beating and all kinds of violence indeed.

Another example would be found in the book named as '*Ailem*' (My Family) prepared by High Council of Religious Affairs and published in 2014. Huriye Martı starts the part relating to family and ideal marriage with a hadith in which it is said

that ‘Spouses are two halves which complement and resemble each other’. Here again, the nature of marriage in Islam is described as being based on mutual love and understanding where using violence against women seems contradictory with the teachings and prescriptions of Islam. Likewise, the book named as ‘*İslam’a Giriş*’ (Introduction to Islam) by Muhammed Hamidullah and published by the PRA in 2015 also sheds light on the allowance of violence against women. Hamidullah gives the words of the Prophet Muhammad stated in the Farewell Sermon as an example and he affirms that it is forbidden to be harsh on women in Islam. However, he does not refrain from using the term ‘*daraba*’ and proposes that men can slightly beat their wives as a last solution. Therefore his opinions differ from the arguments of other scholars mentioned above.

Through these examples, it is clear that the experts of the PRA do not focus on other possible interpretations of the word *daraba* unlike Islamic feminists who revisited the term. While Hassan (1999) suggests that it may also mean ‘holding in confinement in case of a general revolt in the community’, Wadud (1999) and Barlas (2002) propose that it may also mean ‘to give or set an example’ in Arabic. However, these new interpretations are not included in the works of the PRA scholars and experts. Instead, they prefer to base their arguments on the discourse of gender equality, the notion of *sukūn* in ideal marriage, the life of the Prophet as a role model.

On one side, the PRA scholars fiercely argue against the practice of wife-beating since it breaches the dignity of created beings which befits into the claims of Islamic feminists who support that women and men are equally significant and honorable in creation (Barlas, 2002). On the other side, they maintain that a man can beat his wife at the last resort and they do not elaborate on the reasons for this right. The only explanation given about this issue is that this verse should be analyzed within the context of that period where women were not viewed as full human beings and any kind of violence against women was legitimized in society. Therefore, it is not possible to call this as permission but it should be addressed as a restriction to the ongoing practice of wife-beating.

After explaining the approaches of scholars and experts in the PRA on violence against women and ideal marriage, I would like to move onto another cardinal tenet of women’s position in family and marriage which is basically the case of divorce.

As for the rights of women in a divorce, Islamic feminists have pointed to Surah 2: Al-Baqarah: 228 in which the Arabic word '*darajah*' (degree) causes controversy among the scholars and interpreters. Most Islamic feminists read this 'degree' of men over women as just a biological difference since women potentially become pregnant and they have to wait for a certain period of time before they remarry. The reason that underlies in this waiting process is to be able to determine the father of a child who is born during the process of divorce (Barlas, 2002). Additionally, Wadud (1999) points out that the degree stated in this verse may pertain to the privilege of men who can initiate a divorce unlike women who have to struggle more in order to divorce their husbands which will be explained in details in the following paragraphs.

As a matter of fact, it is frequently seen that the problem of divorce is one of the most popular topics that have been given space in the publications of the PRA. The scholars and experts of the PRA deal with the causes, results and procedures of divorce in a great number of issues and it is possible to conclude that the PRA has set a campaign against divorce and unhealthy marriages. Although these scholars do not mainly revisit Surah 2: Al-Baqarah: 228 and focus on the rights of men over women in case of a divorce, they cite a number of hadiths and verses in order to prevent couples from divorcing and to manage the divorce process peacefully.

In the article that took place in January, 2014 issue of Diyanet Monthly, the expert named Rukiye Karaköse declares that the rate of divorce has been increasing since 1970 all around the world. She lists various reasons for this increasing number which are mainly as follows. The first reason for her is the fact that the prejudice against divorce has diminished in the society and the other reason is related to women who increasingly gain their economic independence. Lastly, she points to the increasing number of families without children which makes it easier for couples to get divorced (Karaköse, 2014).

In addition to stating the reasons for divorce, the PRA publications also attempt to define and analyze the nature of divorce. In November, 2015 issue of Diyanet Family where Ülfet Görgülü in the article written by Fatma Bayraktar Karahan describes the issue of divorce as a practice that is not forbidden by God but also not desired for the sustainment of the society. Throughout the interview, Görgülü gives advice how an

ideal marriage should be and lists the bad effects of a divorce on the couple and children. According to her, the Qur'an prescribes that spouses should try to solve their problems by talking to each other when a problem occurs rather than thinking about separating in the first place.

Although the popular periodicals of the PRA spare a great deal of space to define and discuss the process of divorce, the scholars and expert do not go into details in terms of the rights of women and men in divorce. Therefore, the gender discourse of the PRA popular periodicals avoids meddling in critical issues. On the other hand, the books written by individual scholars such as Muhammed Hamidullah and Servet Armağan provide explanations on the procedure of divorce and the legal rights of women and men in Islam.

In the books published by the PRA, there is a consensus among scholars on the superiority of men in case of a divorce since it is claimed that men can initiate a divorce without giving a reason. However, there are some differences in the interpretation of the rights of women with regard to divorce. Although Islamic feminists argue for the reinterpretation of the verses pertaining to divorce, most scholars still stick to the mainstream interpretations that favor the disadvantageous position of women. In his book titled as *Introduction to Islam*, Hamidullah (2015) cites Surah 4: An-Nisa: 128-130 so as to show that there are two conditions for a woman to initiate a divorce. In the first condition, she has to prove that her husband cheats on her or suffers from the ignorance of her husband and in the second one, the man can give his wife the right to initiate divorce by putting an article in their marriage contract. As a result, a woman has to prove the mistreatment of her husband or she has to get permission from her husband to attain the right to divorce.

Like Hamidullah, Servet Armağan (2011) argues that men are given the right to divorce their spouses in principle. In his book, he suggests that a woman can request for a divorce only when she is able to prove that her husband makes her life miserable or he is too sick to take care of the family or he has been away from his home for a long time. In addition to the necessity of proving mistreatment of her husband, she also has to give up getting compensation from her husband. From these statements, we can conclude that they maintain to suggest a secondary and disadvantageous position for women in terms of divorce.

In the light of the examples given above, it is obvious that Islamic feminists and the PRA scholars agree on the fact that it is more difficult to initiate a divorce for women than men. Another point on which the PRA experts and Islamic feminist agree that this verse should be considered as a restriction on the ongoing practice of wife-beating rather than legitimizing it in the society. However, their opinions diverge from each other in terms of the degree of men over women. Although the PRA experts tend to generalize this word which leads to accepting the superiority of men over women in all areas, Islamic feminists restrict this degree with the case of divorce since men are not able to become pregnant and do not have to wait before remarrying.

4.3.4 Woman's Place and Rights in Public

As stated in the previous chapter, this heading consists of hot debates such as the prayers of women in mosques, her career outside her home and the practice of veiling to be discussed. Since the scope of this study is limited, only the issue of veiling was discussed in Chapter 3. We should bear in mind that some of Islamic feminist disagree on the interpretation of veiling since they limit the scope of veiling with the family of the Prophet (Mernissi, 1991) or do not consider 'hijab' as something compulsory for Muslim women (Wadud, 1999). On one hand, we see Islamic feminists like Asma Barlas who regard 'veil' as a protection of women in such a brutal and ignorant society prevalent during that time. She believes that veiling was ordained by God in order to separate Muslim women from non-Muslims and slaves to protect them from attacks in the society where rape and sexual abuse was a common thing to encounter (Barlas, 2002).

On the other hand, some Islamic feminists like Amina Wadud do not consider 'veil' as obligatory for Muslim women since they believe that veiling was a practice overrated and controlled by the societal norms and the last group of Islamic feminists including Fatima Mernissi go back to the specific condition upon which the related verse was sent. By doing this, they conclude that the verse for 'veiling' pertains to the household of the Prophet rather than appealing to all women in the society (Wadud, 1999; Mernissi, 1991). To prove their points, most Islamic feminists revisit Surah 33: Al-Ahzab: 59 where the word '*jilbab*' meaning cloak or veil to cover your body is used and Surah 24: An-Nur: 30-31 where both Muslim women and men are

advised to dress modestly. Likewise, it is also possible to see that the same verses are cited and interpreted in the publications of the PRA with a different take on the interpretation of veiling though.

Looking through the publications of the PRA, it appears that its discourse on veiling is unanimous since all the experts and scholars agree upon the necessity of veiling practice for Muslim women. Unlike some Islamic feminists, the experts of the PRA do not cast a doubt on the belief that veiling is ordained by God as an obligatory practice for Muslim women and give the reasons why it is needed for the maintenance of the society. For instance; in January, 2015 issue of Diyanet Family, Lamia Levent (2015) argues that new conditions occurred with the increasing number of working women after the Industrial Revolution and they paved the way for the emergence of problems with regard to veiling. In this respect, she proposes that Islam aims to elevate the status of women in public and ground the relationship between women and men on the axis of Muslim fraternity.

In addition to this, in August, 2013 issue of Diyanet Monthly, İbrahim Hilmi Karşlı also approves the necessity of veiling since he notes that preserving privacy leads believers to reward or punishment. Before explaining why veiling is obligatory for Muslim women, he touches upon the notion of privacy in the Western world and harshly criticizes it. For him, the body of woman is considered to be the building block of freedom, therefore it is thought that if a woman covers her body, she can't be free to the fullest extent in the Western world.

According to Karşlı, God is the owner of everything, including our body too which imposes some responsibilities on created beings. Islam aims to create a society with its own values and modesty so it carries utmost importance to protect the chastity and modesty of both women and men. In conjunction with this approach, Islam puts forward some rules for the relationships between women and men which consists of the practice of veiling too. Like Islamic feminists, he points to Surah 24: An-Nur: 30-31 and entails that women should wear modestly and avoid showing their ornaments to men. To his mind, God ordered women to protect the privacy of their body since women and men are attracted to each other because of their *fitra*. In addition, he suggests that another reason for the necessity of veiling arises from a natural desire of women who want to reveal their charm. That's why; the order of veiling should be

regarded as a protection of women and restriction of her desire to display herself with their husbands rather than the whole society (Karlı, 2013).

Similar to the interpretations given above, Muhammed Hamidullah in his book ‘İslam’a Giriş’ (Introduction to Islam) also considers the practice of veiling as an obligatory concept for Muslim women as he refers to the word ‘*hijab*’ and the related verses. His rationale for this obligation shows similarities with the interpretations of other scholars since he believes that the only aim of veiling is not to draw attention of strangers and thereby to protect women from the evil deeds of men (Hamidullah, 2015).

One of the most prominent publications of the PRA is *İlmihal* (Catechism) in which a number of basic and debated issues are covered in order to provide a general framework for the believers. Diyanet Catechism also tackles with the issue of veiling and it considers the practice of veiling as ordained by God with the purpose of protecting the mental health, nature and honor of an individual, keeping social morality intact, maintaining balance in the sexual relationships between women and men and providing a sexual and family life that befits the dignity of human beings. For him, the different treatment of women and men in terms of veiling originates from their disposition. After stating the different approaches to veiling put forward by various sects or groups, it is concluded that although these groups diverge from each other in deciding which body parts should be covered, they have a consensus on the necessity of veiling and the reasons lying behind this practice.

To put in nutshell, the opinions of the PRA experts are unanimous in terms of veiling since all of them consider ‘veiling’ as an obligatory practice for Muslim women. Although they show various reasons as the source of veiling such as protecting women in society and the privacy/household of the Prophet, they agree on its necessity. Another dispute among scholars is related to the parts of the body which has to be covered since the word ‘hijab’ does not exactly specify and various approaches have emerged throughout history. In comparison to the arguments of Islamic feminists, it can be seen that the approaches of the PRA experts to veiling are more restrictive and they do not allow for other possible interpretations of it.

In addition to women in public place, her legal rights such as inheritance, child custody, divorce etc. have utmost importance in the daily lives of Muslim women. I

have only focused on the right to witness in the previous chapter since the scope of this study is limited. As stated beforehand, Islamic feminists concentrated their attention on Surah 2: Al-Baqarah: 282 where the witnessing of two women equals to one man and they propose that there are other possible interpretations of it. For instance; Wadud (1999) claims that this verse only appeals to financial transactions where the women of that period did not have enough experience. As another prominent scholar Badawi (1995) pays attention to Surah 24: Al-Nur: 6-9 as a counter argument where it is advised to have four witnesses if you desire to bring charges against your spouse and there is no gender discrimination in such an important case. According to Islamic feminists, it is possible to produce counter arguments against patriarchal or traditional interpretations pertaining to the undervaluation of female witnesses.

In comparison to other headings categorized and analyzed in this study, it is seen that the issue of witnessing has been given less place or discussed less than others. In some books written by individual scholars or experts, the legal right of women to witness and how it should be evaluated when compared to the witness of men are briefly mentioned. For example; Servet Armağan (2011) in his book *‘İslam Hukukunda Temel Hak ve Hürriyetler’* (Fundamental Rights and Freedoms in Islamic Law) comments on this issue and argues that the witness of two women is equivalent of the witness of one man in Islam. According to him, the reason for this differentiation comes from the tendency of women to forget which is stated in Surah 2: Al-Baqarah: 282. Through this comment, he perpetuates the stereotype which views women as mentally weak and incapable of having a good memory which puts another brick on the wall for the degradation of women in the society.

Unlike the opinions given in the publications stated above, in Diyanet Catechism (İlmihal), there is a different perspective on witnessing. It informs that High Council of Religious Affairs expressed their opinion on the issue of witnessing on 17.10.2002 which agrees that the witness of a woman is equal to the witness of a man in weddings. Furthermore, it is added that the difference with regard to female and male witness may be valid only in financial transactions since women were not experienced in this field during that period. Therefore, this verse does not limit or underestimate the capacity of women, rather it aims to provide complete justice in all cases. Again, it seems clear that the publications of the PRA do not have a uniform

gender discourse and some of the opinions expressed completely contradict each other.

As for the mental capacity of women to witness, Aliye Çınar in March, 2008 of *Diyanet Monthly* suggests that the verse pertaining to witnessing should be revised and reinterpreted in accordance within the context of the modern world. For her, the reason for the different treatment in terms of witnessing is related to the specific conditions of that period in which most of women were inexperienced and did not have a chance to get to know financial transactions or trade. However, she entails that the women of the modern world are quite capable of making just decisions and transferring what they have seen. Thus, the conditions stated in the verse should not be generalized, but should be viewed in its specific context.

With these examples, it is shown that the interpretation of female witnessing causes dispute among scholars since some of them consider it as an equivalent of male witnessing whereas some others don't. As a source of their argument, most scholars cite Surah:2 Al-Baqarah: 282 and focus on the word 'err'. For these scholars, the potential of women to err or make a mistake mentioned in the verse legitimizes the belief that the witness of two women is equal to one man's. Actually, this interpretation paves the way for the degradation of women's mental capacity and capabilities in general. This is fiercely denied by Islamic feminists who restrict the potential of women to make a mistake with the financial transactions in which Muslim women were not experienced enough during the period of revelation. Therefore, they argue against its generalization and remind us that women and men are equal counterparts of each other in creation having the same capacity and capabilities (Barlas, 2002 & Wadud, 1999).

Looking through these examples, it appears that the publications of the PRA find a middle course by not making comments that may resent both women and fundamentalists. Another distinguishing characteristic of these publications is that they lack of clarity in some aspects since they do not go into a deeper analysis of the key terms. Therefore, it becomes more difficult for readers to have a grasp of its discourse as a whole since some scholars disagree with each other in some prominent matters such as creation, gender equality or working women.

Last but not least, some of the arguments put forward in these publications need to be revised in line with the newly occurred needs in the modern world in order to realize the universal message of the Qur'an and to provide solutions to the current problems of Muslim women. Since the circumstances have changed with the onset of the modern world, women have begun to participate in the public sphere more which brought up many questions and problems. The issue of working women and the head of the family can be shown among these contemporary problems.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Islamic feminism has been placed at the core of this study since it has been playing a crucial role in the social and political lives of Muslim women in various countries of Islamic geography stretching from North Africa to South Asia. Although Islamic feminism as a social movement has been active just for about 30 years, it is evident that challenges and new interpretations brought up by Islamic feminists gave yield to a number of legal changes and improvements in social life. The change of family law in Morocco and the foundation of women organizations by women in many countries to attain their social and political rights can be given as examples for these improvements. Besides, it should be added that Islamic feminism is not limited with the Islamic geography since there are many Muslim scholars who live in Western countries and conduct their studies there. Last but not least, this women's movement has attracted the attention of Western scholars such as Margot Badran who are quite interested in the movement and its indications in society.

Islamic feminism has not been so popular in Turkey so far because of commonly shared concerns by female scholars and women in society. Since the word 'feminism' has mostly negative connotations in Turkish culture and conservative groups are hesitant to identify themselves as feminists, it is difficult for Turkish Muslim women to affiliate themselves with Islamic feminism. On the other hand, I think it is a theoretical framework that Turkish society will need more and more in the following years. Up to now, there have been only a few scholars such as Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal and Feyza Akınerdem who have produced works and discussions on Islamic feminism. However, I believe that a sound religious theoretical base in gender issues is deeply needed in Turkey in order to answer and meet the needs of Turkish Muslim women who have increasingly become the focus of discussions with the increasing effect of Islamism in the country.

It is seen that male scholars have put forward many claims about women by referring to Islam and the Qur'an. In the recent years, some their opinions on the motherhood, morality and gender equality of women were discussed in the media as depicting women as unchaste or inferior person. While they criticize women, they mostly refer to Islamic texts such as Qur'anic verses and hadiths in order to base their arguments on solid ground. Since this kind of opinions and suggestions on women are increasing each day, I believe there is a crucial need for a religious framework that can both provide egalitarian explanations and show us the value attached to women in the Qur'an.

Departing from the theoretical framework of Islamic feminism, this dissertation has attempted to provide the discourse analysis of the publications of the Presidency of Religious Affairs concerning gender and the women question in comparison with the views of Muslim feminists. By doing this, it was aimed to trace the reflections of Islamic feminism in the arguments of one of the most powerful religious institutions of Turkey, namely the PRA. The publications of the PRA including popular periodicals, books and writings are at the core of this study since the PRA has reached a wide spectrum in Turkey and it is one of the most predominant institutions that hold power in creating religious and social norms related to gender. Bearing this in mind, the popular periodicals of the PRA, books written by individual scholars among their publications and sermons prepared by experts have been analyzed in conjunction with the arguments of Islamic feminists.

With examinations of these publications, this study aimed to find out the similarities and differences between the views of Islamic feminists and of the PRA experts. However, it was also kept in mind that the opinions given in the publications may only reflect the individualistic perspective of that expert rather than the whole institution throughout the study. On the other hand, it should be noted that the publications included in this study have some authority in shaping and influencing religious people.

In their discussions and works, Islamic feminists have tackled with various issues so far. However, it is observed that they have concentrated their attention on some major problems or issues which can be categorized as creation, gender equality, marriage and family, public place and legal rights. Therefore the arguments of

Islamic feminists and the analysis of the PRA publications have been organized under these headings in this study. Although each heading consists of a variety of issues to be discussed, the number of subheadings was limited since it is beyond the scope of this study to deal with each issue at long length.

Having analyzed these publications, it was seen that the discourse of Islamic feminism and the PRA share some similarities and differences. Therefore, it is not possible to draw a general conclusion that appeals to all subcategories of this study. For instance, some uniformity was detected between the ideas of Islamic feminists and the PRA experts or authors regarding the concepts of *taqwa*, *sukūn* and wife-beating. Like Islamic feminists, they also agree upon the fact that '*taqwa*' which means 'piety' or 'consciousness of Allah' is the only criterion to make a distinction between human beings. While explaining this concept, the PRA authors do not make any differentiation based on gender, but emphasize that the only way to distinguish people from one another is looking at their level of piety and their deeds in this world. Therefore, they ensure that the differentiation between human beings does not originate from their gender, but faith. This description of *taqwa* and gender equality seems quite compatible with the arguments of Islamic feminists given before.

Another similarity between the discourse of Islamic feminists and the PRA experts pertain to the concept of '*sukūn*' which was used in Surah 30: Ar-Rum: 21 meaning peace or tranquility. This word was shown as a token of ideal marriage in Islam which is based on mutual love, respect and understanding. Since God created women and men so that they can find tranquility in each other, it is impossible to deduce that God designs a hierarchical relationship between women and men where it is alright for men to degrade and insult women. According to Islamic feminists, wife-beating is therefore against the teachings of Islam. As another strategy, Islamic feminists have given examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad and his attitude towards his wives which should set a model for all Muslims and their marriages (Barlas, 2002).

During the analysis of the publications of the PRA, it was seen that they frequently touch upon ideal marriage and the importance of '*sukūn*' between spouses too since marriage is one of the most significant bonds in society. Like Islamic feminists, they also give examples from the life of the Prophet and how he behaved his wives so as

to show that let alone beating his wives, the Prophet had never uttered a word that hurt his spouses and he showed utmost compassion to his household. Thus, it appears that the discourse of Islamic feminists and the PRA experts have some common points such as condemning wife-beating, explaining the origins of the related verses, describing Islamic ideal marriage, citing authentic hadiths against wife-beating and giving examples from the Prophet's life to show his kindness towards his household.

Therefore, it is possible to claim that the PRA publications and Islamic feminists share some common ideas in terms of violence against women. However, it is also seen that the PRA experts and authors refrain from analyzing the critical words and verses. It seems that they avoid this kind of discussion in order not to have any conflict with the traditional interpretations that were widespread in society. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that they provide egalitarian arguments and answer on gender issues, but also abstain from highlighting the origins of their use.

On other hand, some differences were observed between the discourse of the PRA publications and Islamic feminists concerning the position of women in creation, the issue of working women, and the practice of veiling in Islam. Therefore, although some arguments seem to be compatible with each other at face value, the deeper analysis of the publications showed that most of them differ from each other in a broad sense.

Through the analysis of the publications of the PRA, it is observed that the scholars of the PRA do not go into a deeper analysis on the term '*nafs*' unlike Islamic feminists. However, most of them agree on the fact that Eve was created from the same material as Adam rather than his ribs. By denying this, they appear to reveal that women and men are equal counterparts in creation, therefore it is the patriarchal interpretations that distort the origin of the verse leading to the degradation of women, not the Qur'an.

However, there are some experts who give place to the story of creation in the Old and New Testament which narrates that Eve was created from the rib of Adam in order to please and tranquilize Adam in Paradise. Although the PRA experts do not completely acknowledge the creation story narrated in Genesis part of the Old and New Testament, they tend to consider it as historical information and agree to benefit from it since the Qur'an does not clearly describe how creation took place, in their

opinion. That tendency befits into the counter arguments of Islamic feminists who blame traditions and assumptions rooted in Christianity and Judaism for the degradation of women in Islam (Hassan, 1999).

Another difference between the arguments of Islamic feminists and the PRA experts is related to the issue of working women. In order to explore this issue further, Islamic feminists revisit Surah 4: An-Nisa: 34 where it is stated that men are '*qawwamun*' of women which was translated as 'breadwinners' by Islamic feminists. This verse has always been interpreted as a source for assigning the man as the head of the family and forbid women from working outside their home. But, the rest of the verse specifies the situation where men have to financially support their wives and it involves the case of pregnancy. With this interpretation, it seems obvious that Islam obligates men to protect and support their wives in case of their pregnancy. By doing this, the Qur'an aims to create an ideal division of labor and free women from financial burdens in such a difficult period (Hassan, 1999; Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002).

Unlike Islamic feminists, the PRA experts and authors tend to use the mainstream interpretation of the word which directly assigns man as the head of family and obligates man to be financial provider of his family. Most PRA scholars do not have any doubt on the superiority of man in family. Although some scholars such as Hamidullah (2015) and Armağan (2011) name this situation as responsibility of man rather than his superiority, they do not refrain from accepting the idea that it is not possible for women and men to be equal. It was also observed that they took the different nature of women and men granted and use it as an excuse for the exclusion of women from public realm and other many things. Since they believe that women and men have different dispositions coming from birth, they cannot be equal counterparts of each other.

Accordingly, it was found that some scholars took this as a basis for the unprivileged Muslim women in Islamic law since they believed that it is natural for men to have more legal rights as they have more responsibility within their families. This example reveals that the PRA experts pay attention to gender equality but still partially stick to patriarchal interpretations or mainstream beliefs.

As stated above, Islamic feminists have reached a consensus on the issue of working women and believe that the Qur'an does not prohibit it. However, it should also be noted that the arguments of Islamic feminists remain limited in that matter since they do not provide us a detailed discussion on how the related verse on division of labor should be revised in accordance with the circumstances of the contemporary world in order to meet the needs of Muslim women. Although the publications of the PRA seem to support working women, especially in popular periodicals, some inconsistencies were detected in a deeper analysis. On one hand, it is true that the PRA periodicals put a great emphasis on influential Muslim women who have been active and played a significant role in Islamic history in order to prove that women were part of the public realm since the period of the Prophet Muhammad. On the other hand, these writings only deal with Muslim women who were influential in disseminating religious knowledge and authentic hadiths rather than women having a high position or trading in the society. In addition, some PRA experts restrict the positions for working women which can be regarded as another example of such differences.

As for veiling, it was explained that Islamic feminists did not reach a consensus on its obligatory nature. Although most Islamic feminists agree on that the Qur'an ordains women to veil themselves by listing various reasons, some Islamic feminists propose that veiling is not an obligatory duty for Muslim women. On the other side, it was seen that the discourse of PRA publications on veiling is unanimous. Unlike Islamic feminists, the opinions of the PRA experts do not diverge from each other. They all agree on the fact that the Qur'an ordains veiling as an obligatory practice for Muslim women. The only difference among the claims of the PRA experts is related to the body parts that need to be covered since some Islamic legal schools claim that Muslim women should cover their hands and faces too whereas some others are in favor of covering just their necks and bosoms.

The PRA experts and authors list various reasons for the necessity of veiling in order to provide an insight into the discussion. First reason is that women and men are attracted to each other therefore the borders between them should be determined. Second reason for veiling is related to the women's natural desire to reveal their charm which views the body of women as attractive or seductive. Another reason for the necessity of veiling is to protect women from the evil deeds of men who were

capable of attacking and abusing women without being legally liable or punished during that period. Looking through these reasons, it is clear that the PRA publications offer diverse reasons for the necessity of veiling and agree on that it is needed for the protection of women from the gaze and attacks of men in society and for the creation of balance in sexual relationships between women and men.

In the light of these examples, it is concluded that the arguments of Islamic feminists and the PRA experts concerning the creation of woman, the issue of working women and the practice of veiling seem to contradict each other. Although the PRA publications appear to be in favor of gender equality and emancipating Muslim women, they do not refrain from making use of pre-Islamic religious sources. Furthermore, they limit the possibility of working women with certain positions and jobs rather than fully emancipating Muslim women. Lastly, they do not give a second thought about the necessity of veiling whereas some Islamic feminists question the obligatory nature of veiling in Islam. With these examples, it appears that although they seem to put a great emphasis on equality and give place to hotly debated topics by feminists and reformists in society. They also avoid clear-cut statements that highly diverge from the mainstream interpretations put forward a long time ago. Here, another factor that should be kept in mind is the strategy of the PRA in choosing the books to be published. It can be said that they tend to publish the books written by conservative scholars such as Muhammed Hamidullah. Although his book was written in 1961 and therefore it may lack of contemporary discussions, the PRA reprinted it in 2015. This may stem from the fact that Hamidullah was known and had more traditional interpretations than other scholars.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that Islamic feminists and the PRA experts do not deal with each critical issue in the same way. While some issues such as creation, gender equality, marriage and divorce come to the fore and are discussed in details, some of them such as the rights of women to inherit, witness and work outside are overshadowed with the hot topics mentioned above. This may stem from the daily experiences of Islamic feminists who face more problems in one sphere than others and thus they concentrate their attention on specific topics. Therefore, both Islamic feminists and PRA experts need to broaden the variety of topics to be explored and discussed in their works and publications. However, I believe that some controversial issues such as working women, divorce rights,

inheritance rights or wife-beating should be discussed in more details in the publications of the PRA and Islamic feminists.

In addition to this, it was observed that some issues could be revisited and reinterpreted in accordance with the new circumstances in social and economic life emerging in the modern world. For instance; Islamic feminists deal with the term '*qawwamun*' and interpret it as the 'breadwinners' of the family. While they argue that this verse does not assign man as the head of family directly and prohibit women from working outside, they do not suggest any new interpretation that helps us to contextualize this verse in the modern world and to understand the changing position of women in family and social life.

In the analysis of the publications of the PRA, it was also found out that they refrained from revisiting the origins of the critical terms in mentioned verses and clarifying the meanings of them with their implications. It was seen that the discussions on the indications of the words such as '*nafs*', '*qawwamun*', '*daraba*', '*darajah*' and '*jilbab*' were avoided in the explanations of the PRA experts. It fortifies that to some extent, they support gender equality and some other innovative ideas but refrain from further analysis to avoid reactions from traditionalists.

It seems that Islamic feminists reject the generalization of the superiority of men over women into all spheres of life and show the pregnancy of women as the main source for this degree of men mentioned in the verse. But, they also acknowledge that men have advantage over women in case of a divorce since they do not have to state a reason for divorcing their wives unlike Muslim women. However, in this study, it was seen that the PRA experts do not touch upon the significance of this word although it is of utmost importance to be able to understand the position of women in divorce. To put in nutshell, it was shown with these examples that the PRA experts support gender equality in many terms which seem to befit the arguments of Islamic feminists. However, they avoid revisiting the origins of the critical terms in their explanations.

Last but not least, one of the major findings of this study was that the gender discourse of the PRA publications is not uniform and some of the opinions expressed by experts are in disagreement. The position of women in creation, gender equality and the issue of working women can be given as examples for this difference. For

instance; the authors of the PRA publications provide contradictory discussions related to the issue of working women. In this respect, most of them attempt to show examples of Muslim women who were active in public sphere during the first years of Islam. By giving place to their works and achievements, the PRA publications aim to prove that Muslim women should not be restricted to the private sphere, namely their homes.

With regard to working women, the PRA publications seem to support them, however they also emphasize how difficult a working woman's life is by claiming that the primary job of a woman is to take care of children. Another point is that a great number of experts provide explanations in favor of working women whereas some others explicitly state that women should not work in high positions such as judge or governors. Therefore, it is possible to deduce that the discourse of the PRA publications is varied as it does not fully express support or condemn working.

This dissertation explored the relationship between the discourse of the Presidency of Religious Affairs which is one of the most predominant institutions in religious matters in Turkey and Islamic feminists which are a group of Muslim women who challenged the patriarchal way of thinking in Islam that degrades and restricts millions of Muslim women through their works and reinterpretations.

The study contributed to the studies of women and gender in Turkey where religion is one of the most powerful realms that lead and shape the lives of citizens. It also opened up an alternative perspective within feminist studies since it explored the theoretical framework of Islamic feminists which came to the fore as a new and challenging group against Western and secular feminist waves. In addition, it contributed to the revision of traditional interpretations and mainstream beliefs related to the gender discourse of the Qur'an through a female perspective. Furthermore, this study may contribute to improving the lives of Muslim women in various ways since it focuses on a set of critical terms and issues by referring to the religious framework and providing egalitarian discussions. By this means, women who are bombarded and limited with patriarchal claims can be emancipated through a framework that is both Islamic and feminist.

Another contribution of this study is to shed light on the gender discourse of the PRA by analyzing its publications in terms of ontological and practical issues questioned

by Islamic feminists. It also revealed the gender discourse of the PRA put forward through its journals and books which consist of different opinions. Since any research on the gender discourse of the PRA has not been reached before this study, it appears that this study can open up a space for further studies on their discourse.

Although this study dealt with various critical issues that have an impact on the lives of Muslim women, including creation, gender equality, marriage, family, public life and legal rights, the discussions remain limited with some of the critical subheadings. Due to the limited scope, there are a number of issues under each heading that are in need of further research and discussion. For further studies, it is suggested that prospective researchers may make use of other methods such as interviewing the experts of the PRA, analyzing the PRA fatwas and sermons as well as their educational and scholarly policies. Researchers may also work on Islamic feminists in Turkey by interviewing them and discover their ideas to put forward differences with further analysis in comparison with the discourse of the PRA on gender issues.

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ARTICLES

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