

CONSTRUCTION OF WOMANHOOD THROUGH *FİTRAT*, THE CASE OF  
FEMALE PREACHERS IN TURKEY

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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## ABSTRACT

### CONSTRUCTION OF WOMANHOOD THROUGH *FİTRAT*, THE CASE OF FEMALE PREACHERS IN TURKEY

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This thesis aims to analyze how womanhood has been constructed with the concept of *fitrat* through the professional activities of female preachers who work at *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*. The main objective of the study is to examine the policy of increasing employment of women and activities for them at the institution since 2004. A specific focus is given to the transformation of the institution under the rule of the AKP government, especially by 2010, since its duties and responsibilities were expanded to include women, family, and disadvantaged groups. Meanwhile, AKP favored a more dominant position in politics for the instrumentalization of various state institutions. Since the first public declaration of R.T. Erdoğan about his disbelief in gender equality in 2010, together with a particular Islamic reference to the concept of *fitrat*, the gender policies and discourses of AKP have been increasingly framed within the scope of this concept. The concept of *fitrat* has been mobilized together with the conceptualization of gender justice for challenging gender equality. The works of female preachers, especially in the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus connected to *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, have been redesigned to disseminate the gender ideology of the AKP government. To understand the construction of proper womanhood within and through

the profession, in-depth interviews were conducted with thirteen women who work at *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*. The life narratives of women are analyzed in terms of their perspectives on the concept of *fitrat*, gender justice, and women's employment concerning women's roles and responsibilities.

**Keywords:** AKP, Directorate of Religious Affairs, Fitrat, Gender Justice, Female Preachers

## ÖZ

### *FİTRAT* KAVRAMI ÜZERİNDEN KURGULANAN KADINLIK, TÜRKİYE’DE KADIN VAİZLER ÖRNEĞİ

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Yüksek Lisans, Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Kadın Çalışmaları Bölümü

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Bu tez, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nda çalışan kadın vaizlerin mesleki faaliyetleri aracılığıyla yayılan fitrat kavramı ile kadınlığın nasıl inşa edildiğini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın temel bağlamını, 2004 yılından bu yana kurumda kadınların istihdamının ve kadınlara yönelik faaliyetlerin arttırılması politikası oluşturmaktadır. Kurumun, 2010 yılı itibari ile AKP hükümeti tarafından kadınlar, aile ve dezavantajlı grupları kapsayacak şekilde dönüştürülen görev ve sorumluluklarına özellikle odaklanılmaktadır. Bu arada, AKP politik gücünün artması ile geldiği baskın politik pozisyonu aracılığıyla çeşitli devlet kurumlarını araçsallaştırmıştır. R.T. Erdoğan'ın 2010 yılında kadın-erkek eşitliğine inanmadığını kamuya ilan etmesi sonrası, AKP'nin toplumsal cinsiyet politikaları ve söylemleri belirginleşen bir şekilde fitrat kavramı üzerinden tanımlanmıştır. Fıtrat kavramı ile beraber, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine meydan okumak için cinsiyet adaleti kavramı da seferber edilmiştir. Özellikle Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'na bağlı Aile ve Dini Rehberlik Bürolarındaki kadın vaizlerin çalışmaları, AKP hükümetinin toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojisini yaymak üzere yeniden tasarlanmıştır. Mesleğin içinde ve meslek üzerinden oluşturulan uygun kadınlığın inşasını anlamak üzere Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nda çalışan on üç kadınla



derinlemesine görüşmeler yapıldı. Kadınların yaşam öyküleri; temelde fitrat kavramı, toplumsal cinsiyet adaleti kavramsallaştırması ve kadınların rol ve sorumluluklarının kadın istihdamı ile ilişkisi açılarından analiz edilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** AKP, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Fıtrat, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Adaleti, Kadın Vaizler

*To all women who contributed to this study*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM.....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
ÖZ .....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	xi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	xv
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1. Research Question.....	1
1.2. Background of the Study .....	5
1.3. Outline of the Study .....	16
2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	19
2.1. Introduction.....	19
2.2. Gender Regime through <i>Fıtrat</i> .....	20
2.3. Gender Equality vis-a-vis <i>Fıtrat</i> : Gender Justice .....	33
2.4. Professionalization of Veiled Women.....	41
2.5. Conclusion .....	49
3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN .....	52
3.1. Methodology.....	52
3.2. Field and the Data Collection .....	57
3.2.1. Sampling .....	61
3.2.2. The profile of the interviewers .....	62
3.3. Conclusion .....	68
4. INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND OF <i>DIYANET İŞLERİ BAŞKANLIĞI</i> .....	70
4.1. Introduction.....	70
4.2. Historical Transformation of <i>Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı</i> .....	71

4.3. Transformation of <i>Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı</i> under the rule of the AKP rule .	80
4.4. <i>Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı</i> and Women .....	83
4.4.1. Employment of Women in <i>Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı</i> .....	89
4.4.2. Family Counselling and Religious Guidance Offices .....	94
4.5. Conclusion.....	98
5. WOMEN PREACHERS: A PROFESSION AND A REFLECTION OF	
<i>FİTRAT</i> .....	102
5.1. Introduction .....	102
5.2. The Conceptualization of <i>Fıtrat</i> .....	103
5.3. The conceptualization of Gender Justice through the Concept of <i>Fıtrat</i> .....	108
5.4. Women's Employment in <i>Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı</i> as Female Preachers...	112
5.4.1. Education .....	112
5.4.2. Reorganization of <i>Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı</i> .....	118
5.4.3. Perspectives on Women's Employment at <i>Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı</i> ...	122
5.4.4. Perspectives on the Profession of Female Preachers .....	128
5.5. Female Preachers' Perspectives on Family-Work Balance.....	132
5.5.1. Preachers' Perspectives on Women's Employment in Terms of	
Women's Responsibilities.....	133
5.5.2. Family-Work Balance of Preachers .....	136
5.6. Conclusion.....	138
6. CONCLUSION .....	140
REFERENCES.....	150
APPENDICES	
A. APPROVAL OF METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE .....	160
B. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/ DERİNLEMESİNE	
MÜLAKAT SORULARI.....	161
C. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF <i>DIYANET İŞLERİ BAŞKANLIĞI</i> .....	163
C. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF <i>DIYANET İŞLERİ</i>	
<i>BAŞKANLIĞI</i> , CONTINUED .....	164
D. TURKISH SUMMARY/ TÜRKÇE ÖZET .....	165
E. TEZ İZİN FORMU / THESIS PERMISSION FORM.....	180

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. The Profile of the Sample .....	64
Table 2. The Numbers of Employment at DİB by Gender .....	90

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Number of preachers at DİB by Gender. ....	93
Figure 2. The percentage of female students at İHL. ....	114
Figure 3. The new registries of Faculty Theologies by gender over the years. ....	115
Figure 4. Students at universities by gender over the years.....	116
Figure 5. The percentage of the students in Faculty Theologies to all students at universities. ....	116



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AKP</b>	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi
<b>ADRB</b>	Aile ve Dini Rehberlik Bürosu
<b>ASAGEM</b>	Aile ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Genel Müdürlüğü
<b>ASPB</b>	Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı
<b>DİB</b>	Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı
<b>KADEM</b>	Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği
<b>KSGM</b>	Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Research Question

This thesis is inspired by the women's employment in the Directorate of Religious Affairs in the last two decades under the government of Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, hereafter AKP). Women were increasingly employed, and the activities and projects targeting women increased in number and expanded in this period. Besides the oldest employment position for women as Qur'an course instructor, the new types of cadres have allocated, and their numbers in the already existing areas have also increased dramatically in the last two decades. However, this thesis aims to discuss the women's employment as female preachers who graduated from the Faculties of Theologies and were employed at the official ranks of Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, hereafter DİB). It is a recreated profession, which is hierarchically higher than the Qur'an course instructor, with its expanded sphere of influence and working areas, alongside with its recently defined role of providing counseling on familial and religious issues for women. Even though it is known that women have existed in the ranks of DİB as preachers before, their numbers have dramatically increased, and their working areas have expanded and redefined under the rule of the AKP government. In line with the government's conservative gender policies, in which the "naturalized" gender roles with Islamic references to the concept of *fıtrat* hold a specific place, the gender regime of the profession of preaching has been redesigned, and constructed as an exemplary profession for women, with high social status, and with its newly-created missions.

Women's inclusion in the public spaces of religion as female preachers and their increasing official religious authority in Turkey are discussed in the literature by

scholars (Hassan, 2009, 2011; Tütüncü, 2010; Maritato, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). It is mostly discussed in terms of the intricate relations of the state, society, and religion. In that regard, Hassan's study (2011) focuses on the encounters of female preachers in İstanbul with different groups of Muslims, with a brief discussion of the complex relations structured by the dichotomy between the secularists/Kemalists and the religious groups in the history of modern Turkey (Hassan, 2009, 2011). Hassan (2011) concludes that preachers navigate these processes of encounters with their intellectual capacity and institutional authority. Chiara Maritato analyzes the female preachers' activities from a different angle through contextualizing it with a debate concerning religion and state, and the state's control over female religiosity (Maritato, 2015, 2016, 2017a). She would not agree with Hassan's emphasis on the preachers' religious authority (Hassan, 2011) when Maritato argues that preachers do not challenge the male domination from a feminist perspective; however, their increasing employment and activities raise questions regarding the religious authority and its structures (Maritato, 2017a, 2017b). Lastly, Fatma Tütüncü (2010), who provides a more elaborate study, locates preachers' activities into a position between Islamist religiosity and the sovereignty of the secular state through analyzing the experiences of preachers in Eastern and South-Eastern Anatolian Regions. She argues that DİB plays a political role in enhancing the national territory with the correct understanding of Islam through the activities of preachers. Therefore, she indicates that the old traditional activity of preaching, depending on the context, turns into a political practice concerning gender, ethnicity, and different religiosities in today's Turkey (Tütüncü, 2010).

However, this thesis, with a perspective of gender and women's studies, aims to analyze the gender regime of the profession of preaching, which is shaped through the conceptualization of *fitrat*. The etymological root of *fitrat* is derived from *fatr*, which means creation, certain ability, and predisposition to be used (Hökehenli, 1996). Therefore, drawing upon the discussions of *ulema* of different times on the interpretation of the only one verse in Qur'an and the various hadiths, the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, that the word *fitrat* is used in, Hökehenli defines the meaning of

it as the essence that all human-beings had through the creation (Hökehenli, 1996). Ayşe Sucu also explains the concept of *fitrat* as the intuition or the capability of human beings that enables them to differentiate between true and false, and to sense the oneness and greatness of his/her creator (Sucu, 2009: 10). Therefore, the concept of *fitrat*, in the original sources of Islamic texts interpreted by the theologians of DİB, has been defined as a spiritual characteristic common in all human beings, enabling them to comprehend the truth. However, in today's world, "truth" is conceptualized as a tool of justification of the power. Therefore, today, both the meaning of *fitrat* and the truth that could be comprehensible through *fitrat*, turn into a verification tool of the ordinary actions of the of the power.

In contemporary Turkey, the concept of *fitrat* which is used in the discourses of AKP denotes the definition of the roles of women and men according to the "natural essences" dependent upon the "natural" and "spiritual" differences of the two sexes<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, through this signification of *fitrat*, in the conservative political discourses of firstly the AKP, and then following government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs)— particularly the Women and Democracy Association (*Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği*, hereafter KADEM)— *fitrat* began to be called to define the women's domestic responsibilities, particularly motherhood, and the family as the primary locus of women. Depending on the concept of *fitrat*, AKP's understanding of what women and men can do shows itself in one of its sociopolitical discourses where prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan shared for the first time his disbelief in the equality between women and men in a meeting with feminist organizations in 2010. Thus, Kandiyoti aptly discusses that policing gender norms and conservative family values constitute the central aspects of the AKP's politics (Kandiyoti, 2016).

Accordingly, the conceptualization of "gender justice," which draws upon the conceptualization of *fitrat*, is mobilized against gender equality in the recent political and social atmosphere of Turkey. In that regard, KADEM is a significant organization

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<sup>1</sup> For the example of this signification, please see Yılmaz, S. A. (2015a).

that was founded in 2013 under the leadership of Sümeyye Erdoğan, who is the daughter of current President R. T. Erdoğan. It is a women's organization which carries out projects on women's empowerment with a conservative tone through mobilizing the concept of "*fitrat*," and the "gender justice." In the articles of Sare Aydın Yılmaz (2015a, 2015b), the President of the KADEM, "gender justice" is defined as a new momentum in the women's movement, that takes into account the differences between two sexes, through glorifying women's capabilities and domestic responsibilities, of especially motherhood. Through the biological and "spiritual" differences between men and women, there is a promotion of a system of "gender justice," with references to the criticisms of the liberal feminist theory, which unifies and universalizes the category of women (S.A. Yılmaz, 2015b).

Moreover, despite its conservative approach to the women's issues with specific references to the sanctity of the family and motherhood, recently, the organization became a target of attack by some men of the conservative community. This started when Yusuf Kaplan, a columnist of Yeni Şafak newspaper, accused Ministry of National Education and Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services, and KADEM, of dissolving the family<sup>2</sup>. This led to a discussion in the social media regarding women's rights and İstanbul Convention, in which KADEM assigned to monitoring its implementation.

The tension created between "gender justice" and "gender equality" is one significant aspect of the gender regime of the preaching profession for women. Currently, female preachers are disseminating an understanding of women's roles defined in terms of a particular Islamic interpretation of *fitrat* both through their discourses and their professional activities. That takes place both in the social institutions, in which the

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2 After Yusuf Kaplan accused KADEM of dissolving the family institution from his twitter account, some people from the conservative circles supported him, but some others including Sibel Eraslan criticized him and supported KADEM ("Sosyal medyadaki KADEM tartışması büyüyor: Aile yapısına ters mi, değil mi? (The KADEM debate on social media is growing: Is it contrary to family structure or not?)," 2019). In the social media it was discussed whether KADEM's projects and policies are against the Turkish family structure or not. The accusations were also extended to the İstanbul Convention in which KADEM is assigned to its monitoring ("Conservatives Campaign Against İstanbul Convention, Push AKP for Withdrawal," 2019).

female preachers have regular visits, and in the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus, in which they regularly keep watches to answer the questions coming to these bureaus. Therefore, this study aims to discuss the place of *fitrat* in women's processes of becoming a preacher, their perspective on the gender roles, and gender equality, and their statuses defined within and through the preaching profession at DİB.

Therefore, the main aim of the study is to discuss the construction of proper womanhood with an understanding of *fitrat* through the professional activities of female preachers in the ranks of DİB. It will be discussed by analyzing the life narratives of female preachers on their activities in the spaces enabled by the institutional developments that took place under the rule of the AKP government with the increase of both the employment of women and the activities for them at DİB. The specificities of the profession of preaching are analyzed in terms of the construction of the proper womanhood that is justified through the roles imagined according to the concept of *fitrat*. Thus, the recreation of preaching as a profession with high social status is a significant social and political development in the recent history of Turkey. It reflects the gender regime which is constructed according to the conceptualization of *fitrat* that shapes the understandings of proper womanhood and women's roles in contemporary Turkey.

## **1.2. Background of the Study**

For the analysis of the gender regime of the preaching profession for women, it is necessary to discuss the AKP's gender policies with an emphasis on the family as the women's primary sphere firstly, that is justified through the discourse on *fitrat*, secondly the institutional transformation of DİB regarding women, particularly the preachers, and lastly the recent developments in the position of preaching for women.

Firstly, it is argued that despite the positive legal developments regarding gender equality since 2002 under the rule of the AKP government, women's rights have never been prioritized by the AKP (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011), and it turned into "religio-

conservative gender climate” since the AKP’s second term in 2007 (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017). These positive legal transformations can be considered as the reform in the Penal Code (2004), the amendments on the law on Municipalities (2005), the general notice about the elimination of violence against women and honor-killings (2006), and formation of the Parliamentary Commission for the Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men (2009). However, scholars were critical about the implementation of these reforms. For instance, Dedeoğlu argues that gender equality policies exist in the legislation but not in the practice because it is not changing the traditional gender roles and not alleviating the women’s burden of care work, which impacts female employment (Dedeoğlu, 2012). Yeğenoğlu and Coşar argue that despite the gains of the process, which enabled women’s groups to push for gender-sensitive regulations, the family was a recurrent institution and the locus of discussion in the discourses. According to them, women’s locus is defined primarily as the familial sphere and this is justified through the “naturalization” of the women’s roles (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011). They state that “The most recent manifestation of this stance is observed in the Prime Minister’s meeting with some women’s rights organizations concerning the ‘Democratic Opening for the Kurdish Issue’” in 2010 (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011: 566). While answering to the feminist criticisms on the emphasis on the women’s domestic responsibilities, Prime Minister indicated that

Men and women cannot be equal. It's different. I do not believe that men and women are equal. I am in favor of equal opportunity. We are conservative democrats. Our people voted for this. If the people support our policies with their vote, if they want, we will fulfill the requirements of these votes (R.T. Erdoğan cited in Gülbahar, 2010)

According to Kandiyoti, even though the discussion of equality versus difference has a long history in feminist theorization, Erdoğan’s emphasis on the difference is the “Islamic concept of *Fitrat*, a version of the “biology is destiny” argument” (Kandiyoti, 2011a: 10). Since this argument of Erdoğan, in the political discourses of AKP, gender issues are framed according to the concept of *fitrat*, and the proper women’s roles and places are defined accordingly. Moreover, the idea of “gender justice” was mobilized against the women’s movements’ demand on “gender equality.” Simga and Goker argue that the tension between “gender justice” and “gender equality” is the one reason



for the polarization of women in Turkey; that is, currently, the one significant reason for bifurcation in women's movement in Turkey (Simga & Goker, 2017).

Zehra Yılmaz (2013) asserts that Islamic discourses in contemporary Turkey explain the relationship between men and women through “complementarity” rather than equality. The gender relations are constructed with references to the Islamic concepts of “stable,” “balanced,” “balance created by God,” and the roles are attributed to women and men within this framework. The functions of women and men and their associated spaces defined in such a way that they cannot compete with each other (Z. Yılmaz, 2013). This can be observed in the profession of preaching for women, as well, that is, *fitrat* holds an important place in the discourses of preachers. They, as devoted believers of Sunni Islam and preachers of DİB, claim that women and men are not created equals, but they are created as pairs since the beginning of Adam and Eve. Because of that, they are assigned to different responsibilities. Preachers indicate that the primary roles of a woman should be defined in terms of her duties to her family. They provide family guidance services by both answering the questions of individuals and also preparing preaching activities to groups of people about the family, marriage, relations with relatives, divorce, and engagement. They provide Islamic solutions to women who face various problems in the modern world with references to Qur'an and Sunnah<sup>3</sup>.

In line with the conceptualization of *fitrat* and the reproduction of women's domestic responsibilities, various authors mention the increasing emphasis in the discourses, policies, and institutional changes regarding the “protection of the family.” Several scholars assert that there is a trend of convergence in between the dependent status of women, who is positioned in family, that is enforced by familial policies, and neoliberal transformations in welfare and employment regimes (Buğra & Yakut-Çakar, 2010; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011; Dedeoğlu, 2012; Acar & Altunok, 2013; Z. Yılmaz, 2015; Kandiyoti, 2016; Akkan, 2017).

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<sup>3</sup> Sunnah is known in the common knowledge as the sayings and teachings of the prophet Muhammad.

In this regard, in 2011, AKP transformed the state Ministry of Women and the Family to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies<sup>4</sup>. According to Kandiyoti, with the institutional transformations, “discrimination against women was placed alongside the protection of children, the disabled, and the elderly, clearly marking it out as a social welfare issue” (Kandiyoti, 2016: 107). Zafer Yılmaz argues that with the latest regulations, policies on the new social question structured around “family centralism” (Z. Yılmaz, 2015: 380). In the same year with the transformation to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (2011), the cooperation protocol between DİB and this ministry signed, for the aim of protecting familial values, strengthening family, and carrying out social service projects (Mutluer, 2019: 108). Mutluer states that “As such, this protocol reflected the fact that the DİB was charged with promoting a new version of family values based on Islamic, not secular republican motifs of the foundation era” (Mutluer, 2019: 108).

Secondly, parallel to the transformations which are justified by the discourses emphasizing the concept of *fıtrat* and “gender justice” mentioned above, the organization and structure of DİB have been improved, and its activity areas and sphere of influence regarding women have been expanded especially after 2010. Mutluer states that even though the AKP officials were critical of the existence of DİB within the state order when they first came to power in 2002 (Mutluer, 2018), particularly after 2010, it turned into a very significant institution in the modern social and political history of Turkey (Mutluer, 2018; Öztürk, 2016; Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018). On the other hand, various scholars argued that DİB had been utilized as an ideological apparatus of the state before the AKP as well. For example, for Gözaydın, after the 1960 coup d'état, with the addition of the responsibility of “carrying out works related to Islamic morals” (Gözaydın, 2006:4), DİB used by the state as “an administrative tool to propagate official ideology regarding Islam” (Gözaydın, 2008: 221). Moreover, for Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, after 1980 coup d'état, in addition to the responsibility given

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<sup>4</sup> The Family and Social Policies Ministry was established on June 3, 2011 with legislative decree number 633.

by 1982 constitution as propagating the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, DİB's mission is expanded abroad to Turkic countries and the countries with the large Turkish and Muslim immigrant populations (Öztürk 2016: 626). Therefore, Öztürk argues that DİB became a policy tool for Turkish foreign policy in differentiating contexts, that is structured since the 1980s and increased in the AKP period (Öztürk, 2016). Therefore, the additional responsibilities and duties given to DİB in the restructuring of the state organization during coup periods reflect that it is an ideological apparatus of the state.

However, it became a significant institution when gender relations are considered due to its noticeably increasing employment and activities for women, and its sermons, fatwas, and press statements regarding women's issues. These transformations are crucial, especially when DİB's increasing involvement with social and political issues after 2010 (Öztürk 2016) is considered concerning the AKP's increasing conservative tone in both policies and discourses that locates women into the sphere of the family.

Prof. Dr. Bardakoğlu appointed as the president of DİB from 2003 until 2010. In his period, the considerable employment of and activities for women had been increased (Tütüncü, 2010; Mutluer, 2018). The increasing employment of women to the ranks of DİB, particularly for the hierarchically higher positions of the preacher and vice mufti, met with various responses diverging from the "Women revolution at DİB"<sup>5</sup> to the patriarchal oppositions<sup>6</sup> on the issues like whether women can give fatwa or if there

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<sup>5</sup>Some circles approached the issue as a positive development. For instance, it was stated that women make peace with mosques ("Diyanet'in Kadın Vaizler Projesi (Diyanet's Project of Female Preachers)," 2005). In another example, about the assignment of female mufti assistants, it was stated as a major opening in the Islamic world ("İlk kadın din adamı (First Women Cleric)", 2005).

<sup>6</sup>Mehmet Şevket Eygi (2012) writes that "These feminists want to reform, innovate and change religion. They want to falsify our religion. Even M. Kemal did not do that much, did not recruit women to the staff of the *Diyanet*. There is a lot of freedom in our country, and militant and reformist feminists are also free, but they have no place in the Diyanet's cadres." More examples would be found from Eygi (2011a, 2011b). Moreover, in 2016, the speech of female preacher Ayşe Yılmaz was intercepted by Deputy Mayor of the AKP Halil Alireisoğlu who stated that "We do not need the lectures from women," and later he apologized ("Kadından alacağımız eğitime ihtiyacımız yok (We do not need the lecture given by women)", 2016).

is a room for feminism at DİB. Tütüncü (2010) mentions the projects of that period covering issues like gender equality, women's rights, elimination of violence against women through activities, seminars, and the sermons. She also mentions about the astonishment of feminists when Bardakoğlu asked about guidance for preparing a sermon for 8 March in 2004 (Tütüncü, 2010). In the period of Bardakoğlu (2003-2010), DİB turned into a legitimate partner of the government in the campaign on the elimination of violence against women through giving sermons, preparing media documents to increase awareness about the issue. When the DİB's sphere of influence and its large number of staff all over Turkey are considered, this role can be justifiable for creating the agenda about the issue. However, the assignment of providing guidance and counseling services at the centers for women who have been subjected to violence is a particular role when it comes to determining who will provide those services as it was not among the duties of officially employed religious personnel before.

Moreover, after 2010, that women-friendly tone changed into a more traditional conservative perspective on woman issue (Tütüncü, 2010), and the emphasis on the protection of the family has been increased. Scholars indicate that 2010 was a critical turning point for DİB in terms of increasing budget, which is about 1 % of overall state budget, and expansion of sociopolitical activities (Mutluer, 2018; Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018: 7), reconfiguration of structural organization and the departments with the amendments on the related bill (Ozzano & Maritato, 2018), and also transformation of its president (Öztürk, 2016). In that way, both its operations and sphere of influence were expanded; also, the condition of its staff was improved. In 2011 the Department of Family and Religious Guidance was established at the central organization of DİB (See Appendix C) to be responsible for the issues regarding family and the coordination of the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus connected to the provincial organization (DİB, 2017: 19). The scope of the institution has been expanded, especially for women, children, and families. With the new regulation and

the amendments made<sup>7</sup>, DİB was given the duty of providing enlightenment and guidance activities on religious matters for the family, women, youth, and other segments of society. To fulfill this duty, DİB established Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus<sup>8</sup> (*Aile ve Dini Rehberlik Büroları*, hereafter ADRB). Female preachers are assigned to keep watch in these offices at least one day of a week to answer the questions coming to these offices. In that regard, women's primary responsibility has been emphasized as the domestic responsibilities in line with her *fitrat* within the familial sphere.

All these transformations are significant in terms of the definition of the professional activities of female preachers and the gender regime of the profession which is defined in terms of the concept of *fitrat*. Women were employed as preachers in minimal numbers; numerically, it was 34 (5 percent of all tenured preachers) in 1991, 31 in 2001, and 76 in 2003. However, the number, and also the percentage of female preachers started to increase after the opening of the tenured preacher position for 100 (nearly one-fifth of all tenured preachers in *Diyanet*) women at one time, by the new administration of DİB in 2004 (Hassan, 2011; Tütüncü, 2010). Therefore, 2004 was a critical point due to the opening of a 100 tenured preacher position for women at once. It also follows the appointment of Prof. Dr. Bardakoğlu as the president of DİB; that is, both the employment and activities targeting women increased dramatically. Moreover, it is also significant because it was two years before that the law on the forgiveness of specific disciplinary punishments<sup>9</sup> of civil servants and other public duties was pardoned (Cindoğlu, 2010).

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<sup>7</sup> Amendment made at the Article 7 of the Law no 6002 on Establishment and Duties of *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*.

<sup>8</sup> In 2003, those offices were named as Family Offices (*Aile Büroları*), then in 2007 their name changed to Family Counselling and Guidance Offices (*Aile İrşat ve Rehberlik Bürosu*). After, "*İrşat*" was also removed and the name changed to Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus (*Aile ve Dini Rehberlik Bürosu*).

<sup>9</sup> *T.C. Resmi Gazete* (5525, 04 July 2006).

As Cindoğlu indicates, according to the report of *AK-DER* in the period of 1998-2002, 5000 veiled women were dismissed because they did not comply with the dress code, and nearly 10,000 of them were forced to resign (Cindoğlu, 2010: 35). Thus, women who dismissed because they continued to wear the veil until 2005 were able to return to their jobs. However, as Cindoğlu argues, as long a civil servant who returns to the public office continues to wear the veil, they will receive similar investigations and registry penalties, and after a while, they will be dismissed from their jobs (Cindoğlu, 2010). In this case, DİB became a significant institution for the employment of veiled women who graduated from the Faculty of Theology and dismissed from the public offices.

Tütüncü states that in the 1980s, a “new type of women preacher who is devoted, political and knowledgeable” is emerged (Tütüncü, 2010: 598). In the 1980s, Turkey witnessed the politicization of Islam and was introduced to the young veiled women protesting in universities. Drawing upon Cihan Aktaş, Tütüncü states that after their exclusion from the universities, they turned into voluntary preachers who read primarily through the original Islamic texts and sources, aiming to reach as many women possible, and opposing to both the ‘traditional Islamists’ and ‘secular Westernists’ (Tütüncü, 2010: 597-598). In addition to this “new type of women preacher;” there have been traditional women preachers connected to various Islamic groups and sects that are studied in the scholarly work as well<sup>10</sup>. However, those women are not in the confines of this study, which aims to analyze the employment of official female preachers as civil servants into the public offices of DİB.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, the study of Catharina Raudvere focusing on the sufi-oriented women in İstanbul: Raudvere, C. (2003) *The Book and the Roses: Sufi Women, Visibility, and Zikir in Contemporary Istanbul*. London : I. B. Tauris. The study of Kim Shively about a women group in Sincan: Shively, K. (2008) *Taming Islam: studying religion in secular Turkey*, *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 81, no. 3, pp. 683–711. Elisabeth Özdalga and Berna Turam study on the women in the Fethullah Gülen movement: Turam B (2007) *Between Islam and the state: The politics of engagement*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press. Elisabeth Ozdalga, "Following the Footsteps of Fethullah Gulen: Three Women Tell Their Stories," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, ed. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 85-114.

All the employees of DİB are civil servants. Therefore, as it is a legal requirement, they have to act under state directives. In this regard, they distinguish themselves from the new type of women preachers that emerged in the 1980s. According to Tütüncü, those Islamic women of the 1980s were using the leftist and feminist language while opposing traditional Islamists, secularists, and their male companions who were all having different patriarchal configurations (Tütüncü, 2010). On the other hand, the state-employed preachers' work directives are directly defined by the official instructions, and they are supposed not to oppose the authority of the state. As Tütüncü puts it, "...the headscarved women who are seen as outside of the Turkish state, contribute to its maintenance" (Tütüncü, 2010: 611). While she develops her argument, she looks at the activities of female preachers in the Eastern and South-Eastern regions of Turkey and analyzes the profession of preaching as a reflection of the sovereignty of the state in those regions.

Additionally, they differentiate from the voluntary traditional preachers connected to various Islamic groups. Because, one significant responsibility of DİB is to enlighten society about the 'true' and official Islamic knowledge (Gözyayın, 2009) that is mostly, if not always, conflicting with the knowledge and practices of the different Islamic sects and groups. Following this, Chiara Maritato discusses whether there is a compliance or negotiation between preachers' activities and DİB's dogmas regarding the right knowledge of Islam against the interpretation of various religious groups (Maritato, 2017a). She argues that preachers embody and spread an organized religion of DİB (Maritato, 2017a). By doing this as female preachers, they daily negotiate the religious spaces and authority (Maritato, 2017a: 6). Therefore, as was discussed by Maritato that the female preachers are the carriers of the official religious understanding, which distinguishes them from the voluntary female preachers that are connected to different Islamic groups (Maritato, 2017a).

Both women's employment and reaching out to more women as a target are significant transformations in the structure and perspective of DİB. It was indicated as a policy in various publications and public speeches of DİB's Presidents, and booklets published

by DİB regarding the services on women. It is indicated that the increase in female personnel is an essential consideration for DİB. In this way, it made easier to reach more and more women that consist of half of the society and get affiliated with families that are the building blocks of society (DİB, 2017: 37). Employing women for reaching women and mobilizing them in the field to reach families reflect the gender regime of the profession shaped according to the traditional gender roles.

Lastly, even though female preachers have existed in the ranks of DİB before the AKP government, their number is increased, and their work definitions expanded and defined in detail since 2004. The graduates of four years of theology recruited through written and oral interviews of DİB after reaching enough points from the examination of *KPSS*<sup>11</sup>. Within the scope of the protocols signed with various state institutions, and with the expansion of the service areas recently configured, they provide services called “spiritual support/guidance” in various public institutions and institutions affiliated to the provincial and district mufti offices. Spiritual guidance/support is defined as to provide answers to religious questions and the problems that people face in modern daily life by referring to the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Those services are provided to anyone who goes to mufti-related institutions, particularly Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus, but targeting mainly disadvantaged groups, prisoners, patients in hospitals, students in dormitories, and women. Besides, to develop and define it better, there are ideas of opening master programs in universities, adding courses to the Faculties of Theology, and it has been started to conduct academic studies in Theology Faculties. At the moment, preachers are assigned to preach five times a week to inform the community on religious matters and to provide guidance (*irşat ve rehberlik hizmeti*)<sup>12</sup>. Preaching includes keeping watch in Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus, and for the fatwa line, in which the questions answered by phone, and the

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<sup>11</sup> *Kamu Personeli Seçme Sınavı* (Public Personnel Selection Exam, *KPSS*)

<sup>12</sup> The regulations concerning the female preachers' works are determined by the official regulations on the establishment and duties of DİB in Regulation on Duties and Work of the Religious Affairs (2014, June 17). Retrieved July 1, 2019, from <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/Metin.Aspx?MevzuatKod=7.5.19795&MevzuatIliski=0&sourceXmlSearch=Diyanet%20i%C5%9Fleri%20ba%C5%9Fkanl%C4%B1%C4%9F%C4%B1%20g%C3%B6rev%20ve%20C3%A7al%C4%B1%C5%9Fma>



works related to guidance programs. Preaching activities also include providing preaching services in penitentiary institutions and prisons, children's education houses, nursing homes, children's houses, health institutions, student dormitories, factories, and similar places.

Female preachers are providing guidance services to the public regarding the problems people are faced with in their family life. For this task, they are trained regularly through in-service training seminars which are organized and coordinated by DİB. Those seminars are given by 'experts' from various backgrounds of psychology, sociology, communication, and theology. As mentioned above, regarding the cooperation protocol with ASPB about the family education programs, female preachers are also trained by the trainers affiliated to the Ministry. Through the training courses, they become trainers as well. New projects started as '*Evlilik Okulu*' and '*Nişanlılık Okulu*' in which preachers are assigned. Those programs have structured plans lasting for a few weeks in the form of seminars including the themes such as the rights and responsibilities of husband/wife, national legislation regarding marriage, how to arrange the relations with relatives, and management of the economy in the household.

Female preachers provide services to women and disadvantaged groups; they give preaches about women's responsibilities within the family together with an official Islamic understanding produced by DİB. Preachers who are graduates of Theology Faculties provide religious guidance as a professional work of a state official with their highly educated background in religion. To become a preacher, they are examined by DİB in terms of extensive religious knowledge, including Koran, Hadith, and classical texts. They were also expected to follow main themes in sociology and culture, and to have the art of rhetoric for the transformation of the knowledge. They are highly educated, professional and pious women. On the other hand, their professional identity includes their position in the state bureaucracy. They are civil servants subject to state appointments and control.

Consequently, proper womanhood has been constructed through the recent social and political changes under the rule of the AKP government. These changes are particularly the institutional transformation of DİB and the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services with its current name, and the emphasis on *fitrat* in defining gender roles in the discourses and projects of both the AKP and KADEM. In the light of these developments, the profession of preaching recreated as an exemplary profession for women with its high social status and privileged location, and with its conformity to the gender regime which is shaped by the conceptualization of *fitrat*. Therefore, even though it is studied in the literature as an increase of women's authority in the religious field (Hassan, 2012), it does not reflect a break from the traditional gender roles. On the contrary, it is redesigned under the AKP government as an example of the empowerment and mobilization of women through professionalization for the dissemination of gender norms shaped with Islamic references to the concept of *fitrat*. Therefore, *fitrat* holds an important place in the profession of preaching for women. Because, it became one considerable basis of the empowerment of urban, educated, pious, and veiled women in the profession of preaching with a social status at one hand, and it sets the limits of the women in terms of her duties and responsibilities confined to the familial sphere through the profession at the other side. Therefore, the very first condition of her empowerment through the professionalization turns into a dynamic that controls her primary sphere and main roles which are defined in terms of patriarchal ideologies enmeshed with Islamic references.

### **1.3. Outline of the Study**

In order to analyze the proper womanhood constructed in the profession of preaching for women, it is necessary to discuss the concept of *fitrat*. Therefore, in the second chapter, the conceptualization of *fitrat* will be analyzed in terms of its meanings firstly in an official Islamic understanding which is interpreted by DİB, secondly in the discourses of the AKP, and lastly, in its mobilization by KADEM. In that regard, AKP's policies on women's issues will be examined concerning the conceptualization of *fitrat*. Drawing upon this, the perspectives on the "gender justice" defined according

to the concept of *fitrat* will be discussed through a feminist analysis concerning gender equality. The dynamics of the tension which is created between “gender justice” and gender equality will be analyzed. Lastly, the professionalization of veiled women will be examined by looking at the recent transformations in the historical context of Turkey. This chapter is designed to construct the conceptual framework for analyzing the gender regime of the preaching profession for women.

The third chapter presents the methodology and the research design of the study. The reason for adopting a feminist standpoint methodology by looking at the life narratives of women is explained in addition to the research design and sampling. Following this, in the fourth chapter, the institutional background of DİB will be examined in terms of historical evaluation of its duties and responsibilities with a particular focus on the institutionalization of women’s employment under the AKP government because DİB became a significant ideological state apparatus in shaping the gender regime. Especially after 2010, it has gone under radical transformation under the AKP government. In this way, its sociopolitical activities and sphere of influence have expanded to cover the areas of women, family and disadvantaged groups. The position of women, particularly the female preachers, their employment, and their professional activities will be discussed after the institutional transformations of DİB.

Lastly, in the fifth chapter, the gender regime constructed in the profession of preaching, and the construction of the proper womanhood with the concept of *fitrat* analyzed based on the life narratives of the female preachers. Firstly, their perspectives on the *fitrat* will be discussed with regard to women’s roles and responsibilities. Secondly, after their conceptualization of justice, their views on gender justice will be examined with their position at DİB as female preachers. Afterward, their experiences of becoming a preacher will be analyzed concerning the institutional transformations of both DİB and the Faculties of Theologies, which structures their career prospects. Lastly, their perspectives on women’s employment and her position in the family will be examined concerning each other. So, it is known that one significant dynamic

impacting women's employment is women's domestic responsibilities and her burden of care work.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1. Introduction

Gender regime is a convenient tool to examine the significance of *fitrat* in shaping the proper womanhood in various institutions of family, employment, and the state. According to Connell (1987), the interaction of gender relations in a particular institution is the gender regime of that institution. In her influential work, Sylvia Walby (1990) develops her conceptualization of gender regime by synthesizing the radical and socialist feminist analysis. She argues that the gender regime in an institution is determined mainly by the six main structures and the interrelation between them, which are waged-work, housework, sexuality, culture, violence and the state (Walby, 1990: 7). In that regard, the limits of proper gender roles and gender relations are determined through the gender regimes which are embedded in these institutions. States are governed by gender regimes, and develop policies and make laws accordingly. They position their economic and sociological structures through these gender regimes.

Within the six main structures, state and employment are significant for this study for discussing the employment conditions and professional activities of preachers that are shaped according to the conceptualization of *fitrat*, which has been mobilized by the efforts of the government of the AKP. The state is significant because it develops gender policies and discourses. Women's employment is a crucial aspect of this thesis, which helps to analyze the gender regime of the profession of preaching for women.

In that regard, in this chapter firstly, the gender regime informed by the conceptualization of *fitrat*, which is enforced by the AKP government referencing the

Islamic significations will be discussed. Secondly, the development of the concept of “gender justice,” which is applied by *fitrat*, will be examined through its relation with the feminist demands for gender equality. Lastly, a discussion will be given on the professionalization of the veiled women and the gender regime, which impacts and justifies her existence in the public spaces of employment.

## **2.2. Gender Regime through *Fitrat***

According to the definition of Hayati Hökehenli in the Islamic Encyclopedia of Turkey DİB Foundation (*Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 1996), the etymological root of the word *fitrat* means 'split, split into two; to create, to invent' which is derived from *fatr*, that means “creation, certain ability and predisposition to be used” (Hökehenli 1996). The first creation expressed in the word *fitrat* as it was considered in a way as the coming out of being through the splitting of absolute absence. Accordingly, *fitrat* indicates the basic structure, character, and the very initial status of the entity at the time of creation. It is mentioned in the Qur'an as one of the names of *Allah*.

Hökehenli states that the word *fitrat* used in only one verse of the Qur'an, however the different terms that stem from the same root are used in 19 instances. The verb of *fetara* means “to create,” and the noun form of *fâtır* means the creator. The only verse that the word *fitrat* is included is:

So [Prophet] as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion. This is the natural disposition (*fitrat*) God instilled in mankind– there is no altering God's creation– and this is the right religion, though most people do not realize it (Qur'an 30:30, Oxford World's Classics edition, emphasis on *fitrat* is mine)

In this English translation of the Qur'an by M.A.S. Haleem, the word *fitrat* is translated as the “natural disposition.” According to the interpretation which is provided by DİB, the meaning of the *fitrat* in this verse is defined as:

In the Qur'an and the hadiths, sayings of Prophet, it is seen that the word *fitrat* is used to indicate the essence of human personality, which is independent of the exterior impacts, and which is the capacity to form and develop, which is common to all people. This common feature enforces the personality traits which are developed by each individual. According to the Islamic doctrine, the first state of creation has potential completeness that is clean and sinless, ready for development and maturation, and possesses all the possibilities and features which are required to be human and living humanely. There is a natural tendency towards recognizing the existence and oneness of God in human nature (“Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Kur’an-ı Kerim,” n.d., translation is mine).

Therefore, according to the interpretation of DİB, which draws upon the discussion of different *ulemas* of different times, *fitrat* denotes a term of the essence of all human beings that is natural and pure, as a reflection of God in his creation. It also signifies the capacity of each human, that comes from procreation, as being to be devoted to God. As it could be understood from the only verse it is used in Qur’an, it does not define the “natural” roles and responsibilities of women and men. Rather than evoking a gendered duty in everyday life, it connotes a spiritual essence included in every human-beings.

Furthermore, Ayşe Sucu (2009), also argues that according to Islam, women and men created equally in terms of their rights and responsibilities. She states that the differentiation of the appropriate spaces of women and men, as the private and public spheres, did not exist in the times of the Prophet Muhammad, that is structured mostly after the 18<sup>th</sup> century. She contends that it is a consequence of the social and cultural processes and the transformations that the Muslim societies had gone through. Sucu also defines the concept of *fitrat* as the intuition or the capability of human beings that enables them to differentiate between true and false and to sense the oneness and greatness of his/her creator (2009: 10). She argues that the differences between men and women that are dependent upon biology and psychology should not lead to women’s confinement to her role of motherhood. According to her, these differences should not be used as the basis of the discrimination or the superiority of one sex over the other (Sucu, 2009: 13). Moreover, she argues that the religiosity of women is related to her privacy; it should not lead her development in social life as it should not lead her to deprive her of rights (Sucu, 2009: 13).

Therefore, the concept of *fitrat* according to Islamic understanding, interpreted by drawing upon different *ulamas*, evokes a spiritual capacity and ability which depend upon procreation. It denotes the strength of both men and women to be directed to the truth, to God, and Islam. Accordingly, it does not invoke a meaning attributed to the differentiating characteristics of women and men. However, in the conservative political discourses of AKP in general, and pro-government so-called non-governmental organizations in particular, namely the Women and Democracy Association (*Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği*, hereafter KADEM), the concept of *fitrat* has been mobilized to define women's domestic responsibilities of motherhood and her primary locus as family. According to the AKP's conceptualization of *fitrat*, women and men are created with their biological and spiritual differences, and hence the old traditional gendered division of labor is reproduced within this concept that invokes Islamic understandings. These have been reflected in the discourse of the AKP on the issues like the number of children that a family should have as at least three children, to giving birth with the cesarean section, and disbelief in equality between genders. Moreover, increasing women's unpaid care work within the neoliberal structuring of the welfare regime, the low rate of women's employment, and the increase of policies on the protection of the family are all significant in shaping the gender regime in Turkey.

In line with the AKP's conceptualization of *fitrat*, which sees women's domestic responsibilities as her primary duty, various authors mention the increasing emphasis in the discourses, policies, and institutional changes regarding the "protection of the family." Several scholars assert that there is a trend of convergence in between the dependent status of women, positioned in family, enforced by familial policies, and neoliberal transformations in welfare and employment regimes (Buğra & Yakut-Çakar, 2010; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011; Dedeoğlu, 2012; Acar & Altunok, 2013; Z. Yılmaz, 2015; Kandiyoti, 2016; Akkan, 2018).



Kandiyoti (2011a) aptly observes that the entanglement of politics and religion is a significant area for the contestations of gender equality and women's rights. She argues that the discourses on both gender equality and religion are instrumentalized by distinct political agendas of various political actors in different networks. Therefore, she proposes to look at these networks between international, national and local actors, rather than framing the issue at hand with the categories of religious versus secular- or Western versus non-Western (Kandiyoti, 2011a: 10). In that regard, she mentions Prime Minister Erdoğan's meeting with some women's rights organizations concerning the 'Democratic Initiative and National Unity and Brotherhood Project,' known as 'the Kurdish Initiative' in the popular press in 2010. In that press news while answering to the feminist criticisms to the emphasis on the women's domestic responsibilities Erdoğan stated that

Men and women cannot be equal. They are different. I do not believe that men and women are equal. I am in favor of equal opportunity. We are conservative democrats. Our people voted for this. If the people support our policies with their vote, if they want, we will fulfill the requirements of these votes (R.T. Erdoğan cited in Gülbahar 2010, translation is mine)

According to Kandiyoti, even though the discussion of equality versus difference has a long history in the feminist theorization, Erdoğan's emphasis on the difference is the "Islamic concept of *fitrat*, a version of the "biology is destiny" argument" (Kandiyoti, 2011a: 10). She argues that this disposition shouldn't be surprised women's NGOs in the meeting, while it is considered together with the AKP's position as the "neoliberal and 'liberal democratic' splinter of the former Welfare Party that overtly promoted changing the constitution and state laws in favour of Sharia-based legislation" (Kandiyoti, 2011a: 11). In a similar vein, Yeğenoğlu and Coşar argue that the AKP's initial willingness to cooperate with civil society organizations, which enabled women's rights organizations to push for gender-sensitive legal amendments, evolved to cooperation with the market forces and the hostility towards feminist demands (Coşar & Yeneoğlu, 2011: 564). They argue that despite the gains of this process, gender equality has never been prioritized, and the family was a recurrent institution

and the locus of discussion in the discourses of AKP when the women's rights are considered.

According to Kandiyoti (2016), policing gender norms and conservative family values constitute the central aspects of the AKP's politics. She mentions the changing policies and discourses of AKP on gender, sexuality, and family, all of which were defined according to the concept of *fitrat*. In this context, she states that:

After a spate of progressive legislation in the early 2000s, one of the first shocks came in July 2010 when then Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that he did not believe in the equality of men and women. Women's principal and preferably sole vocation – home making and motherhood – accords, he claimed, with their biological and divinely ordained nature (*fitrat*) (Kandiyoti, 2016: 104).

Following this argument, she gives the instances of Erdoğan's discourses on abortion, high rate of cesarean section births, and his declaration of delivering at least three births.

One significant reflection of the definition of gender regime through *fitrat* can be observed in the construction of women's domesticity through an institutional transformation both in the state and also in the civil society. In that regard, Kandiyoti mentions about the co-optation of women's rights issues by the impetus in the collaboration of the government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) with state institutions, that is countering the women's rights and sexual liberties platforms, and marginalizing women's movement in Turkey (Kandiyoti, 2016: 110). Moreover, she contends that:

Civil society is also currently being populated by a myriad of government approved NGOs many of which are active under the umbrella organization of the Turkish Family Platform (TUYAP)<sup>13</sup>. The mission statement of the Platform includes the protection and elevation of the family and of general morality. Needless to say, the coalitions of NGOs that worked tirelessly to achieve the reforms of the Civic and Penal Codes mentioned earlier are totally marginalized and funding flows are now directed towards 'government approved' civil society (Kandiyoti, 2016: 107).

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<sup>13</sup>It is misspelled, it should be TURAP.

Considering those statements, one significant organization, that is emphasized in the footnotes by Kandiyoti as well, is KADEM. Regarding the developments which are mentioned above in the recent history of Turkey, KADEM is an important organization, which was founded under the leadership of Sümeyye Erdoğan, who is the daughter of current president R. T. Erdoğan. KADEM was established in 2013 with Sümeyye Erdoğan as vice president of the board directors. It was stated in the website that KADEM is a non-governmental organization that advocates delivering women's human dignity. They asserted that their vision is “Developing a social consciousness that the sharing of roles between men and women can only be realized by considering the balance between rights and responsibilities” (“About KADEM,” n.d.). Therefore, KADEM is one significant organization, and an example of Kandiyoti’s (2016) emphasis on “government approved” organization, that is enforcing the gender regime shaped according to *fitrat*.

Moreover, in her article (2015a), “A New Momentum: Gender Justice in the Women’s Movement,” Sare Aydın Yılmaz, the President of the KADEM, states that women and men differ in terms of physiology and spirituality. She puts it as “Undoubtedly, relying solely on legal and political practices without taking into account the physiological and spiritual differences would mean opposing the natural law” (S.A. Yılmaz, 2015a: 115). She defines gender roles according to her interpretation of an Islamic definition as “God’s Word (*kalam*), which holds that women and men complement each other in terms of duties and responsibilities, does not demand obedience to men, but to the order” (S.A. Yılmaz, 2015a: 114). Therefore, according to her, in the Islamic understanding, women and men have different roles depending upon the natural law, of *fitrat*, which complement each other in order. She puts it as:

Islam regards women and men as human beings and identifies differences in what they can do. It considers women and men as parts of a whole that complement each other, stating that “women constitute the other half as men, complementing a whole” by accepting that “the two spouses cannot be reduced to each other, cannot be blended with each other but cannot be separated either.” That is why the relationship between men and women assumes no hierarchical superiority either within the family or in

terms of mutual relationships between the two, and holds that there is only a difference with regard to functions and duties (S.A. Yılmaz, 2015a: 113).

She differentiates women and men in terms of their duties and responsibilities, which are shaped according to what they can do in terms of their natural qualities.

Moreover, in another article about women's participation in the political sphere, S.A. Yılmaz argues that women and men have different perspectives on social life and different characteristics coming from the creation (S.A. Yılmaz, 2015b). For the justification of providing the appropriate working environment and conditions for women, she argues that the professional ideologies should be restructured by taking into account women's characteristics coming from *fitrat* (S.A. Yılmaz, 2015b). She asserts that in order to better the situation of women in all spheres of the social life, a perspective should be developed, that is framed with the notion of justice that takes into account the women's differences than men in terms of their lifestyle and views of life (S.A. Yılmaz, 2015b).

Yılmaz states that in the political sphere of both Turkey and the European countries, women are expected to behave against their nature, which is dependent upon *fitrat* (S.A. Yılmaz, 2015b). For her, because of that, woman is regarded to be in an inferior position than man. After giving the recent percentages of women in parliaments in both contexts, she argues that the political arena is considered a male-dominated area (S.A. Yılmaz, 2015b: 30). Therefore, it is expected for women to behave like a man, which is against their *fitrat*. In this context, she asserts that the solution of increasing women's participation in the political sphere necessitates the transformation of this expectation of society from women to behave manly, and the mobilization of the idea that women have right to have behaved with a perspective framed with "balance" and "justice" (S.A. Yılmaz, 2015b: 31). According to her, instead of equality between genders, there should be a justice that takes into account the natural balance created by God. This balance could be sustained through the actualization of the duties and responsibilities of the two sexes that complement each other.

Instead of feminist discourse, which advocates discriminative policies between men and women, a complementary and holistic discourse must be created. Feminism regards women and men as separate social groups so as to maintain its function. On the contrary, for the establishment of social balance and harmony, holistic rather than discriminative policies must be implemented with respect to the cultural dynamics of each society, and women and men must be regarded as two equivalent entities with the same essence, complementing each other (S.A. Yılmaz 2015a: 112).

Moreover, she argues that it should be accepted that the concept of “division of labor” and “social roles” should be restructured in a manner that prioritizes the justice over equality, assuming that men and women are the same in their essence but different in nature (S.A. Yılmaz 2015a). The concept of “gender justice,” which is created in this context, means drawing attention to an approach that will eliminate the victimization of women which arises from both traditional values that are discriminating against women and modernity, which expects women to behave manly. This approach that she advocates is an understanding of justice that ensures the healthy existence of women in social life without contradicting her nature (Yılmaz, 2015b: 31).

What is significant for this study is that since the argument of R.T. Erdoğan about his disbelief in the equality between women and men, both in the political discourses of the AKP and in the discourses of civil society organizations mobilized by the AKP, gender issues are framed according to the concept of *fitrat*, while proper women’s roles and places are defined accordingly.

In line with Kandiyoti’s (2016) argument of transformation and collaboration of the civil society and the public institutions regarding gender equality, it can be argued that in the discourse as mentioned earlier; women’s rights framed with a more conservative tone. In addition to the above-mentioned changes which took place in the sphere of civil society, particularly the establishment and the enforcement of the women’s organizations, it is also necessary to discuss the institutional developments in the public offices under the rule of the AKP government regarding the gender regime. Because, according to Kandiyoti (2016) to reproduce the patriarchy, that is no more secure, the AKP mobilizes various state apparatuses.

I propose that a new phenomenon I call ‘masculinist restoration’ comes into play at a point in time when patriarchy is no longer fully secure, and requires higher levels of coercion and the deployment of more varied ideological state apparatuses to ensure its reproduction” (Kandiyoti, 2016: 110).

In that regard, in the footnotes, she asserts that despite the scarcity of the published work, Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus was established under the DİB should be considered as examples of the ideological state apparatuses as such. Firstly, DİB became a significant institution for the dissemination of the gender relations shaped according to the concept of *fitrat*. As Çağatay puts it:

In the 2010s, *Diyanet*’s weight in shaping gender relations increased as the institution gained more administrative power through its nation-wide Family and Counseling Bureaus and joint projects with the Ministry of Labor, Social Services and Family and the Ministry of Education. Alongside running educational programs on “strengthening the family institution”, the *Diyanet* releases fatwas propagating the notions of *fitrat* and complementarity, such as labeling feminism as immorality; allowing for men to divorce their wives via email, SMS, or phone call; or approving nine-year-old girls’ eligibility for marriage according to Islamic rules (BBC, 2018) (Çağatay 2018: 54).

Selin Çağatay (2018) argues after mentioning the earlier reforms made in the legislations regarding gender equality that after the authoritarian and populist turn of the AKP in the 2010s, the gender regime of Turkey is shaped according to the Islamic values:

In the 2010s, however, the notion of equality ceased to inform the state’s gender policies as the AKP discredited laicism by labeling it as an imposed-from-above principle of Western/Kemalist modernity. Starting with the then Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan’s declaration that he did not believe in gender equality (Cumhuriyet, 2010), *fitrat* and complementarity gradually became dominant themes in Turkey’s gender regime (Çağatay, 2018: 50).

In this respect, she bases her argument on the transformation of the State Ministry responsible for Women and the Family to the Ministry of Family and Social Policy (Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı, hereafter ASPB) in 2011, and allowing muftis to perform civil marriages in 2017 (Çağatay, 2018: 50). In a similar vein, Mutluer argues that despite the positive legal reforms regarding women in the first term of the AKP, in their second term, after 2007, they started to “shift to the religious side of the

secular-religious divide” (Mutluer, 2019: 108). Even though, I agree with Kandiyoti’s earlier mentioned supposition to go beyond the dichotomies of secular/religious or Western/Eastern divides in the analysis of gender policies, Mutluer’s study provides insights about the institutional restructuring which took place under the rule of the AKP government. For Mutluer, in line with the AKP’s political ideology, DİB reconfigured for establishing a link between the state, community, family, and market (Mutluer, 2018: 4). Here, it is significant to consider that DİB became an important state apparatus in shaping the gender regime restructured according to the concept of *fitrat*, with referencing to an Islamic understanding. Regarding these arguments, I will discuss the details of the institutional transformation of DİB regarding the gender regime in the fourth chapter of this study.

In the shed of all these discussions, it becomes evident that it is significant to look at the institutional transformations for detecting the gender regime under the last two decades of the AKP government. In addition to DİB, the institutional developments which took place in the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services, as its current name and increasing emphasis on women’s primary site as the family are significant in determining the gender regime in Turkey. Various authors mention the increasing focus on the discourses and policies and institutional changes regarding the “protection of the family.” The gender regime embedded in those policies needs careful attention due to women’s roles defined in terms of *fitrat* in these policies. Various scholars assert that there is a trend of convergence between the dependent status of women, positioned in family, enforced by familial policies, and neoliberal transformations in welfare and employment regimes (Buğra & Yakut-Çakar, 2010; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011; Yazıcı, 2012; Dedeoğlu, 2012; Acar & Altunok, 2013; Z. Yılmaz, 2015; Kandiyoti, 2016; Akkan, 2017).

Initially, one significant institutional change was the transformation of the Ministry of Women and the Family to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies<sup>14</sup>. Afterward, The

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<sup>14</sup> The Family and Social Policies Ministry was established on June 3, 2011 with legislative decree number 633.

General Directorate of Women's Status and Problems (*Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü*, hereafter KSGM)<sup>15</sup> and General Directorate of Family and Social Research<sup>16</sup> (*Aile ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Genel Müdürlüğü*, hereafter ASAGEM) were both connected to the new ministry. In this regard, with the establishment of the new ministry, ASAGEM established as an executive body, and the KSGM became a non-executive body, limited to the research (Akkan, 2017: 79). Zafer Yılmaz argues that with those new regulations, policies on the new social question structured around “family centralism” (Z. Yılmaz, 2015: 380). When KSGM frames the issue as the prevention of the violence against women, ASAGEM focuses on the ‘protection of the family.’ According to Kandiyoti (2016), with this institutional transformation, women's issues were confined to the social policies and social assistance for the disadvantaged groups, and women were located in the family policies. Moreover, in the same year, with the transformation to ASPB (2011), the cooperation protocol between DİB and the ASPB signed, for the aim of protecting familial values, strengthening family and carrying out social service projects (Mutluer, 2019: 108). According to Mutluer, those changes were in line with the AKPs policies “which were specifically designed to situate women in the biopolitical space as second class citizens charged with the task of reproducing not only the Turkish nation itself but, more importantly, the cheap gendered labor force deemed to be necessary” (Mutluer, 2019: 108).

Kandiyoti (2016) proposes that gender policies that emphasize conservative family values are central aspects of the AKP's ideology and practice. In the first point, Kandiyoti argues that women's noncompliance with the “government-decreed norms

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<sup>15</sup> The General Directorate of Women's Status and Problems was established in 1991 as part of the CEDAW process for gender monitoring (Kandiyoti, 2016: 107) as a research and policy body (Akkan, 2018: 79). In 2011 with the transformation of the Ministry of the Women and Family, there were questions regarding the status of KSGM, whether it was abolished or not. Feminist groups reacted to the new regulation because KSGM was the only unit assigned to develop policies, strategies, cooperate and coordinate with all stakeholders to ensure equality between women and men, strengthen women's position in all areas of social life and prevent all forms of discrimination against women.

<sup>16</sup>After AKP came to power, in 2004, General Directorate of Family and Social Research was established for carrying out research on family, as a non-executive body (Akkan, 2018: 79).



of propriety,” the proper womanhood, is one of the bases of the populist discourses of the exclusion. In the second point, Kandiyoti indicates that the decreasing social welfare with the neoliberal drive on the decrease of state’s responsibility for social protection comes along with a conservative policy demanding the strengthening of the family. After examining the Nükhet Sirman’s (2005) term “Familial citizenship” that locates the points of intervention by the state in the realm of the family with a gendered discourse in which male heads of household determined as the ideal citizens and women imagined as the dependent wife/mother; she puts it:

Yet despite continuities with some republican tropes, the particular mix of neoliberal, neoconservative, and bio-political agendas evident in AKP policies may signal a new departure in the gender regime that deserves to be understood in its own right (Kandiyoti, 2016: 107).

Kandiyoti indicates that this could be observed both in the discourses of the AKP and also in the institutional changes. She shows that the emphasis on women by the reforms made in the early 2000s turned into the protection of the family, and women framed within the disadvantageous groups not as a civil subject, regarding the changing policies of the AKP (Kandiyoti, 2016: 107). She mentions the abolishment of KSGM and the establishment of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in which “discrimination against women was placed alongside the protection of children, the disabled, and the elderly, clearly marking it out as a social welfare issue” (Kandiyoti, 2016: 107). In this respect, DİB is a significant institution in which the conservative policies on “strengthening family” carried out for the recovery of the transformation of the society under the detrimental impacts of neoliberal policies.

In line with Kandiyoti’s argument of the AKP’s policies signifies a new gender regime, Zafer Yılmaz (2015) also argues that familial policies under a new impetus under the AKP’s policies. Zafer Yılmaz (2015), explains that even though the policies on the family can be dated back to the Republican Era, the government of the AKP endeavors to transform it with neo-conservative policies. This gained a momentum significantly after 2011 with the establishment of ASPB, the discourses, policies, and structure of ASPB started to change (Z. Yılmaz, 2015). He asserts that the family’s role is enforced

as the welfare provider in the context of the rise of urban poverty, structural reforms after the 2001 crisis is increased in the informal economy, and unemployment rates (Z. Yılmaz, 2015: 375).

Similar to Kandiyoti (2016) and Zafer Yılmaz (2015), in an earlier study, Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2011) argue the emergence of a new kind of patriarchy under the AKP government, combining seemingly contradictory neoliberal and conservative policies. They examine the gender policies of the AKP through a feminist reading of the AKP's discourses, and through focusing on ASAGEM. This ally in between neoliberalism and conservatism defines women's primary locus as the family, while also demanding women's participation in the workforce. Therefore, women have to arrange their working in a balance with their familial responsibilities, which increases women's exploitation. Similarly, Acar and Altunok (2013) also address this regime as an alliance between neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities, basing their argument on the discourses of the politicians for the regulation of the "politics of intimate" (Acar & Altunok, 2013). Family is crucial for the functioning of this alliance, because of the decrease in social security and welfare at the one hand, and for the control of the sexual and reproductive capabilities and sustaining the moral order on the other hand. Therefore, they argue that "women are increasingly placed within the boundaries of the private sphere and their subjectivities are defined concerning the traditional roles of care giving" (Acar & Altunok, 2013: 20).

Moreover, Berna Yazıcı (2012) and Ayşe Buğra and Burcu Yakut-Cakar (2010) discuss the strengthening of the family in terms of the transformation of the social welfare policies under the rule of the AKP government. Buğra and Yakut-Cakar (2010) investigate both the female labor force participation and female employment concerning the structural changes in employment patterns and the social policy environment in Turkey. They contend that the low employment of women is because of the interrelation between changes in the economy, family life, and the structuring of social policy. They argue that "The Turkish welfare regime has a distinctly gendered character" (Buğra & Yakut-Cakar, 2010: 534). Because, the social security system

defines women as dependent on working male relatives, which reinforces the dependent-status of women whose role perceived as “natural care providers” (Buğra & Yakut-Cakar, 2010: 530). On the other hand, Yazıcı (2012) asserts that with the cuts on the state’s welfare expenditure, the emphasis in the discourses of the AKP on the “strengthening of the family” became stronger. She traces her argument back to the example of the de-institutionalization of children's care in the child-houses, with the politicians’ emphasis on enforcing the integrity of the family (Yazıcı, 2012). These restricting of social policies have significant impacts on the gender regime in Turkey, which is increasingly defined in terms of “naturalized” duties of women, namely *fitrat*.

As a result, regarding the literature on the recent transformation of gender policies which are impacted by both neoliberal and conservative policies; it could be argued that the decrease in social welfare, social policies, and protection, women’s traditional role of caregiving is emphasized by the discourses and structural changes with a conservative tone in line with the women’s responsibilities defined according to *fitrat*. Emphasis on the family, which is considered as the one central institution for the social order, is not new when the policies of the AKP’s predecessors are considered. What is new is the emphasis of the women’s roles within family and definition of their roles in terms of their *fitrat* with references to an Islamic understanding. In this context, DİB became a significant institution to provide care to the children, disabled people, and elderly through preachers' visits to the various state institutions on the one hand. Female preachers provided services through the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus, impacted by the policies on the strengthening family and reminding women’s traditional roles of caregiving as mother/wife, on the other hand.

### **2.3. Gender Equality vis-a-vis *Fitrat*: Gender Justice**

In this part, the conceptualization of “gender justice” is discussed, which is mobilized against the conceptualization of “gender equality.” With the increasing backlash against the women’s movement, its demands, and gains, the concept of “gender

justice” is justified and explained in terms of the women’s and men’s naturalized roles, namely the *fitrat*.

Gender equality was defined in the constitution in 2004 under the rule of the AKP government, after the adoption of the new Civil Code in 2001.

In 2004, a clause stating ‘the State has the obligation to ensure that this equality exists in practice’ was added to Article 10 of the Constitution. In 2010, a special clause saying ‘measures taken for this purpose shall not be interpreted as contrary to the principle of equality’ was added, thus constitutionally recognizing affirmative action. In 2004, article 90 of the Constitution was amended to admit the superiority of international law confirming the legal superiority of CEDAW (Convention on Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination against Women), which had been signed by the Turkish government in 1985 (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2018: 613).

Despite the earlier positive changes on the way to gender equality, including the reform in the Penal Code (2004), the amendments on the law on Municipalities (2005), the general notice about the elimination of violence against women and honor-killings (2006), and formation of the Parliamentary Commission for the Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men (2009); scholars were critical about the implementation of those reforms. For instance, Dedeoğlu (2012) argues that gender equality policies exist in the legislation but not in the practice because it is not changing the traditional gender roles and not alleviating the women’s burden of care work, which impact female employment. Yeğenoğlu and Coşar (2011) assert that despite the gains of the process, which enabled women’s groups to push for gender-sensitive regulations, gender equality never prioritized, and the family was a recurrent institution and the locus of discussion in the discourses. Scholars show that gender equality has never been on the agenda of the AKP government. Moreover, Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün assert that the establishment of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, while disregarding the feminist women’s demand of naming the committee as “Gender Equality Committee,” can be considered as an earlier sign of the government’s limitation of gender equality to the equality of opportunity (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2018: 613). Scholars argue that especially since 2007 patriarchal notions framed by

religion (Acar & Altunok, 2013), and the ‘gender climate shifted from a more egalitarian atmosphere to a religio-conservative one with strong references to tradition and religion’ (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2018: 615). In this context, after Erdoğan’s expression of his disbelief in gender equality in 2010, he once again repeated his perspective with an addition of the emphasis on “gender justice.”

While expressing his ideas on women’s contribution to social development, their employment and domestic violence, he underlines the necessity of considering their *fitrat*. At the Women and Justice Summit, hosted by the Women and Democracy Association in November 2014, he once more voiced his objection to gender equality and mentioned ‘equivalency’ instead of ‘equality’. He stated, ‘Sometimes, here they say “equality between men and women”. But “equality among women” and “equality among men” is more correct. However, what is particularly essential is women’s equality before justice’ (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2018: 618).

Simga and Göker (2017) argue that together with the heightened political debates on “secularism versus Islamism,” there is a risk of increasing polarization of women’s movement between Islamist and secularist women. For them, this is reflected in the debate of “gender equality versus gender justice” between the rights-based approaches of secular feminists and faith-based approaches of Islamist women (Simga and Göker, 2017: 274).

The conceptualization of “gender justice” has been mobilized and disseminated through the civil society organizations mobilized by the AKP, drawing upon the concept of *fitrat*. As Çağatay asserts:

In the 2010s, as women’s organizations who previously participated in the EU-oriented issue-based platforms were repositioned in the counter-public sphere, AKP-established anti-feminist GONGOs (government-organized non-governmental organizations), such as the Women and Democracy Association (KADEM), took over the role of representing Turkey at transnational feminist processes such as Beijing+20 or the GREVIO (Çağatay, 2018; Doyle, 2018). KADEM, involving both covered and not covered women in its body, advocates for the reorganization of gender relations based on *fitrat* and complementarity under the brand name “gender justice”, arguing that this notion transcends the Western notion of “gender equality” (Hürriyet, 2015) (Çağatay, 2018: 53).

In that regard, parallel to the mobilization of the concept of *fıtrat*, gender justice has been mobilized through the discourses and policies of the government-enforced civil society organizations.

Sare Aydın Yılmaz defines gender justice, which is conceptualized as a solution to the women's problems in today's Turkey, as a broader concept than gender equality (S.A. Yılmaz, 2015a, 2015b). Yılmaz (2015b) argues that the idea of equality regarding the women's and men's roles and statuses requires the equal treatment of women and men both in their social and private lives, which is not enough to explain the current situation.

The most important point here is the prioritization of the understanding of justice based on the differences and inherent characteristics of the two sexes, due to the fact that women's socio-economic grievances and their loss of position cannot be resolved only with equality but with an understanding of justice. Thus, within this scope, "gender justice" is a term emphasizing this comprehensive and equality inclusive approach. It highlights the different features and characteristics of men and women by nature, and acknowledges different liabilities between men and women attributed by society and culture, but also notes that there is no hierarchical superiority or inferiority between sexes (Yılmaz, 2015a: 113).

Yılmaz (2015a) contends that the concept of equality ignores the "fact" that men and women are different in their creational characteristics. Because for her, women's and men's perspectives on life, their expectations, and powers are separate. Therefore, she proposes to enforce the "wider" concept of "gender justice," which also includes equality in itself, instead of "gender equality." In her words:

Gender justice" is a concept that is appealing to certain circles of women's movements all around the world due to the fact that equality, set forth by modernity, is not concerned with particular differences among women. As a modern concept, equality provides standard monotypes [for women] grounded in Western culture by attempting to equalize women and men, whereas "justice" points to a superior concept in which equality is inherent and refers to equity, balance, a higher understanding of fair treatment, and liabilities between men and women (Yılmaz, 2015a: 108)

Therefore, she asserts that "gender justice" is a "superior" concept because it is more "comprehensive" than gender equality. Yılmaz bases her argument on the assumption

that justice includes equality, and it considers the different contexts of different women instead of universalizing the woman category. Thus, she creates a hierarchical relation between gender justice and equality.

Moreover, she states that gender equality, which has been developed in western-context, does not provide a just solution. This is one repeating argument against feminism, considering feminism as the western-centric movement in Muslim societies. After mentioning the development of the concept of gender that denotes the equality between genders in the individual, symbolic and institutional levels, she argues that

All the statements produced in secular sphere, regardless of the actual roles that Islam imposed on women and men, in a country as such the 99% of its population are Muslims, are conceptualized by the Orientalist perspective revealed by Western culture (Yılmaz 2015a: 15).

Furthermore, she criticizes the liberal feminist movement, for universalizing the women through imagining women as a homogenous category while ignoring the differences among them. She develops her argument drawing upon the critics in the feminist literature against the first wave of feminism, namely the liberal feminism, which fights for equality before the law. Although the gains of the liberal feminist movement that struggled for women's rights and liberties, cannot be ignored and reduced to the mere criticism of it, she goes on to argue that:

The efforts to equalize women with men by reference to the characteristics of the male sex do not provide women with any privilege. Rather, it reflects the presupposition that women are weaker than and subordinate to men (S.A. Yılmaz, 2015b: 110).

To support her argument, she points out that the “classical feminism,” in that she refers to liberal feminist theories, also criticized by “post-feminist” approaches through the post-colonial theories of Spivak (1998) and Mohanty (2008). Drawing upon post-colonial criticisms, she argues that “classical feminism” does not consider the class, ethnicity, and other aspects of the discrimination. However, she justifies the Islamic understanding of the gendered division of labor and gender roles as a consequence of the different contexts in which women live.

She argues that gender equality is not enough to solve women's problems because of the gender-blind approaches in social, political, and economic spheres (Yılmaz, 2015b: 109). For her, this is one of the main arguments of the development of the concept of "gender justice." For instance, she contends that the main reason for women's lower participation in political life stems from the socially created division of labor which has left almost every realm of the public sphere to male domination. Therefore, she asserts that as a result of the gendered division of labor, professions are divided as men's and women's occupations (Yılmaz, 2015a). For her, the division of labor between men and women has been established in a male-dominated manner, which is independent of religion, which is a strong phenomenon in shaping society, taking into account cultural and physical superiorities (Yılmaz, 2015a: 18). Therefore, the solution to this problem cannot be provided with gender equality; however, it should be solved through "gender justice." In that regard, she considers positive discrimination as an application of the concept of gender justice, not equality. Positive discrimination is defined as improving the socioeconomically disadvantaged status of persons who are exposed to discrimination, to ensure justice for disadvantaged groups (Yılmaz, 2015a). Consequently, it has been defined as paving the way for women to have equal rights and freedoms with men without being subjected to different treatment in public life by considering physical and biological characteristics, namely *fitrat*.

As a result, gender justice has been enforced against the feminist demand for gender equality. By doing this, Sare Yılmaz (2015a, 2015b) uses the feminist argument of the gendered division of labor, as the reason for inequality for women's participation in social life. However, she criticizes the liberal feminism due to its emphasis on a universal women's category defined in a Western-centric manner, its endeavor to equalize women with men while disregarding women's differences, and its neglect of different women living in different contexts. Therefore, she proposes the concept of "gender justice" as a solution, through referencing the Islamic connotations of gender roles defined through the idea of *fitrat*. Even though the discussions in feminist literature about the sameness and difference dated back to earlier waves of the feminist



movement and theory, she reproduces a similar argument in her defense of gender justice through reproducing the traditional gender roles within Islamic discourse.

The fact that the duty of managing the institution of the family, for the continuance of this institution, has been laid upon men, does not generate a hierarchical order in any sense and does not prevent the equality between women and men about being human beings and subjects of God. The notion of equality refers to the sameness of two entities and the substituting of two equivalent entities (Yılmaz 2015b: 114, translation is mine).

Therefore, through referencing the concept of *fitrat*, which defines women's primary role as motherhood and men's role as meeting the needs of the family in economic terms, she reproduces the gendered division of labor, which stated by her as the reason of unequal participation of women in social, political and economic life.

The significant part of this study is the mobilization and the dissemination of the conceptualization of "gender justice" against the "gender equality." A.S. Yılmaz is defining "gender justice" as a "new momentum" in the women's movement (A.S. Yılmaz, 2015a). In this context, KADEM *Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi*<sup>17</sup> (KADEM Women's Studies Journal) has been established as a peer-reviewed academic journal that publishes research on gender and women's studies. KADEM asserts the aim of the establishment of the journal as:

It aims to criticize the singular approaches to women's issues and to remove the issue of women from the work of a certain group of academic circles in the light of different perspectives and to open an interdisciplinary approach to the interest of a wider academic and non-academic interlocutor. Besides, it aims to present critiques to the hegemonic discourses and analysis in women's studies in our country by taking into consideration the alternative orientations and conceptualizations of the international academic community in women's studies and to develop new concepts ("KADEM Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi," n.d., translation is mine)

Therefore, the conceptualization of the term "gender justice," as in the article of A.S. Yılmaz (2015a), could be considered as an example of providing alternatives and

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<sup>17</sup> The further information would be found from the website: <https://kadem.tr/kadem-kadin-arastirmalari-dergisi/>

criticisms to the conceptualization of “gender equality.” Therefore, together with the references to the concept of *fitrat*, the conceptualization of “gender justice” became an academically discussed term in women’s studies. By doing this, KADEM turns “gender justice” as a term used by conservative circles with Islamic references into a scholarly discussed concept in a peer-reviewed academic journal.

On the other hand, Simga and Goker show the reason of increasing tension between Islamist and secular women as:

Due to the recent political developments in Turkey, the dissent between secular feminists and Islamist women has intensified as AKP, the ruling conservative party, began to prioritize the faith-based aspiration for “gender justice” over rights-based “gender equality” while proposing new socio-political and legal policies (Simga & Goker, 2018: 276).

As a result, as Simga and Goker (2017) argues, there is an urgent need of women in both parties to come together for demanding solution of women’s problems in the areas that they could negotiate, rather than differentiate in the highly polarized political atmosphere of Turkey. In this context, Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün mention about the instances of collaboration between some Islamist and secular women’s groups on the grounds of headscarf ban and in the EU membership process for the Turkish Penal Code (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017: 612).

Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün discuss the AKP’s various policies on family and motherhood, which contradicts with gender equality (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017: 617). Gender justice has developed and mobilized through the AKP’s policies, discourses and the civil society organizations mobilized by the AKP to counter the feminist demand for gender equality. This mobilization of gender justice that depends upon women’s and men’s differentiating social roles is one significant aspect determining the gender regime defined in terms of the concept of *fitrat*. All these developments are important aspects determining the gender regime which is shaped through the traditional gender roles emphasized with religious and conservative values, against the concept of gender equality. In addition to the mobilization and

dissemination of the “gender justice,” women’s participation in the workforce framed under this conceptualization together with the reproduction of the women’s domestic responsibilities and the role of motherhood.

#### **2.4. Professionalization of Veiled Women**

Lastly, it is significant to discuss the historical processes that enable the participation of veiled women in the public spaces of employment and education that is leading to today’s conditions. Professionalization of veiled women should be considered with increasingly religious and conservative policies and discourses of the AKP, which emphasize gender justice instead of gender equality, through justifying it with the ordained gender roles with specific references to the religion. In that context, the appropriate professions developed for the veiled women need special attention for the aim of this thesis.

The 1980s in Turkey regarded as critical for young middle-class urban women who resisted the Republican description of modernity and demanded their rights to be visible in particularly the public spheres of universities (Cindoğlu 2008). 1980s was also critical in terms of the emergence of the feminist movement, which criticized the state feminism of the Republic. The development of feminist and Islamic women’s movement took place at the same time. In this regard, Gülnur Acar-Savran (2004) argues that for feminists, it became significant to understand the pious women’s participation in public life with her veil; in this way, public-private became very much used concepts of the studies investigating women’s position (Acar-Savran, 2004: 98). Cindoğlu emphasizes the centrality of the state and argues that “hegemonic power of the state is crucial in shaping the domain of possible contestations for women” (Cindoğlu, 2008: 797).

Nilüfer Göle (1997) argued that the secularization of the public space in the modernization process of the Republican era excluded “those who do not conform to this “new life”, that is the non-Westernized Muslim population” (Göle, 1997: 238).

Göle stated that the state controlled the public space until 1983, which is gained more autonomy with competing movements of civil society, which challenged “the national, secularist and homogeneous character of the republican project of the public sphere” (Göle, 1997: 241). In that regard, she argued that

The demand by female Muslim students to be allowed to attend university classes in their Islamic outfit constitutes the most visible assault on this project and is perceived by the secular elites as an invasion of "their" public sphere (university classes, parliament, television, concert halls, streets, etc.) (Göle, 1997: 241).

She argues that the emergence of an Islamic sphere in the 1980s entered into a complicated relationship with modernity, which cannot be reduced to the identity politics of resistance to modernity (Göle, 1997: 247). Nilüfer Göle (1991) is one of the first scholars who discussed that the veiling of women who are urban, educated, and conservative Muslims in public spaces is a modern phenomenon that is constructing an alternative modernity. Similar to Göle (1991), in an early study of Aynur İlyasoğlu (1994), veiling is also discussed as an aspect of the identity of modern, urban, educated and Muslim women, whose veils were understood as a balance between private and public spheres.

Saktanber and Çorbacioğlu (2008) argues that veiling became an urban concept, a symbol of the identity of Islamic activist women who are modern and well-educated (Saktanber & Çorbacioğlu, 2008: 519). According to her, the meaning and style of veiling changed over time, and it was called *Türban* by the state authorities in the 1980s, particularly to refer to the female university students’ veil (Saktanber & Çorbacioğlu, 2008: 520). And she argues that despite the various styles and different backgrounds of the women who wear it, women who wear the headscarf in the public space regarded as the “other” of the Republican women (Saktanber, 1994).

Even though the first legal regulation regarding the headscarf ban in Turkey organized in 1981, veiling appeared as an issue when a medical faculty student wearing a headscarf, who graduated from Istanbul University with the first degree, was not allowed to make a graduation speech in 1964 (Cindoğlu, 2010: 33). And in 1982, the

Council of Higher Education issued a circular regarding the dress code. The regulation concerning the costume of the veiled personnel working in the public sector was first issued in 1982 as well. As of this date, some veiled students were not allowed to attend their school, and disciplinary penalties were imposed in some universities. In the face of increasing student protests over time, in 1984, the Council of Higher Education issued a circular allowing “modern *türban*” till 1987 (Cindoğlu, 2010: 33). Although it was released in 1988 with an additional article introduced on the Law of Council of Higher Education, in 1989, the Supreme Court re-evaluated the situation upon the application of President Kenan Evren. In this context, the Constitutional Court annulled the related sentence which states that “it is free to cover the neck and hair with a veil or *türban* because of religious belief” (Cindoğlu, 2010: 35).

In the period starting with 28 February 1997<sup>18</sup>, known as the 28 February process, veiled women working in the public sector was started to be expelled. As Cindoğlu indicates, according to the report of AK-DER in the period of 1998-2002, 5000 veiled women were dismissed because they did not comply with the dress code, and nearly 10,000 of them were forced to resign (Cindoğlu, 2010: 35). Veiled women in the public

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<sup>18</sup> 28 February 1997 is a critical turning point in the contemporary Turkish politics, that is impacted the today's position of AKP and its policies as well. The process starting with 28 February 1997 led to the resignation of the Erbakan government and the closing down of Welfare Party, which considered as the predecessor of AKP. It is the process of “suspension of normal politics until the secular correction was completed” (Cizre & Çınar, 2010: 310). It followed by the critical instances in terms of veiled women's position within the state's spaces. For example, the crisis in the parliament and the following public dispute took place when an elected and veiled MP Merve Kavakçı entered the Grand National Assembly for taking the oath, which prevented with the protests in the parliament (Cindoğlu & Zencirci, 2008: 800). After this incident, another crisis happened in the commemoration of Atatürk's death, 10 November, when a “dress code” applied for the state protocol.

This process followed by a new development of two lines in the Islamist political agenda, as the traditionalists of Fazilet (Virtue) Party, and the reformists of AKP. AKP symbolized a break from the tradition that “represent the transformation to a moderate conservative democratic party from a pro-Islamist party” (Cindoğlu & Zencirci, 2008: 802). Even in 2003, Erdoğan stated that the veiled university students are not the party's priority. However, later in 2008, he brought his silence about the issue. Moreover, the discussions and tensions followed with the position of veiled spouses of AKP's MPs in the ceremonies of the state, and later the position of a veiled first lady in the presidential palace (Cindoğlu & Zencirci, 2008: 803). Therefore, Cindoğlu & Zencirci argue that with these developments “headscarf issue lost its counter-hegemonic potential via the transformation of the headscarved women as agents (either as university students or as women politicians) to the status of the agent's wives” (Cindoğlu & Zencirci, 2008: 804).

sector are often banned from the profession by conducting investigations based on disciplinary provisions.

In 2006, the law on the forgiveness of specific disciplinary punishments of civil servants and other public duties was pardoned (Cindoğlu, 2010). Thus, women who were dismissed because they continued to wear the headscarf until 2005 were able to return to their jobs. However, since the headscarf ban and dress code were still in force in this process. Therefore, this amnesty was a significant gain only for those who decided not to wear (Cindoğlu, 2010). Cindoğlu argues that as long as a civil servant who returns to the public office continues to wear the headscarf, she will receive similar investigations and registry penalties, and after a while, she will be dismissed from their job (Cindoğlu, 2010).

Since the 1980s, the headscarf ban has been the main issue on the agenda of veiled women, particularly those who want to study in higher education and work in their professions. Besides, female labor force participation in the last 20 years in Turkey has fallen. Since this research does not aim to establish a causal relationship, if there is any, between these two issues, it will be sufficient to draw attention to the relationship between these two phenomena. The findings here should be taken into consideration in future research on the labor participation of urban women. Looking at the data of this study, we can say that the decrease in female employment in specialist professions can be explained in part by this prohibition (Cindoğlu, 2010: 37, translation is mine)

Therefore, Cindoğlu (2010) argues that one significant issue affecting women's labor force participation has been the headscarf ban. Cindoğlu (2010) examines the impacts of the ban on the involvement of women who have higher education and have a professional career in working life. She argues that this ban impacted women's participation in working life not only as a civil servant, but it also affected the labor markets and private sector in terms of hiring policies, wage policies, working conditions, and promotion policies (Cindoğlu, 2010: 8).

Saktanber and Çorbacioğlu (2008) describe the process of politicization of headscarf in Turkish politics through various meanings attributed to it since the 1980s. They represent the situation as “headscarf skepticism” which demarcated society into two

camps of secularists and Islamists and gained new momentum after the AKP's attempt to lift the ban in 2008. From the feminist side, the responses were nuanced about the struggle for repealing the prohibition of the headscarf in public universities and buildings. As Kandiyoti puts it;

The issue predictably divided secular feminists between those who upheld the right to veil as an inalienable individual right to choose one's attire (and beliefs), and those who feared that this might be the thin edge of the wedge as far as women's equality - so far enshrined in the legal system - was concerned (Kandiyoti, 2011b, p. 6).

According to Cindoğlu and Zencirci (2008), this demarcation among the society about the veiling issue reached a critical point in 2007 when the next President of Turkey will be elected, and whose wife will be the first lady with her headscarf.

Sunier et al. (2011) indicate that the AKP attempted to lift the ban, after the second electoral victory with an increase in the votes from 33 percent in 2002 to 46.6 percent in 2007, and after the rise of the presence of the population with a more conservative outlook in the public spaces of Turkey. This created anxiety among the westernized urban population, who were thinking that the AKP had a hidden Islamic agenda (Sunier et al., 2011: 22). In 2008, the AKP passed two amendments about lifting the ban, which led to even a closure case. The Constitutional Court, with the application of the main opposition party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), annulled the amendments. However, finally in 2013, after the regulation in higher education, the AKP lifted the ban in the civil service (Kaya, 2015).

Jenny White (2005) argues that there is a paradox concerning the “new Islamic women” in Turkey. This paradox realized through veiling, as she puts it

The symbolic content of *tesettür* veiling is highly contradictory. On the one hand, it incorporates ideas about an “Islamic modernity” in which women are educated and professionally and politically active. On the other hand, it refers to values like patriarchal hierarchy, gender segregation and women's primary role as mothers and their place in the home. And at other times, it is simply a fashion that implies the wearer is urban, stylish and upwardly mobile, in intent, if not in fact (White, 2005: 128).

Considering these statements, White indicates that their political activism welcomed by the Welfare Party, which leads to a successful campaign, especially in the working-class neighborhoods in 1994 and 1995 elections (White, 2005: 131). When the issue is about the women's role, male party officials thought that they should be mothers and homemakers, even though they were critical about the headscarf ban, which was deemed as "undemocratic." White explains that for the male activists, the priority of educated professional women should be their husbands and family, and accordingly, they should stop working after getting married or having a child (White, 2005: 132).

In another article by White (2002), according to the same ethnographic study carried out in a working-class neighborhood of İstanbul in between 1994 and 1998, she argues that the role attributed to women from the Islamic circles has also been changing according to their class. This is reflected in the issue of women's employment as well. White (2002) states that

Both the mayor (R.T. Erdoğan) and the male activists, in other words, differentiate between women who are educated and may work at a profession and women who are not educated and would be better off at home than in a job where they could be oppressed and molested (White, 2002: 211).

It is also mentioned in the literature that even though primary aim of their activism is the abolishment of the headscarf ban, some Islamist feminist women discussed the women's social status and roles, women's education, career and leadership (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017: 612). They also challenged the men's domination in the Islamist movement that limits women's activism with the headscarf issue. These women also criticized the AKP's delay in abolishing the ban on the headscarf, which is reflected in the campaign of "No veiled candidate, no vote<sup>19</sup>" in 2011 elections, and the expression of "solemn silence" by Sibel Eraslan<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> About the campaign see <https://basortuluadayyoksaoydayok.wordpress.com/>

<sup>20</sup> About the "solemn silence" see Saktanber, A. 2006. Women and the iconography of fear: Islamicization in post-Islamist Turkey. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 32(1): 21–31.



According to Saktanber (2006), although the ban on the headscarf is the one of the reasons of confining women into the Islamic patriarchal settings, their participation to public sphere was encouraged for the empowerment of the symbolic presence of Islam in society while protesting the ban, but not for their liberation and challenging women's traditional roles. In this context, women who questioned the patriarchal rules and conducts, who are highly educated and politically active, were also criticized by Islamist male elites (Saktanber, 2006: 27).

In this respect, Zehra Yılmaz (2013), in her study "*Dindarlığın Yeniden İnşasında İslamcı Kadınlar (Islamist Women in the Restructuring of the Religiosity)*," examines the charitable associations established by or run by 'Islamic women.' Yılmaz (2013) argues that even though their increasing visibilities in the public realm and their exit from the confines of the private sphere, they are emancipated but unliberated due to the reproduction of traditional gender roles in the public sphere. Yılmaz (2013) asserts that women included in the public with their conventional roles of caregiving. Therefore, the "liberation" of a woman from the private sphere may not always lead to "emancipation." In addition to this, Zehra Yılmaz (2013) argues that women's spiritual and men's financial tasks in the public sphere refers to the transformed and a new form of the distinction between public/private. So, that Bano and Kalmbach argued Islamic discourses in today's Turkey explain the relationship between men and women through "complementarity" rather than equality. The gender relations are constructed with references to Islamic concepts of "stable," "balanced," "balance created by God," and the roles attributed to women and men within this framework. The functions of women and men and their associated spaces are defined in such a way that they cannot compete with each other. Therefore, she argues that:

The new divide through the public sphere (women's charities) puts women back in the cultural sphere of religion and man in the sphere of economy and politics. Thus, the internal tension and deadlock concerning gender relations always remain at the center of the agenda of the Islamic movement" (Z. Yılmaz, 2013: 26).

In this way, women's inclusion in the public sphere does not necessarily transform gender roles. The gender regime appropriates women to proper roles and regulates gender hierarchy accordingly.

This can be observed in the profession of preaching, as well. According to Çağatay (2018) repealing the headscarf ban in 2011 and 2016, "An increasing number of female civil servants are hired in the DİB and the Ministry of Labor, Social Services and Family (Ministry of Family and Social Policy until June 2018), institutions responsible for redesigning gender relations according to fitrat and complementarity" (Çağatay, 2018: 51). Çağatay asserts that

AKP's ideal of "strengthening the family institution" does not correspond to women's confinement in the familial sphere; unlike the Kemalist assumption that Islamism and women's public participation were incompatible, the latter proved to be inherent to the AKP's social engineering program (Çağatay, 2018: 51).

In this context, Çağatay argues that the veiled women's employment through the AKP's policies in the state bureaucracy of particularly DİB and the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policies is for social engineering projects of the AKP on the strengthening of the family.

Regarding the women's employment at DİB as preachers, which constitutes central aspect of this study, it is important to look at the literature in which the transformation of women's authority in the religious sphere is examined. Masoda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach (2009) edited a book, titled "Women, Leadership, and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority," by arguing that growing number of women in religious leadership, and their increasing existence in the religious spaces, which was previously at the monopoly of men, are not new, but take place since at least three decades in different contexts while focusing on the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. In this edition, the central focus of the twenty-one different cases, written by academicians from various disciplines, is to analyze the dynamics behind the female Islamic authority in mosque and *madrasah* spaces. In the introduction part, they argue that thanks to the mass communication technologies in recent years, there

emerged alternative ways of achieving and disseminating the knowledge, particularly the Islamic knowledge, and the new modes of religious instruction and leadership expanded (Bano & Kalmbach, 2009). However, even though the female preachers of DİB use the mass communication technologies as well, their sources of knowledge for the female leadership are supposed to be the classical Islamic texts, the publications of DİB, and the education of the Faculty of Theologies. The female students in these faculties indeed increased, however, it does not constitute a new way of acquiring Islamic knowledge in the sense that Bano and Kalmbach argued. Since it does not also constitute “relatively decentralized and multifaceted nature of twentieth century Islamic authority” (Bano & Kalmbach, 2009: 15). Since, female preachers work for DİB, which produces the official Islamic understanding since the beginning of the Republic.

Bano and Kalmbach mention the impact of the growth of female religious leadership and the exercise of Islamic authority as varying from a radical change in Islamic gender norms to their increasing activities in the most conservative Islamic institutions. They discuss the impact of female religious leaders on their communities despite the various limitations set by the patriarchal organization of the religious space (Bano and Kalmbach, 2009). Their arguments do not entirely fit the example of female preachers of DİB. Because as I will try to show in the following analysis chapter, female preachers of DİB are disseminating the gender regime shaped through the *fitrat* dictated them through DİB’s instructions, which does not denote a radical break from traditional gender norms.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

As a result, the gender regime in Turkey has been started to be defined in terms of the conceptualization of the *fitrat*, drawing upon its Islamic meaning. It is mobilized through the “naturalization” of the roles of women and men, which are explained as rooted in procreation. It has been mobilized through the discourses and policies of the AKP about women and the family. This has been structured by the institutional

transformations of the state's apparatuses, particularly the DİB and the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policies, also changing the name of the latter with an aim to prevent the institution of the family. Moreover, the AKP has enforced the civil society organizations, particularly KADEM for the mobilization of the concept of *fitrat*. With a particular definition of and emphasis on *fitrat*, women's roles are increasingly defined in terms of their domestic roles and motherhood responsibilities. In this way, the policies of the AKP which have been developed with a combination of the conservative and neoliberal values has been justified in terms of gender relations.

Moreover, through a particular conceptualization of *fitrat*, the AKP challenged the concept of "gender equality," and instead of it disseminated the idea of "gender justice." It has shown in the literature; this differentiation leads to a polarization between the secular feminist movement and the Islamic women's organizations. Moreover, the backlash against the feminist movement and the challenge of women's gains in Turkey has been justified through the conceptualization of "gender justice." It has been mobilized, not only through the policies and discourses of the AKP but also with the enforcement of the civil society organizations, such as KADEM. In this context, KADEM is mobilizing the term of "gender justice" in the academic works as well, with the establishment of the peer-reviewed academic journal on gender and women's issues.

Lastly, I tried to show the relationship between the ban on the headscarf in universities and other public institutions and the political activism of veiled women who became active in the protests and party politics of the now abolished Welfare Party and how those women later supported the gender policies of the AKP. However, both because of the ban on the headscarf, and also the patriarchal rules and structures in the conservative community, the professional employment of those active veiled women in the sociopolitical spaces of Turkey did not improve significantly. As Saktanber (2006) pointed out the ban on the headscarf is one of the main reasons for confining women into Islamic patriarchal settings. In that regard, Cindoğlu's study (2010) shows that the veiled women who had been excluded from the public spaces of employment

as civil servants experienced many obstacles in their professional career even in the private sector companies owned by the Islamic circles. Moreover, the study of Zehra Yılmaz (2013) on the employment of Muslim women in civil society organizations also shows that the gender regime of the professions as such, was shaped through the traditional gender roles with Islamic references.

Depending on these discussions, in the following chapter, I will try to analyze the gender regime of the profession of preaching in terms of the conceptualization of *fitrat*, through which the concept of “gender justice” has been defined accordingly. I argue that preaching as a profession for veiled women became much more institutionalized and improved in terms of its social status, its conditions and the professional activities in the sociopolitical context of Turkey. Thus, I will discuss preaching as a profession, which is understood as appropriate for women in terms of her *fitrat*. I will try to show how the profession of preaching is redesigned for the female graduates of the Faculties of Theology under the AKP’s increasingly conservative policies and discourses on gender and women.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this chapter, the design of the research will be elaborated in terms of the methodology, sampling of the interviewers, data collection techniques, and lastly, the way of analyzing the data. Because the study aims to examine the gender regime of the profession of preaching at DİB with a feminist standpoint methodology, it is necessary to look at the personal and occupational experiences of women who are doing this professional work in Turkey. The feminist standpoint theory is adopted in building the research design.

#### **3.1. Methodology**

In the feminist methodology, modern scientific knowledge, which is committed to reason, is criticized due to its bias arising from a masculinist perspective that favors ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’ in the name of “universalism.” It is argued that the scientific knowledge and its methods reflect the knowledge and practices of a particular group of the middle-class, white, and heterosexual men while claiming for universalism through objectivity and neutrality.

Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) discuss the history of the development of modern scientific knowledge since Descartes’ separation of the mind and the matter. They argue that the dualism of mind and body in Descartes’ thinking drew upon earlier dualistic thinking in western and Christian thought, which has impacted the development of western thinking about knowledge and science (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002: 27). Drawing upon this duality, feminist thinkers challenged the duality in which the authority between the subject of knowledge and its object has established.

Because it has been argued that the subject of knowledge who is the researcher with his commitment to the reason wants to control his object of knowledge.

The natural scientist, the man of culture, could unlock the secrets of nature in order to master her. One consequence of this logic was to conclude that the rational, civilized, cultured man, with his access to certainties, could master the savage, primitive or barbarian, who was subject only to passion or a childlike mind. (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002: 28).

The feminist standpoint theorists and epistemologists criticized these foundations of thinking about science. For instance, Stanley and Wise argued that the masculinist perspective wanted to control both nature and other humans in the name of objective science (Stanley & Wise, 1983a: 169). Additionally, feminist theorists argued that the way the knowledge is produced as neutral scientific knowledge is itself patriarchal (Smith, 1988; Stanley & Wise, 1983b). Since, the process of knowledge production is not value-free, but it is “contaminated by the researcher’s value” (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002: 45).

Men’s naturally superior capacity for rational thought critically distinguishes masculinity from femininity. The rise of modern science entails ways of thinking in which these dualistic categories of thought are both hierarchical and political (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002: 29).

In line with these statements, feminist theorists criticized the methodology of the modern-scientific knowledge, which drew upon reason, which is socially and politically constructed as a characteristic of men.

Following these arguments, Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) argue that the methodologies in social sciences vary in their way of establishing relations between reality, ideas, and experiences. They argue that

Claiming that feminists can tell a better story of gendered realities than can others means claiming that specific connections can be established between feminist knowledge and some reality that it represents (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002: 42).

In this context, Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) mention the research on domestic violence which became visible and which is shifted the understanding of the issue. In this way, it is argued that feminist researchers who are politically devoted to the “emancipation of women,” established specific connections between reality, feminist knowledge and women’s experiences. Therefore, by focusing on women’s experiences of everyday life and their understanding of it, through the concepts and frameworks developed by the feminist methodology in various disciplines, it would be possible to produce the knowledge of the gendered social life which has not been reached through the methodologies of the modern-scientific knowledge. In that regard, some feminist theorists suggest producing knowledge from the experiences of women. Harding (1986) calls them as “feminist standpoint epistemologists.”

In her groundbreaking study, titled “The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology,” Dorothy Smith (1987) develops a method for analyzing how their gendered point of view shapes women’s perspectives. She starts by giving an account of the historical process of “women’s silencing” in the academic writing that promotes itself as universal; however, it is male-centered. She argues that

What men were doing was relevant to men, was written by men about men for men. Men listened and listened to what one another said. This is how a tradition is formed. A way of thinking develops in this discourse through the medium of the written and printed word as well as in speech. It has questions, solutions, themes, styles, standards, ways of looking at the world (Smith, 1987: 18).

Considering these statements, she argues that there is a need to develop ways of doing “a sociology for women” which is different from the male-centered sociology, because women become subjects rather than mere objects of the study (Smith, 1987). She argues that “a sociology for women” is not exclusively about women, but it “addresses society and social relations from the standpoint of women situated outside, rather than within the relations of ruling” (Smith, 1987: 46). Smith argues that she is problematizing the everyday world and of its practices, because:



It points to the fact that the everyday world as the matrix of our experience is organized by relations tying it into larger processes in the world as well as by locally organized practices. A feminist mode of inquiry might then begin with women's experience from women's standpoint and explore how it is shaped in the extended relations of larger social and political relations (Smith 1987: 10).

Following these statements, she continues by explaining the specific research strategies for carrying out a study for women and about women based on their everyday life practices. Smith argues that feminist researchers can begin with making the assumptions, which are made in the sociological discourse through a male-centered perspective, observable (Smith, 1987: 64). Thus, she states that in that sociological discourse, "Its own organized practices upon the world have treated these assumptions as features of the world itself" (Smith, 1987: 64). Therefore, there is a need to develop a feminist methodology that is not male-biased and that excludes women's experiences. To go beyond that and also to resist that, a feminist methodology is needed, which builds upon women's subjective experiences of their relations and the social systems around them. This approach prioritizes qualitative research over the quantitative one.

Consequently, in order to develop feminist research that aims to underline women's perceptions about their own situation, their perspectives about their lives, relations, and the world around them, the study should drive upon the narratives of women. They assume that women's experiences reflect a more complete and less distorted kind of social reality (Harding 1987), and their own accounts are more valid (Stanley and Wise 1983, 1990). However, the limitation of this methodology is that it is limited by the views of the women interviewed. On the other hand, it is limited when it is considered that the women's view of their own experiences is not independent of the social systems in which they live. Therefore, Harding (1987) proposes to decide carefully on the questions to be asked and the resources allocated to the research, rather than determining which methodology is better.

Lastly, one significant aspect of the feminist standpoint methodology is self-reflexivity. Feminist standpoint methodologists and theorists suggested that the

researcher should think about and reflect upon her own position within the research. Accordingly, as mentioned above, the methods of modern-scientific knowledge claim for objectivity and neutrality through creating a hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched. This process of producing knowledge excludes the position of the researcher. Considering these statements, Smith (1987) argues that the objectivity for the social scientist should be sustained with careful attention to the experiences of the sociologist herself.

Objectivity for the social scientist has involved continual attention to the methodological and epistemological problems arising from the fact that the cognitive domain of sociology has to be organized in and-in a sense-out of the lived reality of the world the sociologist participates in her total being. The scientific attitude sometimes enforces an exclusion of concerns and interests— exclusion that seems artificial, strange, and wrong (Smith 1987: 7).

In the feminist standpoint theory, one critical aspect is the relationship between the researcher and the researched because doing feminist research is not only scientific and academic work but also politically a feminist endeavor that should intend the emancipation of the women. Thus, the structure of the relationship must be carefully determined. The hierarchical relation of the male-biased sociological inquiry between the researcher and the researched should be overcome, because the field is an experience both for the researcher and the researched alike.

In this respect, Stanley and Wise (1990) question the nature of knowledge epistemologically in terms of the relation between the researcher and the researched. Regarding this, they argue that researchers' experiences about the social world around them are not monolithic, as it was not for the researched women as well. As for them, "women is a socially and politically constructed category, the ontological basis of which lies in a set of experiences rooted in the material world" (Stanley & Wise, 1990: 21). As a result, understandings of both the researcher and the researched are "temporally, intellectually, politically and emotionally grounded and are thus as contextually specific" (Stanley & Wise, 1990: 23). Therefore, they argue that feminist methodology should be self-reflexive; thereby it should be derived from the

experiences of women by the feminist researchers whose experiences are also subject to change due to the experience of the research itself.

To sum up, the methodologies of modern western science have been criticized since the 1980s by feminist standpoint theorists and epistemologists due to its male-centered perspective that favors “neutrality” and “objectivity.” Feminist standpoint methodologists strongly argued that there is a need to develop a feminist methodology. What is significant for feminist standpoint methodology is to problematize women’s experiences of the everyday world and its practices. It is vital to focus on the women’s experiences from women’s standpoint that is shaped in the relations of broader social and political processes. In that regard, in the context of this study, the more extensive social and political relations are discussed in terms of DİB’s policies under the rule of the AKP government, as constructing the gender regime and the proper womanhood with particular Islamic references to the concept of *fitrat* and “gender justice.” By doing this, I aimed to discuss the place of *fitrat* and gender justice in the narratives of women while doing the professional activities of a preacher. This study employs feminist standpoint theory through focusing on women’s own experiences of both becoming a preacher and performing the profession. At the same time, this study also aims to examine the underlying social structures which deeply influence and shape these experiences by discussing the policies and discourses developed and enforced by the AKP government on women and family.

### **3.2. Field and the Data Collection**

Being informed by the feminist standpoint theory, this study is based on a methodology that prioritizes women’s accounts of their professional experiences of preaching in contemporary Turkey, which is mainly influenced by political, social and structural forces that shape this profession. For that purpose, this study also examines the gender regime in Turkey which is shaped by the particular Islamic references to the concept of *fitrat*, developed by the policies of the state institutions.

The methodology involves a 2-stage data gathering process; the first is the DİB's publications, and the second is the interviews. Firstly, to discuss the DİB's policies and strategies on the increase of female employment and activities targeting women, I examined DİB's publication. Among them, the most significant ones are the two booklets about DİB's activities, a cooperation protocol with ASPB, and the working directives of DİB. Initially, "*Kadın ve Aileye Yönelik Çalışmalar 2007-2009* (Works about women and Family 2007-2009)" published by DİB (2010). As indicated by one respondent, this booklet is the first work covering DİB's newly established services and activities for women. The second similar booklet was published in 2017 with a similar heading "*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nın Kadın ve Aile Çalışmaları: 2011-2015* (DİB's Work Women and Family: 2011-2015)". The second booklet published in the period of a different president, Mehmet Görmez; after significant transformations in the structure of DİB; after the first initiatives regarding the increase of the female employees at DİB; and also after some projects, the first of their kinds, have already completed regarding women and family. I used these two booklets to reach the information about the DİB's strategies, its perspective on women issues, its projects and activities, and also the numbers of women employed as preachers.

Moreover, I compared these two booklets to detect the transformation of DİB's perspective on the issue after 2010. I reached these booklets through my respondents. In addition to them, I reviewed the annual activity reports, which are published online from 2010 to 2018, of various departments, particularly the General Directorate of Religious Services, to reach the official information about the activities and projects of DİB on women and family. In addition to the publications of DİB, I examined the official documents, which I reached over the online search, such as working directives, in which the preachers' duties and responsibilities are defined; cooperation protocols with various state institutions, in which the preachers' activities in these institutions are based upon, and the organization law of DİB.

Secondly, I conducted thirteen in-depth interviews with women who either work at DİB or retired after working at DİB. As it is exhibited in Chapter 3, DİB is a state

institution that is politically-oriented according to the policies of the governments of their times since the early years of the Republic, also in contemporary Turkey under the successive AKP governments with its conservative policies. It holds a controversial place within the secular state structure, with its high budget, and personnel in all over Turkey. It is criticized particularly for its public statements and activities about the issues on gender, sexuality, and family with Islamic references. Therefore, the women who work there are considerably hard to reach, and expecting them to be transparent is also another issue. However, because my mother also works at DİB as a Qur'an course instructor, it was relatively more accessible for me. Besides the women that I had a pilot study about the questionnaire I prepared, I got to introduce with others through the snowball sampling technique.

My mother's position at DİB also helped me to create a relationship of trust with the interviewees. Especially when they asked why I am interested in them and their work, I told them that I was familiar with the issue because of my mother's profession. This allowed them to see me as one of them. However, because of my appearance without a headscarf with the "modern" outfits, and because of my program as Gender and Women's Studies at Middle East Technical University –a university which is known as oppositional to the government-, I felt like they were a little suspicious about my aims. However, within the conversation, some of them stated that I was included in "our neighborhood." In order to build rapport and to go beyond the hierarchical relation between the researcher and the researched, I shared my own experiences and my perspective on this study as well.

Initially, I introduced myself as a graduate student writing a thesis in the Gender and Women's studies program at Middle East Technical University. Then, I introduced my research topic as the increase of female employment and activities for women at DİB since the early 2000s, and the related transformation of the DİB's structure, particularly the institutionalization of the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus. I explained that based on these developments, I mainly aim to examine the profession of preaching for women which I approach as a recreated position for women at DİB.

In that regard, I stated that I am trying to examine the processes of this recreation in terms of the transformation of the profession, development of the professional formation, professional duties and responsibilities by looking at the daily experiences of female preachers.

Initially, I asked questions to women regarding their life stories (See Appendix A). After asking their demographic information, I asked preachers how they decided to become a preacher and in which processes they passed through for becoming a preacher. For instance, I questioned how they chose to study in the Faculty of Theology, what their career prospect was at the university years and after graduation. Secondly, I asked questions about the specificities of the profession of preaching. I wanted them to define the profession regarding the working hours, daily duties, how they prepare for the preaching activities, which institutions they visit, what the sources they benefitted for preaching, and the difficulties and easiness they face during professional work. Lastly, I asked questions about their perspective regarding the place of women in society and the family to understand their views considering the gender regime. In this respect, I asked questions about women's roles and responsibilities, what a preacher suggests women basing on which sources, why family is a significant institution for their profession and DIB. Besides these questions, mostly the conversation evolved to various topics including the perspectives about women's participation in the workforce concerning her place in the family.

Despite the much easiness of reaching the field, some of the respondents were not willing to express their life-stories and to share something personal that could lead to their recognition. They mostly did not allow me to record their voices for the later transcription, even though I explained that the voice recording would be used only by me and for this study. Even though these are challenges about the field, they could be overcome. The first challenge is overcome by asking questions regarding their perspectives on their professional experiences and their views on the women's issues, besides the personal and demographic information if they did not want to share. Because the aim of the study is to discuss the professional formation of preachers

concerning the gender identity produced within this profession in relation to the conceptualization of *fıtrat* and its significations. The second challenge of not recording the interview is overcome by taking notes with keywords. I tried not to miss any statement of them, and I transcribed the interviews soon after it took place.

### **3.2.1. Sampling**

The interviewees selected among the preachers who started to work at DİB after 2004, in which the first positions assigned as the preacher to 100 women at once. This number of positions is higher than the previously employed female preachers at DİB.

As it was indicated in the previous chapters as well, female preaching is a recreated profession since the early 2000s at DİB. Even though women employed as a preacher in very small numbers before, the number, and also the percentage of female preachers started to increase dramatically after the opening of the tenured preacher position for 100 women at one time by the new administration of DİB in 2004 (Tütüncü 2010). Moreover, their working areas expanded, and the definition of the profession has developed since that time. In that regard, as will be mentioned in the following chapter, the first symposium held for preachers and preaching activities in 2004. In that symposium, it was also asserted that the preaching profession has been expanding its scope and transforming to include religious and family counseling as well.

Moreover, 2004 was also critical because it is one year after the appointment of Prof. Dr. Bardakoğlu as the president of DİB; that is, both the employment and activities targeting women increased dramatically. On the other hand, it is also significant because it was two years before that the law on the forgiveness of specific disciplinary punishments of civil servants and other public duties was pardoned (Cindoğlu, 2010). As was discussed in the previous chapter, Cindoğlu indicates, too many women were dismissed because they did not comply with the dress code, and too many women were forced to resign (Cindoğlu, 2010: 35). Thus, women who were dismissed because they continued to wear the headscarf until 2005 were able to return to their job, however,

as long a civil servant who returns to the public office continues to wear the veil, she will receive similar investigations and registry penalties and will be dismissed (Cindoğlu, 2010). In this context, DİB became a significant institution for the employment of women who graduated from the Faculty of Theology and dismissed from the public offices. Indeed, it necessitates a quantitative study to detect if there is a causal relation between DİB's employment of women and the amnesty mentioned above, however it is reflected at DİB's employment of all the Qur'an course instructors between 2004-2007 as women (DİB 2010: 70). Moreover, despite the first most significant number of positions assigned for female preachers in 2004, after that, new preacher cadres opened for women who can be promoted from the positions of Qur'an course instructor or Religious Services Specialist.

Therefore, the female preachers were selected among those who started to work as a preacher in the period after 2004, the year in which the profession of preaching started to be recreated as a new career opportunity for the female graduates of the Faculty of Theology.

### **3.2.2. The profile of the interviewers**

As mentioned above, interviews with thirteen women conducted. Even though three of them are not in the position of preachers, they work in the central organization of DİB (See Appendix B), in which the strategies determined, and decisions made regarding all the activities of religious personnel. Among the three women who were not preachers, one of them also retired from DİB at the time the interview took place. Additionally, I conducted in-depth interviews with ten female preachers. The five of these preachers work in the field, in the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus. They are visiting the various state institutions for preaching, organizing and participating in the activities of the mufti offices. The other five of them work in the central organization of DİB, connected to the Department of Family and Religious Counselling. Even though some of them connected to the mufti offices at the provincial



organization of DİB, they were working in the central organization by the official assignments when the interviews conducted, not working as a preacher in the field.

As could be seen from the table below, they are all graduates of the Faculty of Theology, except one who graduated from the Faculty of Literacy. They are graduated from different universities, which are known as having different perspectives. Some women graduated from Ankara University, which is known as with its more historical perspective that could be criticized as “radical” in the common knowledge. Some women graduated from Marmara University, which is known for its more classical view regarding Islam. When the two faculties are compared the faculty at Ankara University has been emphasized with the lectures on philosophy, sociology and psychology, while faculty at Marmara University is known with its lectures on classical Islamic sciences. These two Theology Faculties in these two universities are regarded among the best Theology Faculties in Turkey. Some women are graduated from universities in different cities in Turkey.

Table 1. The Profile of the Sample

Interviewer	Age Cohort	Education	Year of University Graduation	Year of Recruitment at DİB	Position at DİB before being Promoted to Preacher Position	The Position at DİB at the Time of the Interview	Year of Promotion to the Preacher Position
Reyhan	30-40	Faculty of Theology	2006	2006	Qur'an course instructor	Preacher	2010
Elif	30-40	Faculty of Theology	2011	2009	Qur'an course instructor	Preacher	2016
Yasemin	50-60	Faculty of Theology	1989	2001		Working in Department of Family and Religious Guidance	2001
Nida	30-40	Faculty of Theology	2004	2006	Qur'an course instructor	Preacher	2016
Jale	50-60	Faculty of Theology	1980ler	2005		Preacher	2005+
Azize	40-50	Faculty of Theology	1999	2000	Qur'an course instructor	Preacher	2012
Neşe	30-40	Faculty of Theology	2005	2005	Qur'an course instructor	Preacher	2011
Süreyya	40-50	Faculty of Theology	2004	2004	Qur'an course instructor	Preacher	2017
Feriha	50-60	Faculty of Theology	1983	2006		Retired from Diyanet	-
Meltem	40-50	Faculty of Theology	2000	2007	Qur'an course instructor	Preacher	2009
Havva	50-60	Faculty of Literature		2006+		Specialist in Diyanet, Working in Department of Family and Religious Guidance	-
Gül	50-60	Faculty of Theology	1999	2005	-	Preacher	2005
Dilan	50-60	Faculty of Theology	1993	2007	Religious services specialist	Preacher	2017

When the age range is considered, there seems a variation that indicates that considerable number of interviewees consists of newly-graduates of universities. Those are four women aged between thirty and forty, who are all preachers at the time of the interview. They all experienced the 28 February process while they were about to start their degree in university or when they were in the early years of their university

education. Regarding the questions on how they decided to become a preacher, they mostly indicated that it was due to the change in the regulation of coefficient, which high school students get based on the type of their high school and also their notes in the school to be accepted into universities. About becoming a preacher and working at DİB, they were aware of such a position at DİB, while they were graduated.

On the contrary, the age group of 50-60, some of them became personnel of DİB, after working as a teacher of Religion and Ethics in primary, secondary, and high schools connected to the Ministry of Education. The age group 50-60 consists of six women among the interviewees. Three of them were preachers, one in the field and the other two were in the central organization. And among the other three women aged between 50s-60s, one of them, Feriha, retired in 2010 with the resignation of Bardakoğlu. She was the one who had many responsibilities in the projects and seminars about the elimination of violence against women and gender equality. She had been working in the central organization and had a more critical stance towards DİB. On the other hand, the other two women, Havva and Yasemin, aged between 50s-60s, were in the central organization as well. Both of them work in the Department of Religious and Guidance. Yasemin had a hierarchically higher position, and she has been working at DİB since 2001, earlier than all the others. She also had the experience of being a preacher before.

Besides them, there was a relatively small sample of three women aged between 40 and 50. All of them are graduates of Theology Faculties. All of the three became preachers after they worked as the Qur'an course instructor as their first position at DİB.

Among ten women who are preachers, seven of them entered the exam of promotion in the institution. After they successfully passed these exams, they appointed as preachers. One woman among the ten preachers, Dilan, was also from another position of Religious Services Specialist, which is a hierarchically higher position than the Qur'an course instructor, lower than preaching. There is only one woman, Gül, among ten preachers, who started to work directly as a preacher at DİB since 2005. At the

moment, she works in the central administration, in a position higher than the preachers of the field.

Moreover, among my respondents, some women are graduate students in the Faculty of Theologies. Some of them have already completed their master's degrees, and some of them were still students. Moreover, two women indicated that they are the Ph.D. students and in the process of writing their thesis. Their thesis topics are mostly related to the women and family issues within the Islamic understanding. One of them stated that she is writing her thesis about the conceptualization of violence against women in Islamic law, which is interpreted from the Qur'an. One of them mentioned her topic as a post-colonial reading of the Islamophobic approaches to Prophet Muhammad.

On the other hand, as will be mentioned in the following chapter, women have been increasingly commissioned abroad for studying about the familial problems of Turkey-originated citizens in European countries. Among my respondents, three of them indicated that they had such experience. However, they didn't share the details of where they had been, and what their responsibilities were.

DİB has three primary organizational units (See Appendix C); one is the central organization in Ankara, the second is the provincial organization in which all the mufti offices and the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus connected, and the third is the organization in abroad that deals with DİB's activities abroad. The first is the central organization located in Ankara, in which the president, vice presidents, High Board of Religious Affairs (*Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu*) which is the highest decision-making and advisory body on religious matters, eight different general directorates (*Genel Müdürlükler*), and various head of departments (*daire başkanlıkları*) under each general directorate connected. The central organization consists of the main service units, advisory and supervisory units, and auxiliary units as well as the presidential authority. In the central organization, there is General Directorate of Religious Services, in which the Department of Family and Religious Guidance connected since its establishment in 2011. This department established to carry out the projects and

activities about the family. It is assigned to coordinate the works of Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus. Among my respondents, seven women work in the central organization at the time of the interview, and one woman retired after working there. Among these seven women, five of them work in the position of the preacher. In those interviews, except with the one who is retired, some of them were not willing to share their demographic information. Moreover, because they were not working in the field, they were explaining the organizational structure of DİB regarding women and the works carried out by the Department of Religious Guidance and Family.

Secondly, the provincial organization consists of provincial and district mufti offices and training centers. In the provincial organization, provincial and district muftis, preachers, prisoner preachers, imam-hatips, *muezzin-kayyim*, and Qur'an course instructors are all affiliated to the muftis. In some places such as Yenimahalle, the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus are in the same building with the mufti office. However, in some areas such as in Kızılay, they had an independent office in a busy place under the subway. Preachers are connected to mufti offices, and the mufti assigns them for the visits to the various state institutions. Among my respondents, five of them work in the field as preachers, connected to the district mufti offices of Ankara. In those interviews, they were more willing to talk about their life narratives and demographic information. They shared their experiences during the "religious guidance" sessions and their visit to different institutions.

To sum up, the in-depth interviews conducted with thirteen women who work at DİB either as preachers connected to both central and provincial organizations of DİB or from other cadres connected to the Department of Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus in the central organization of DİB. Preachers are mostly related to the provincial organization of DİB, working in Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus connected to a district or provincial mufti offices. Some preachers work in the central organization of DİB, even though their cadres connected to provincial organizations. Among my respondents, there were both the preachers who work in the field, and there

were women who work in the central organization and work in the hierarchically higher positions within the decision-making structures of DİB.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

This chapter explained the reason for adopting a feminist standpoint theory and methodology regarding the research question at hand. Firstly, this draws attention to the criticisms of feminist theory starting from the 1980s on the methodologies of the modern and western scientific knowledge. It is argued that the gender-blind and male-centered social and political sciences are conducting the study while universalizing the study object at hand through valuing the “objectivity” and “neutrality.” However, in the feminist standpoint theory, it is argued that the male-centered ways of producing knowledge do not focus on the women’s experiences; therefore, these studies are “silencing women” in the realm of social sciences. It is argued that it focuses on male experiences of the male scientists by using their own categories, assumptions and framework (Stanley and Wise, 1990; Smith, 1987). What is significant for feminist standpoint methodology is to problematize women’s experiences of the everyday world and its practices. It is vital to focus on the women’s experiences from women’s standpoint that is shaped in the relations of broader social and political relations.

In the context of this study, the broader social and political relations are discussed in terms of the DİB’s policies under the rule of the AKP government, as constructing the gender regime and the proper womanhood with particular Islamic references to the concept of *fitrat* and “gender justice.” However, to examine the women’s experiences within this broader social and political atmosphere, their narratives will be analyzed in the fifth chapter. It is significant to focus on women’s own narratives to discuss how they perceive the gendered social and political reality around them.

Rather than analyzing only the publications of DİB and the policies of the government on the issue, it is essential to examine women’s narratives about the processes of becoming a preacher and how they are experiencing this profession at DİB, which has

been a highly patriarchal organization. In connection to this, with the question at hand, their perception of the concept of *fitrat* and “gender justice” could be discussed through adopting a feminist standpoint methodology. Therefore, the qualitative research method is adopted by conducting in-depth interviews with thirteen women. Among them, some women work both in the central organization, in which the decision-making cadres exist, and some women work at the provincial organization to provide services in the field. Including both of these samples is significant because it enabled me to examine both the women’s experiences in the field and the women’s experiences in the hierarchically higher positions, who are coordinating and cooperating the women’s professional activities in the field.

As a result, women’s life narratives, their experiences of becoming a preacher, and their perspectives on womanhood, in terms of women’s domestic responsibilities and her place within the familial sphere will be analyzed based on the narratives of women. To discuss the construction of womanhood within and through the profession of preaching with a gender regime referencing a particular Islamic understanding of *fitrat*, it is significant to analyze the life narratives of these professional women.

## CHAPTER 4

### INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND OF *DIYANET İŞLERİ BAŞKANLIĞI*

#### 4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the position of DİB, the historical transformation of its duties and responsibilities, and the recent emphasis on women both in terms of employment and as a target of the services is discussed.

The historical transformation is examined in order to reflect the significant place of DİB in the history of the Turkish Republic. DİB could be seen as the successor the institution of *Şeyhülislamlık*<sup>21</sup>, whose duties and responsibilities changed over time, in Ottoman government. It is argued that DİB has been established in the secular state structure of the Turkish Republic, in order to produce the official understanding regarding Islam, and provide services regarding Islamic faith and worship. The historical transformation of the institution is discussed with a particular focus on the female preachers' recreated professional activities. In that regard, it is emphasized that some of their activities are in line with previously defined roles of DİB.

Afterward, DİB's transformation under the rule of the AKP government since 2002 bears significant consequences for this study. Because this study aims to examine the gender regime produced through an Islamic interpretation of the concept of *fıtrat*, which has been mobilized by the AKP government in its policies and discourses regarding gender norms. In that regard, the increasing authority of DİB and the

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<sup>21</sup> *Şeyhülislam* means the person with the highest degree of religious knowledge and authority. During the Ottoman Empire, *Şeyhülislam* was the state official with the highest authority in religious matters since 1424 till 1922. *Şeyhülislam* was considered the head of the science class (*ilmiye sınıfı*), which is dealing with the issues on education, jurisdiction, and Muslim canonical laws, the *shari'a* law.



consequences of these processes are examined with a specific focus on DİB's women policies. Because the inclusion of women to the ranks of DİB and the target of its activities as a policy is a significant transformation in the last decades regarding the gender regime constructed through the services, activities, and discourses of the institution.

#### 4.2. Historical Transformation of *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*

Grand National Assembly of Turkey established on 23 April 1920 and formed the government on 3 May 1920. In this Assembly, instead of the Ottoman *Şeyhülislamlık ve Evkaf Nezareti*<sup>22</sup>, they formed *Şer'iyye ve Evkaf Vekaleti* (Ministry of Religious Affairs and Foundations). The Ottoman government assigned *muftis* from the *ulema* class to give religious advice and services to people. Even though his roles changed over history, *şeyhülislam* adopted as the head of the *ulema* and reached a superior position with the laws of Fatih Sultan Mehmet. Yanardağ states that their significance within the state bureaucracy had increased with the Ebussuud Efendi's thirty years of being *Şeyhülislam* (1545-1574); they had the highest degree after the *Sadrâzam* (grand vizier) (Yanardağ, 2012: 217). After that time, besides science and jurisdiction (*ilim ve kazâ*), their opinions asked about the state's administration and politics (Yanardağ, 2012: 217). However, it was not a part of the council till II. Mahmud, who wanted to control and regulate *ulema* by turning *Şeyhülislam* into a ministry (Yanardağ, 2012). Çakır and Bozan indicate that the institution of *Şeyhülislamlık*, which prepared the legitimate ground for even the murder of sultans with the fatwas, lost its power during the modernization period of Ottoman Empire and turned into an institution that only regulated the religious life (2005: 13). In the II. Constitutional Period (1908-1920), the control over *Şeyhülislam* had been increased, its power restricted, and all the Sharia courts connected to the Ministry of Justice and all the madrasahs connected to the Ministry of Education (Yanardağ, 2012: 219). Therefore, before the Republic, if

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<sup>22</sup> The *Nazırlık* (*Nezaret*) in Ottoman Empire, and *Vekalet* (*Vekillik*) in the first Grand National Assembly of Turkey is the counterpart of the ministry. In this respect, *Şeyhülislamlık ve Evkaf Nezareti* is the ministry responsible for the institution of *Şeyhülislamlık* and all the Islamic foundations.

*Şeyhülislam* would be taken as the predecessor of DİB, its authority had been restricted.

Even though, *Şeyhülislam* had only an advisory role in the formation of the public laws before II. Mahmud, *Şer'iyye ve Evkaf Vekaleti* had a ministerial position at the council in 1920, and it affected the council's decisions. The first thing that the Ministry had done is to read the declaration stating that the working for the liberation of the country is the order of Islam to declare to the nation and the Muslim world that the Independence War started in Anatolia was not opposed to Islam (Yanardağ, 2012: 74). Yanardağ argues that *Şeyhülisamlık*, who had the authority of the fatwa institution till the end of the 19th century, had lost its power and removed from the council, means that the fatwa's influence over the government affairs had been diminished (2012: 221). However, under the circumstances of the occupation, *Şer'iyye ve Evkaf Vekaleti* had been given a place in the government, and the fatwa institution's effectiveness had been increased (Yanardağ, 2012: 211,221). After the establishment of the *Şer'iyye ve Evkaf Vekaleti*, Islamic religious institutions and organizations, and all the foundations (*vakıf*), are connected to it. The ministry assigned to be responsible for religious services.

The principle of national sovereignty declared in the first article of the law of the new government of Turkey, which was on the way of establishing a modern state, with the statement of "Sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the nation<sup>23</sup>" on 20 January 1921. On 1 November 1921, the sultanate was abolished; and the principle of national sovereignty was secured. At that time, the caliphate was not abolished, but its political power was diminished, and it was not included in the political decision-making mechanism. Finally, on 29 October 1923, the Republic was declared. Then, the laws of revolution began to pass through parliament.

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<sup>23</sup> *Hakimiyet bila kaydü şart milletindir.*

In this regard, 3 March 1924 was a critical point in the history of the laic and modern Turkish Republic, and in the history of DİB due to laws passed through the parliament. Abolition of *Şer'îye ve Evkaf Vekaleti* was passed from the parliament; Caliphate was abolished; the law of *Tevhid-i Tedrisat* (unification of education) was proclaimed. On that day, instead of the *Şer'îye ve Evkaf Vekaleti*, *Diyanet İşleri Riyaseti*<sup>24</sup> was established. In this way, its political authority at the ministerial level transformed into administrative duty level; authority of the religion in the state administration narrowed; and, religious services were included in the general administration and taken under state supervision (Yanardağ, 2012: 94). On the other hand, with the *Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu*, all the madrasah and schools were connected to the Ministry of National Education, and the ministry was assigned to open schools for the education of DİB's personnel as well.

On that day, *tekke* and *zaviyes* (Islamic monasteries) were connected to DİB; however, later on (30 November 1925), they were abolished. Yanardağ states that with the abolishment of the *tekke*, *zaviye* and *türbes*, and the abolishment and the prohibition of the activities of *şeyh*, *derviş*, *mürît*, *dede*, *çelebi*, *baba* who were living in the community with their unique understanding of religion; religious services became under the responsibility of only DİB (Yanardağ, 2012: 98). Yanardağ argues that in this way, a trend has begun towards the pure structure of Islam (Yanardağ, 2012: 98).

In this regard, Gözaydın (2009) sees the laws in this period as significant in the process of the formation of the Republic's legal structure which is based on the principle of national sovereignty. Gözaydın (2009) examines this process of transformation of DİB from ministerial level to an administrative duty level, in terms of administrative law. She argues that the first political decision-making cadres of the Republic, who tried to establish a secular state and a secular social structure, were consistent with their decision to assign the religious affairs to the management of an organization within the technical administration, not to a unit within the Council of Ministers. Because the

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<sup>24</sup> Law no. 5634 of 23 March 1950, name of *Diyanet İşleri Riyaseti* turned into *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*

Ministry was the highest hierarchical authority of the central administration in technical terms and was an executive unit in a political sense (Gözüaydın, 2009: 61). Therefore, in this way, they both managed to take control of religion within the community, and they put religious affairs into a secular structure (Gözüaydın, 2009).

DİB's duties defined according to Law no. 429, as to carry out the works of faith and worship of Islamic religion and to manage mosques and other Islamic places (Gözüaydın, 2009: 64). Nonetheless, with an arrangement introduced in 1931, the administration of mosques and masjids, and their employees transferred to the Directorate of Awqaf (Evkaf Umum Müdürlüğü). Gözüaydın emphasizes that the duties of the DİB were narrowed with this arrangement, and it was limited to conducting the works of faith and worship of Islamic religion (2009: 65, 108). For Gözüaydın, this is a significant reflection of Kemalist *laicite* (Gözüaydın, 2008: 218). Because with this regulation, only the religious affairs relating to the worship and faith became the responsibility of DİB, and "all other areas of interest were considered to be under the legislative power of the Parliament of Turkey" (Gözüaydın, 2008: 218).

Gözüaydın contends that politicians' attitudes towards religion in the early years of the Republic, which could be described as "sterile" began to change, including the discourses and policies of the Republican People's Party, in the process of transition to the multiparty democracy (Gözüaydın, 2009: 204). This was reflected in the discussions that took place in the parliament on the issues varying from the number of mosques to the lack of İmams (Gözüaydın, 2009: 204-209). With the amendments made to the organization law in 1950, the management of mosques and masjids, and the mosque officials transferred back to the DİB (Gözüaydın, 2009: 69). At the same time, the names of some units changed, the number of personnel increased, and their working areas expanded (69). Moreover, the preachers, who were not included in the regulations before, were involved in the provincial organization and transferred to the cadre (Gözüaydın, 2009: 70, 188). Regarding the positive attitude towards the DİB's staff and their salaries, Gözüaydın argues that:

At least some parts of these efforts is a political investment for both personal expectations and also for increasing the votes. The use of religious personnel as a political instrument may not seem dangerous to the politician, but surely the most damaging consequence is for the state in which it is located and for the system in which it (state) is built (Gözaydın, 2009: 209-210, translation is mine).

In this regard, it could be argued that the organization of DİB and the circumstances of its staff were a tool for politics. This was against the discourses of the founders of the Turkish Republic that religious affairs should be kept away from the politics for the protection of itself from the government policies (Yanardağ, 2012: 91-92). Moreover, it could be argued that the policies considering the religious affairs, the structure of DİB, and the conditions of the DİB's staff have always been connected to the political ideology of the differentiating governments of their times.

In connection with this point, after the 1960 coup d'état, both the new constitution of 1961, and the organizational law of DİB (Law No. 633 in 1965), and its amendments can be regarded as in line with the previous point. The constitution of 1961 gave DİB a constitutional status, placed in the state administration, even though there were discussions regarding the place of an institution dealing with religious affairs within the state bureaucracy (Gözaydın, 2009: 38-39).

After the establishment of the new constitution, and after the long discussions and diverse studies, the bill on the establishment and duties of DİB accepted in Parliament in 1965 (Gözaydın, 2009: 73). The decisions were including the development and enlargement of DİB and increasing the number of directorates within the Presidency (Gözaydın, 2009: 73-74). Moreover, with this new law, in addition to the DİB's previously defined roles of administration of the Islamic principles of faith and worship, "carrying out works related to Islamic morals" added into the primary responsibilities of DİB (Gözaydın, 2006:4). According to Gözaydın, the addition of the moral principle is the most significant blow to the constitutional secular state principle. As she puts it:

To create an administrative body to offer services to meet the general, daily needs of practicing Islam may be justifiable as ‘public service’ where about 95% of the population belongs to Islam; however to assign to this organization a function such as ‘to carry out affairs related to moral foundations’ whose content is legally ambiguous, indicates that the state preferred to use the organization as an ideological tool in a manner different from the original intent of the founding elite (Gözyayın, 2006: 4)

Therefore, she (2009) argues that those times’ legislators turned DİB into an ideological tool, in a different manner than the founders of the Republic. In addition to this, she argues that in this context, "enlightening society about religion" and “religious education” are not public services, but part of the official politics (Gözyayın, 2008: 221). In this way, DİB was used by the state as “an administrative tool to propagate official ideology regarding Islam” (Gözyayın, 2008: 221).

Today the profession of preachers and their activities should be analyzed in terms of those responsibilities. Maritato analyzes the female preachers’ employment through contextualizing it with the debate concerning the religion and the state, and the state’s control over religion (Maritato, 2015, 2016, 2017). Maritato (2015) argues that DİB’s employment of women for the ‘female moral support’ is enforcing the state’s role of educating people on religion and ethics. She examines how and to what extent an old traditional activity turned into a new profession by examining the daily activities of preachers. She argues that with the mechanisms of preaching, the state regulates the female religiosity by transforming it from the private form into a public affair subject to state regulation (Maritato, 2015: 441). For her, this infiltration of the religious into the secular sphere leads to a redefinition of Turkey’s Republican conception of secularism, that is, religion is also redefined as a form of ‘moral support’ (Maritato, 2016). Providing religious and family guidance for women by a state-employed religious personnel constitutes a compelling case especially when the AKP government’s increasingly conservative policies on gender issues considered. However, this does not contradict with the previously defined duty of providing moral principles of the Islamic religion.

One significant change after those years was the addition of providing an Islamic understanding that is enhancing national unity and solidarity, with an emphasis on the principle of laicism, to the duties of the DİB (Gözaydın, 2009: 84). It was indicated in 1982 Constitution, which was adopted after the 1980 Turkish coup d'état:

The Department of Religious Affairs, which is within the general administration, shall exercise its duties prescribed in its particular law, in accordance with the principles of secularism, removed from all political views and ideas, and aiming at national solidarity and integrity (Constitution (1982) of the Republic of Turkey, art. 136).

Gözaydın shows, in the 1980s, significant steps were taken for the improvement of the material conditions of the religious officials as well, whose numbers rose from 50 thousand to 85 thousand (Gözaydın, 2009: 199). However, the employment of a significant amount of women had not taken place until the mid-2000. Those numbers were mostly concentrating on the male personnel.

Binnaz Toprak (1990) argues that to renew the “Islamic sense of community” for preventing the clashes caused by ideological divisions in the 1970s, a new ideological formulation promoted, which is called “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” (Toprak, 1990: 10). She puts it as:

Radical secularism as state policy, which had been a fundamental aspect of the republican ethos in Turkey, was replaced by a new ideology which rested on a re-interpretation of Turkish-Islamic history (Toprak, 1990: 10).

The solution found for this social unrest was to enhance the “national culture” (12). It is obvious that DİB was a significant part of state planning, because religion regarded as the “essence of the culture” (Toprak, 1990: 12) or the “mediator of the national unity” (Gözaydın 2009: 253). Gözaydın also argues that, in this way, DİB assigned to protect the Turkish national identity through emphasizing the Islamic identity (Gözaydın, 2009: 47).

In line with this responsibility of working for national unity and solidarity, Tütüncü (2010) explains the recently employed female preachers’ activities in Eastern and

South-Eastern regions of Turkey in terms of the sovereignty of the Turkish state. Tütüncü gives the accounts of women, and the obstacles they met, who are appointed as the preacher in the cities/districts like Silopi, Cizre, İdil, Mardin, and Siirt.

When DİB recruited women preachers, some of them were sent to the cities and towns in the east and south-east to preach to Kurdish women and to teach them the truth of Islam, especially that Islam is a religion of peace and fraternity. It was assumed the preachers would educate these women, prevent female suicide, and honour killings, and soothe the pain of fratricide amongst Muslims (Kurdish and Turkish) (Tütüncü, 2010: 605).

Tütüncü approaches the profession of female preachers with a distinct perspective (Tütüncü, 2010). She locates them into a position in between Islamist religiosity and the sovereignty of the secular state, and also in between the official Islam of the state and the Islam of different groups and sects. Firstly she analyzes their in-between situation reflected in preachers' narratives of the preaching activities. After giving the accounts of women about their experiences of preaching in Eastern and South-Eastern Anatolian Regions, Tütüncü argues that depending on the context, the old traditional activity of preaching turns into a political practice concerning gender, ethnicity and different religiosities in contemporary Turkey (Tütüncü, 2010). She argues that through the preachers' activities, DİB plays an essential role in "securing the national territory through Islam when the Kurdish question is considered" (Tütüncü, 2010: 608).

According to Ahmet Erdi Öztürk (2016), DİB was established, in the first place, as an ideological state apparatus for its primary task of "management and control of religion by Kemalist elites within the new secular state structure" (Öztürk, 2016: 620). For him, there are two historical turning points for DİB; one is the period after September 1980 *coup d'état*, and the second is the after the AKP government (Öztürk, 2016). He argues that DİB's mission is expanded abroad to Turkic countries and the countries with large Turkish and Muslim immigrant populations after the 1980s (Öztürk 2016: 626). Gözaydın and Öztürk (2014) indicate that after the military coup of 1980, DİB started to send its personnel to Europe to counter Islamic influences of other groups, and



increase or maintain the loyalty of Turkish Muslims to the Turkish state (Gözaydın & Öztürk, 2014: 15). Furthermore, DİB's activities abroad are not limited to European countries where the Turkish-background citizens are the majority, but expanded to the Balkans and Caucasia as well (Öztürk, 2016: 15). In this regard, DİB has been emphasized as a policy tool for Turkish foreign policy in differentiating contexts such as since the early 1980s in Western Europe including France, Germany (Çitak, 2010), Netherlands (Öztürk & Sözeri 2018; Sunier et al., 2011); then 1990s oriented towards the Muslim communities of Central Asia and the Balkans, and became one most influential actor in Balkans during the AKP period (Öktem, 2012; Öztürk & Gözaydın, 2018); and with the end of cold-war in Eurasia (Korkut, 2009).

Additionally, female personnel increasingly commissioned abroad for religious services since 1990, in addition to male staff going abroad since 1975 (DİB, 2010: 18). Besides, DİB indicated that the number of women appointed for pilgrimage and *umrah* visits has been increasing because more than half of the pilgrims are women (DİB, 2010: 17). In the interviews I conducted, some preachers had been in European countries as DİB personnel for the investigation of the familial problems. For example, in addition to the religious services, "Women-family problems abroad" have been added to the curriculum of the training seminars given to religious officials going abroad, since 2007 (DİB, 2010: 19).

Therefore, when it came to the 1990s, DİB's activity areas expanded. Besides in the budget draft of 1990, DİB's budget was multiple times higher from some of the ministries including Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Public Works and Settlement, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism, and Ministry of Labor and Social Security (Gözaydın, 2009: 199). As stated by Gözaydın, 94.7% of the budget of DİB was allocated for personnel expenses (Gözaydın, 2009: 199).

Mutluer mentions about the restrictions on the Islamic activities after the 1980 coup, which was not much extended to DİB (2018: 8). However, after the post-modern coup

of 28 February 1997, DİB's sermons and publications controlled by National Security Council for the emphasis on the nationalist and militaristic language (Mutluer, 2018: 8). One significant change in the 28 February period was the transformation of the administration of all the mosques in Turkey to the DİB. However, as Bozan and Çakır indicates DİB did not have the religious personnel in all of those mosques in all over Turkey, due to the shortage in the cadres (Bozan & Çakır, 2005: 32).

#### **4.3. Transformation of *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* under the rule of the AKP rule**

The period starting with the AKP's successive governments needs special attention for the aim of this study, which is confined to the period after 2004, in which the first considerably high number of tenured cadre for female preachers appointed at DİB. Various scholars argued that, under the rule of the AKP government, especially after 2010, DİB became an essential tool for politics with its activities, public statements, fatwas, and sermons, both inside and outside of Turkey. It expanded its sphere of influence to the sociopolitical arenas, through covering issues regarding women, family, and disadvantaged groups. It became a significant institution when the intricate relation between state, society and gender is considered. In that regard, for the promotion of womanhood proper to the Islamic interpretation of both government and DİB, became significant in determining the gender regime of Turkey.

Mutluer argues that even though the AKP officials were critical of the existence of DİB within the state order when they first came to power in 2002 (Mutluer, 2018), particularly after 2010 it turned into very significant institution in the modern social and political history of Turkey (Mutluer, 2018; Öztürk, 2016; Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018). Mutluer (2018) examines the transformations of DİB, which is a significant institution due to its role in creating the national religion of the Turkish Republic, and the secular-Muslim Turkish identity, under the neoliberal AKP period. As she puts it

During the AKP era, DİB has been redesigned to provide a link between the state, community, family and market according to neoliberal, conservative and authoritarian needs (Mutluer, 2018: 4).

After 2010, DİB had its most powerful period in terms of both its budget and expansion of its sociopolitical activities (Mutluer, 2018: 3-4).

Scholars indicate that 2010 was a critical turning point for DİB in terms of increasing budget, and expansion of sociopolitical activities (Mutluer, 2018; Sözeri & Öztürk, 2018: 7), and also the transformation of its president and the legislative reforms about the structure and activities (Öztürk, 2016). Moreover, in 2010 with Act No. 6002, DİB's structural organization and the departments were reconfigured (Ozzano & Maritato, 2018). After this bill, DİB radio and a television broadcast established. Accordingly, in the same year, there was a dramatic increase in the budget, which is about 1 % of the overall state budget, and its status improved from 'general directorate' to 'undersecretariat' (Mutluer, 2018). Moreover, in 2012 DİB's rank in state protocol promoted from 51st to the 10th, and after that, in 2014, it was linked to the office of Prime Ministry.

Ahmet Erdi Öztürk (2016) focuses on the complicated relationship between DİB and the AKP in the last decade. He argues that DİB became an institution of the implementer of the state's policies by looking at the discourses of it regarding gender, social media, political economy, and relations with other social groups. Öztürk claims that the AKP reshaped the "ideological work of *Diyanet* as a fundamental state apparatus" to follow a clear and more specific political agenda (Öztürk, 2016). For him, with the effects of electoral victories and successive governments since 2002, the AKP gained a politically dominant position, which has been used for the instrumentalization of various state institutions and cadres (Öztürk, 2016: 619). He argues that even though DİB was politicized since the 1980s, it transformed most radically under the rule of the AKP government (Öztürk, 2016: 620). For him, despite the AKP's thriving domestic and foreign policy that implemented "pro-European Union and pro-democratization reforms" since 2002, it had an "authoritarian turn" after the 2011 elections (Öztürk, 2016: 627). Öztürk states that "It is in this context that the DİB become one of the most politicized and disputed ideological tools of all

the state apparatuses in Turkey” (Öztürk, 2016: 627). Moreover, he adds that DİB became involved in public discussions about all political and social issues, reflecting the political ideology of the ruling party (Öztürk, 2016: 627).

For Mutluer, these improvements allowed DİB to provide services and activities outside the mosques (2018: 4). Sözeri and Öztürk also state that “Its budget, administrative capacity, and activities have been gradually expanding” since 2010 (Mutluer, 2018: 7). In that way, both its activities and sphere of influence were expanded. Also, the condition of its staff was improved.

Legislative reforms at this time both expanded the mission of the organization and dramatically strengthened its bureaucratic and administrative capacity. This is important, because increased capacity provides the DİB with greater ability to affect policy not only in Turkey but also in foreign countries. These reforms came after 10 years of exponential growth after the 2002 election of the AKP. In less than a decade, its budget has quadrupled to over \$2 billion, and it now employs almost 120,000 people, making it one of Turkey’s largest state agencies (Öztürk, 2016: 628).

Besides the legislative reforms, Öztürk also argues that 2010 was a critical point due to the resignation of Bardakoğlu, who kept a distance to the politics; and the appointment of Mehmet Görmez (2010-2017) who was “more devoted to fulfilling the AKP’s demands” (Öztürk, 2016: 627). That was in the wake of the abolishment of the headscarf ban, which Bardakoğlu’s opinion was asked about. He stated that consulting DİB for legislative issues was against secularism, and “İslam does not require Muslim women to wear headscarves” (Bardakoğlu cited In Öztürk, 2016: 627). Moreover, after the resignation of Bardakoğlu, Ayşe Sucu, who was the director of Women Activities Center at the Diyanet Foundation for fourteen years and known for her “modern” way of covering, was discharged from her position. This leads to public discussion and controversies in the wake of the abolishment of the headscarf ban<sup>25</sup> and led to the

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<sup>25</sup> The confusion about the dismissal of Ayşe Sucu reflected in the media: “Sucu görevden alındı Diyanet Karıştı (Sucu was dismissed and *Diyanet* is confused),” (2010, December 25). Retrieved May 18, 2019 from: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/sucu-gorevden-alindi-diyanet-karisti-1330718>; “Ayşe Sucu Balçıçek İlter’e Konuştu (Ayşe Sucu Talked to Balçıçek İlter).” (2010, December 29). Retrieved May 18, 2019 from: <https://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/586302-ayse-sucu-balcicek-iltere-konustu>; “Diyanet’e alınan ateistler Ayşe Sucu’yu görevinden etti (Atheists who was included to the Diyanet

resignation of 28 more women from the same department<sup>26</sup>. After all these developments in 2010, fatwas and press statements of DİB started to reflect political discourses of the AKP on the issues including gender relations (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018: 7). After the AKP enhanced its dominant political position, “women, family, and children have become one of the policy areas of focus for the institution (of DİB)” (Mutluer, 2019).

What is significant here is to see that with the expansion of its staff and its activities, the family became a very substantial institution for DİB. In that regard, for DİB, women also became significant actors for sustaining the unity of the family.

#### **4.4. Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı and Women**

İştar Gözaydın (2009) argues that even though there were various attempts to include women into almost all of the professional groups in the early Republican years, the dramatic increase of women’s employment at DİB took place in the mid of 2000s (Gözaydın, 2009: 106). For her, it is evident that the founding cadres of the Republic preferred not to interfere with the "sensitivity" of the Islamic religious organization in this regard (Gözaydın, 2009: 107). Even though the studies regarding the women at DİB are not much, recent studies are focusing on female preachers’ increase in numbers since the mid of the 2000s (Hassan, 2009, 2011; Tütüncü, 2010; Maritato, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018).

In 2004, for the first time in the Presidency instruction, it was stated that there is a need to organize religious guidance activities for women inside and outside the mosques;

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caused the dismissal of Ayşe Sucu).” (2010, December 26) Retrieved May 18, 2019 from: <https://t24.com.tr/haber/diyanete-alinan-ateistler-ayse-sucuyu-gorevinden-etti,118938>

<sup>26</sup> After Ayşe Sucu, resignation of 18 more women reflected in the media in “Diyanet Vakfı’nda Sucu istifası (Resignation of Sucu from Diyanet Foundation).” (2010, December 28). Retrieved May 18, 2019, from: <https://www.birgun.net/haber/diyanet-vakfi-nda-sucu-istifasi-56524>

and the muftis were asked to work on this through preparing and sending reports (DİB, 2010: 11). In this respect, instructions on women's access to mosque services and guidance and religious services for women included in the 2007 Circular of the Presidency. Under article 38, the details of the religious guidance activities (*irşat çalışmaları*) for women defined and the instructions are determined. It was stated that, within the framework of the provisions of the current legislation, taking into account the local characteristics and conditions, religious guidance groups (*irşat ekipleri*) will be formed with female preachers, religious services experts, and Qur'an course instructors, with the approval of the administrative chief. The programs will be prepared separately for each year by the provincial mufti's offices in coordination with the district mufti's offices. It was also indicated that increasing the number of women's activities in all provinces and districts is encouraged by the Presidency (2010: 18). Therefore, the employment of more female personnel, specifically the female preacher, is a policy of DİB for the following years.

Prof. Dr. Bardakoğlu was appointed as the president of DİB from 2003 until 2010. In his period the considerable employment of and activities for women had been increased (Tütüncü, 2010; Hassan, 2011; Mutluer, 2018). The increasing employment of women to the ranks of DİB, particularly for the hierarchically higher positions of preacher and vice mufti, met with various responses diverging from the “Women revolution in *Diyanet*” to the patriarchal oppositions on the issues like whether women can give fatwa or if there is a room for feminism at DİB. Tütüncü mentions about the projects of that period covering issues like gender equality, women’s rights, elimination of violence against women through activities, seminars, and the sermons (Tütüncü, 2010). She also mentions about the astonishment of feminists when Bardakoğlu asked about guidance for preparing a sermon for 8 March in 2004 (Tütüncü, 2010). There were also projects regarding the schooling of girls in eastern and southeastern regions, prevention of early marriage, and elimination of honor killings (DİB 2017).

In the period of Bardakoğlu (2003-2010), in line with the AKP's liberal and democratic reforms of the Penal Code (İlkkaracan, 2007), in 2006, Prime Minister Erdoğan issued a general notice named as "Measures to Prevent Violence Against Children and Women and Honor Killings." After this call, DİB turned into a legitimate partner of the government in the campaign on the elimination of violence against women through giving sermons, preparing media documents to increase awareness about the issue. In that regard, in the preface of "*Kadın ve Aileye Yönelik Çalışmalar 2007-2009*", which is the first published work of DİB on activities for women and family, Bardakoğlu states that the awareness of the necessity of expert support in solving domestic/familial problems has been increasing in Turkey. He continues, in this regard, DİB has been paying attention to the services provided to women and family, and has been communicating and cooperating with government agencies and civil society organizations, to contribute to the solution of the problems like "domestic violence, honor killings, and gender discrimination against girls" through explaining to society that Islam does not approve of those practices (DİB, 2010: 6). When the DİB's sphere of influence and its large number of staff all over Turkey considered, this role can be justifiable for creating the agenda about the issue. However, the purpose of providing guidance and counseling services at the centers for women who have been subjected to violence is a peculiar role, when it is considered who will be providing those services. Providing counseling and guidance services on those issues has not been the role of an officially employed religious personnel before.

Besides, DİB started to conduct projects, in coordination with various state institutions and both local and international NGOs. The first project, "Project on Stopping Violence and Discrimination Against Women," carried out by Amnesty International between 2006-2010 (DİB, 2017: 57). Within the scope of the project, workshops and seminars were organized in 15 different provinces, with the participation of religious officials on the topics such as women's rights in Islam, the cultural reasons behind the discrimination, and both national and international legislation about the violence against women (DİB 2010: 45).

At this point, it is significant to discuss that after 2010, that women-friendly tone changed into a more traditional conservative perspective on woman issue (Tütüncü, 2010), that is framed within the familial sphere. As mentioned in the previous part, scholars indicate that 2010 was a critical turning point for DİB in terms of its increasing authority within the state structure and expansion of its activities and service areas with the legislative reforms and the transformation of its president. After 2010, in line with the AKP's policies discussed in the second chapter, DİB's emphasis on the protection of the family has been increased together with the construction of women's roles in terms of the conceptualization of *fıtrat*. This is reflected in many instances which are seen firstly in the publication of DİB on its activities for women and family, secondly in the transformation of the project on violence against women to the "protection of the family", and lastly, in the increasing cooperation with ASAGEM instead of KSGM as well as increasing cooperation with Ministry of Family and Social Policies.

Initially, after the first booklet (2010) covering the DİB's newly established services and activities for women in the period of 2007-2009, the second booklet was published in 2017 titled "*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nın Kadın ve Aile Çalışmaları: 2011-2015*". This booklet was published in the period of a different president, Mehmet Görmez, after significant transformations in the structure of DİB; the first initiatives regarding the increase of the female employees in the institution; and also some projects regarding women and family have been completed. When the two booklets' prefaces are compared, it could be seen that the emphasis on the family and its protection has been increasing. For instance, it is stated that the General Directorate of Religious Services of DİB is tasked with providing guidance on religious matters for families, women, youth, and other segments of society (DİB, 2017: 3). Respectively, DİB asserted that it is an institution which has been taking the responsibility on contributing to the protection of family, informing society about the right religious knowledge about family; and most importantly, empowering and strengthening the family members with religious knowledge and support for the risks they face as a result of new problem areas of social, economic and cultural changes (DİB, 2017: 4). In this regard, it was also asserted that DİB had expended its vision in the last decade about



the problems surrounding the family and their solutions (DİB, 2017: 4-5). In that regard, even though there were references to the significance of family in the first booklet (2010), it has been increased in the second booklet (2017) with Islamic references. It could be seen that the works of DİB on women were mostly confined to the sphere of family, which would be informed with religious knowledge for preventing the dissolution of it.

Secondly, the change of tone regarding the approach to the women's issues could be observed in the transformation of the project about violence against women to the protection of the family. The first protocol for the project, which was entitled "The Project of Providing the Contributions of Religious Officials in Preventing Violence Against Women," was signed on 12 April 2010, in the period of Bardakoğlu (2003-2010). However, in the second booklet (2017) regarding DİB's activities on women, "protection of the family" was added to the name of the project which was changed to "The Project of Providing the Contributions of Religious Officials in Protecting Family and Preventing Violence Against Women." Regarding those changes in the project, another protocol was signed in 2013, and UNFPA was not included in the protocol as a partner. In the media, it was reported that in the signatory ceremony of the project, DİB president Mehmet Görmez (2010-2017) asserted that:

In the presence of our Ministers, we support this project since 2010. I myself, with great devotion, attended the meetings from time to time as a guide. But now I will not spend a penny of the United Nations in the next part, at least in the part of the Presidency of Religious Affairs. I don't accept that money. They should use that money to prevent high crimes against humanity. We have enough faith, spirituality, and materials to talk about violence against women and to tell compassion towards women to our society and nation (Görmez cited in "Diyanet Başkanı: BM Kadına Şiddetle Uğraşacağına...", 2013).

This project's preparatory work started in 2008 and was carried out by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (DİB, 2010: 43). However, later on, "protection of the family" was added to the name of the project while UNFPA was not included in the protocol as a partner (DİB, 2017). After the establishment of the new ministry, cooperation partners became DİB and ASPB, while KSGM was not a coordinating

unit anymore. A protocol was signed by Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ, Minister of Family and Social Policies Fatma Şahin and Head of Religious Affairs Prof. Dr. Mehmet Görmez in 2013 (DİB Din Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2013: 119). In this regard, it was also indicated that the materials for the training were rewritten for the emphasis role of religion on the protection of family (DİB, 2017: 29-30).

Lastly, as it could be seen from the previous example as well, after the transformation of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011, the cooperation between them increased for the protection of the family. As was discussed in the second chapter, after 2011, instead of KSGM which was the only unit assigned to develop policies, strategies, cooperate and coordinate with all stakeholders to ensure equality between women and men, strengthen women's position and prevent discrimination against women; ASAGEM became an executive body (Akkan 2017: 79) that is framing women's issues in the sphere of the family with a more conservative lens (Yılmaz, 2015; Kandiyoti, 2016). Therefore, DİB has increasingly co-operated with ASAGEM after 2011. ASAGEM developed "The Family Education Program"<sup>27</sup> to "meet the basic information needs of families." Accordingly, for disseminating the Family Education Program to broad audiences through religious personnel, another protocol signed with DİB 2013<sup>28</sup>. Afterward, DİB started its "Marriage School," "Family School," and "Engagement School" seminars in various provinces. In addition to these, in the same year with the transformation to ASPB (2011), a protocol was signed with ASPB specifically for the aim of strengthening family and social support systems<sup>29</sup>. This protocol can be seen as the basis of the cooperation between DİB and ASPB for

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<sup>27</sup> Further information would be found from the website: <https://www.aep.gov.tr/aep-hakkinda/aep-in-tarihcesi/>

<sup>28</sup> Protocol between the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, General Directorate of Family and Community Services and DİB Affairs Directorate General of Educational Services in the date of 27.05.2013.

<sup>29</sup> Protocol on Cooperation between the Ministry of Family and Social Policies and the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı ile Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Arasında İşbirliği Protokolü.*) (n.d.) Retrieved June 1, 2019 from: <https://www2.diyanet.gov.tr/DinHizmetleriGenelMudurlugu/isbirligiProtokoller/Aile%20ve%20Sosyal%20Politikalar%20Bakanl%C4%B1%C4%9F%C4%B1.pdf>

the protection and empowerment of family and “religious guidance” activities carried out by preachers at the institutions connected to the ministry. Mutluer states that “As such, this protocol reflected the fact that the DİB was charged with promoting a new version of family values based on Islamic, not secular republican motifs of the foundation era” (2019: 108).

From all those initiatives and developments, it could be easily understood that the DİB started to pay attention to women’s issues and familial problems since the mid-2000s. In this respect, DİB aimed to increase female religious personnel for them to carry out those projects.

#### **4.4.1. Employment of Women in *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı***

DİB indicates that female religious officials should work for contributing to the solutions to the problems women face in today’s world, and also for ensuring that women are guided with religiously correct information (DİB, 2010: 59). The first female Qur’an course instructor started to work at DİB in the early 1940s, and since then, women worked at DİB’s various cadres, especially with a significant increase in each unit, including the technical field within the last years (DİB, 2010: 59). DİB states that there is a need for female religious officials in every area, therefore since 2000, both the number and duties, powers, and responsibilities of women officials have been increased (DİB, 2010: 59).

Women have been assigned as “education specialists” since 1998, and in the “religious services specialist” positions which were established only for women with a regulation issued in 1999 (DİB, 2010: 60). Besides those, since the mid of the 2000s, with the increase in the employment of women, new cadres were allocated for women. For the first time in 2005, the first female provincial mufti assistants assigned in 2005 for Kayseri and Antalya, and in the following years, it is increased for the aim of covering all cities (DİB 2010: 60). According to the legislation, it is not necessary for women to have spent at least three years as a district mufti or a training center teacher for being

appointed as provincial mufti assistant, while it is a necessity for males (DİB 2010: 59). Huriye Martı was assigned as the first woman vice president with the decision of the deputy prime minister, which was published in Official Gazette on 13 March 2018<sup>30</sup>. Although their numbers are very low in those cadres compared to males, those are hierarchically high positions, compared to imams, muezzins, and Qur'an course instructors.

Qur'an course instructor is the first cadre for women since the early 1940s. It is also the most crowded position for women at DİB. Moreover, its number also has been increasing since the 2000s. It was asserted by DİB that “after 2000, the demand for male Qur'an courses decreased for various reasons, but on the contrary, there was serious demand and interest among women” (DİB 2010: 76). To meet “the growing demand and interest of women,” all the Qur'an course instructors who were assigned between 2004-2007 were women (DİB 2010: 70). Furthermore, as of November 2005, DİB had to employ contractual women instructors, therefore, in total, 7000 contractual Qur'an course instructor cadres had been allocated from 2004 to 2008 (DİB 2010: 76). Moreover, the numbers of employment by the organization and gender can be seen below:

Table 2. The Numbers of Employment at DİB by Gender over the Years 2010-2018

Year	Central Organization			Provincial Organization			Education Directorates			Organization in abroad		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
2010	55	901	956	3679	78714	82393	8	758	766	0	42	42
2011	59	920	979	10226	86409	96635	13	889	902	0	40	40
2012	67	973	1040	16456	87104	103560	23	808	831	0	41	41
2013	75	1023	1098	18760	101085	119845	42	824	866	0	36	36
2014	74	1033	1107	18593	99121	117714	50	821	871	0	51	51
2015	78	1039	1117	18477	96741	115218	51	937	988	0	55	55
2016	79	1043	1122	17744	92721	110465	63	1021	1084	0	53	53
2017	74	1018	1092	17738	89235	106973	64	1160	1224	0	43	43
2018	91	1103	1194	17656	86922	104578	86	1281	1367	0	67	67

*Note:* Data from Annual reports of Directorate of Religious Affairs Directorate of Strategy Development (*Diyanet işleri Başkanlığı Strateji Geliştirme Başkanlığı Faaliyet Raporları*) - 2010-2018.

<sup>30</sup> Please see T.C. Resmi Gazete (30359, 12 March 2018) Retrieved April 28, 2019 from <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2018/03/20180313-31.htm>

As it could be seen clearly from the table above, the numbers of female personnel have been increasing since 2010. However, the most dramatic increase can be observed in the provincial organization (See Appendix C). Even though it is argued that the hierarchically higher positions allocated for female personnel, the number of women in the central organization has increased from 55 to 91 between 2010 and 2018. On the other hand, it is significant to consider that the provincial mufti assistants, which is a hierarchically higher position for women as well, are connected to the provincial organization. Their numbers are not included in the central organization. However, the most dramatic increase in the provincial organization reflects that women are mostly employed in the field to provide services, rather than in the central organization in the decision-making mechanisms. The stark difference between men and women in the provincial organization is explained with the employment of imams, who are all men, in almost all of the mosques all over Turkey.

DİB has been conducting in-service seminars to inform the personnel to be employed in the Family and Guidance Offices, particularly preachers, with the participation of experts in the fields of family, women, and children. These seminars are reprogrammed every year. The topics include “Basic Counseling Skills, Victim Interview Techniques, Family Communication, Importance of Family in Islam and Women's Position, Young-Child-Woman-Elderly Psychology, Domestic Tension and Violence, Child Neglect and Abuse, Divorce and Results, Law and Legislation on Women and Family” (DİB, 2017:21). The themes of the in-service training are given as above; however, it is not easy to find the contents, programs, and speakers of the seminars. It could be understood that the themes are mostly related to the practice of counseling, women, and familial issues. As was indicated in the interviews that the speakers come both from universities’ related departments of psychology, theology, sociology, and communication; and “experts” from the private sector working in these areas.

Besides, the seminars organized for the personnel working in Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus, DİB provides in-service training seminars to other personnel as

well. Year-round training programs are held for the personnel working in various fields such as for prison preachers, specific training for preachers, and seminars for Qur'an course instructors providing services for disabled individuals (DİB 2017: 39).

#### **4.4.1.1. Preacher (Vaiz)**

For the first time in December 2011, the “Preaching Symposium” was held in Ankara, in order to assess and find solutions to the problems of preachers by identifying deficiencies and shortcomings in the field (DİB 2011: 40). A booklet, “*Vaaz Klavuzu* (preaching guide),” prepared by compiling the papers presented at the symposium. In the “History of Preaching” part of the booklet, it is stated that the DİB has been developing a new service policy in recent years (DİB, 2012: 30). It is aimed to extend the religious service to the broadest possible sections both inside and outside the mosque and to spread its field of activity towards the society through the mosque. In this context, cooperation protocols were signed with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies and the Ministry of National Education (ibid). Those were included in 2007 (updated in 2010) with Social Services and Child Protection Agency (DİB, 2010: 40), in 2011 with Ministry of Justice (DİB, 2011: 135), in 2015 with Ministry of Health<sup>31</sup>, and in 2015<sup>32</sup> with Ministry of Youth and Sport (Religious Services annual report 2015). Those protocols are particularly significant for preachers to provide religious services in various state institutions. Because through them, the basis of the legislation on religious services to be carried out has been established.

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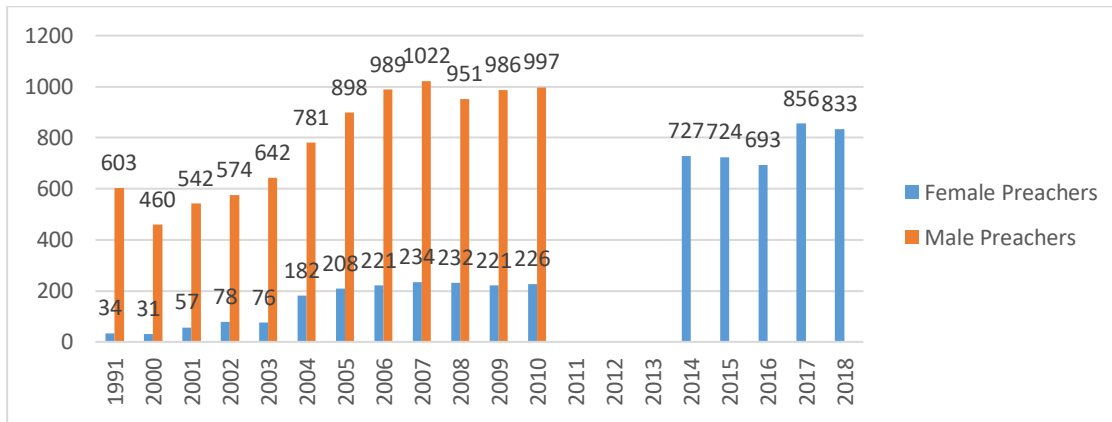
<sup>31</sup> Cooperation Protocol between T. C. Prime Ministry Presidency of Religious Affairs and T.C. Ministry of Health to Provide Spiritual Support in Hospitals (*T.C. Başbakanlık Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı ile T.C. Sağlık Bakanlığı arasında Hastanelerde Manevi Destek Sunmaya Yönelik İşbirliği Protokolü*) dated 7 January 2015

<sup>32</sup> Cooperation Protocol between Turkish Republic Prime Ministry Presidency of Religious Affairs and Turkish Republic Ministry of Youth and Sports (*D.T.C. Başbakanlık Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı ile T.C. Gençlik ve Spor Bakanlığı Arasında İşbirliği Protokolü*) dated 26 February 2015

Moreover, Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus, established within the structure of mufti offices, become essential service areas. Most of the personnel working in all these areas are preachers. Therefore, the job descriptions of the preachers are changing accordingly (DİB 2012: 30). It was stated that following the relevant legislation; preachers perform many tasks such as preaching in mosques, prisons, hospitals, nursing homes and kindergartens on certain days of the week, keeping watches for a fatwa, and serving in Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus (*ibid*).

To be assigned as a preacher, the requirement of having completed the specialization course opened by the Presidency or having a Ph.D. degree in theology is not required for women, while it is necessary for men (DİB 2010: 59). Since the mid-2000s to today, the number of female preachers employed at DİB has been increased dramatically:

Figure 1. Number of preachers at DİB by Gender.



Data for the years 1991,2000-2009 from (DİB 2010), for the year 2010 Directorate of Religious Affairs Report of the Performance Program of the Diyanet (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Diyanet'in Performans Programı Raporu) 2010 , for the years 2014-2018 from DİB 2019.

Moreover, with the new organizational law of the Presidency, the “career system” was introduced in the organization of preachers (DİB 2012: 31). Preachers having the necessary conditions were provided with the opportunity to become “expert preachers (*uzman vaiz*)” and “chief preachers (*başvaiz*).” Besides, the cadre of the “presidential preachers (*Başkanlık vaizi*)” has been improved in terms of duties and personal rights,

and became more attractive. It was stated that this innovation is expected to make significant contributions to the profession of preachers and the service of guidance (DİB 2012: 31).

It could be easily argued that the definition, the field of services, and the structural position of preachers have been changing.

#### **4.4.2. Family Counselling and Religious Guidance Offices**

In 2010 with Act No. 6002, DİB's structural organization and the departments were reconfigured (Ozzano & Maritato, 2018). Comprehensive amendments were made to the Law on Establishment and Duties of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in 2010<sup>33</sup>. After this bill, in 2011 the Department of Family and Religious Guidance was established at the central organization of DİB, to be responsible for the issues regarding family and the coordination of the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus connected to the provincial organization in each province and district (DİB 2017: 19). With the new regulation and the amendment made<sup>34</sup>, DİB was given the duty of providing illumination (*aydınlatma*) and guidance activities on religious matters for the family, women, youth, and other segments of society.

DİB stated that since religious officials have a close relationship with citizens while providing religious services, they also face many applications for counseling. Family Counseling and Guidance Offices have been put into service within the provincial mufti offices to respond personally to the religious part of these consultations and to direct the applicant to the relevant institutions regarding health, law, and security (DİB 2010: 23). Providing guidance services to women who encountered domestic

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<sup>33</sup> Law No: 6002 Law on Amendment of Law Law and Some Laws on Organization and Duties of Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Kuruluş ve Görevleri Hakkında Kanun ile Bazı Kanunlarda Değişiklik Yapılmasına dair Kanun*), Accepted in 1/7/2010, Retrieved August 18, 2019 from: [resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2010/07/20100713-2.htm](http://resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2010/07/20100713-2.htm)

<sup>34</sup> Amendment made at the Article 7 of the Law no 6002 on Establishment and Duties of DİB



problems, discrimination and violence, and guide people about human rights violations, honor killings, environmental awareness, and combating bad and harmful habits, to eliminate false religious understanding, and to cooperate with institutions and organizations working in this field are all under the responsibility of the expert religious officials (DİB 2010: 23). To fulfill this duty, DİB established Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus<sup>35</sup> in Mufti Offices in 81 provinces and affiliated districts. Those offices were first established in 2003 in six pilot provinces. After opening 18 more offices in 2007 (DİB 2010: 24), they started operations, and their numbers increased to cover all the cities and many districts all over Turkey. Female preachers are assigned to keep watch in these offices at least one day of a week to answer the questions of both the visitors of the offices and the phone calls.

It was indicated that the services provided by those offices are significant in providing solutions to “social problems,” through cooperation with official institutions and civil organizations. In this respect, both for the office activities and the training seminars of the personnel of those offices, cooperation protocols established with various state institutions, universities, local administrations and non-governmental organizations (DİB 2010: 24). Religious counseling provided by preachers for women and family issues at those offices is a new theme. But it has been dramatically expanding its scope, extending beyond those offices to the various public institutions.

The purpose of the establishment of this department is indicated as to contribute to the creation and preservation of a healthy family structure consisting of conscious and reliable individuals who have the right religious and moral knowledge and bears the responsibility of being a member of a family (DİB 2017: 19). The religious guidance services to be provided to other groups of the society in need of attention and protection are included in the task definition of the department. The department is responsible for producing and carrying out projects based on “religious guidance” for children, young

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<sup>35</sup> In 2003, they were named as Family Offices (*Aile Büroları*), then in 2007 their name changed to Family Counselling and Guidance Offices (*Aile İrşat ve Rehberlik Bürosu*). After, “İrşat” was also removed and the name changed to Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus (*Aile ve Dini Rehberlik Bürosu*).

people, and women residing in social services institutions (DİB 2017: 20). Therefore, the responsibilities of the department divided mainly into two: the first one is the activities related to family, and the second is religious guidance activities carried out in social service institutions (DİB 2017:20). Here, it is significant to emphasize the change in the perspective after 2010, as it was mentioned previously. It is reflected once again in the definition of the responsibilities of the family offices. In the first booklet (2010) it was stated that the offices are established for providing services to women who encountered various problems including domestic problems, human rights violations, and honor killings. However, in the second booklet (2017), the duties of family offices asserted as to create a healthy family structure and prevention of the dissolution of the family. Therefore, it could be argued that it is a shift that is important for understanding the increasing significance of the concept of *fitrat*. Because the growing mobilization for DİB on the protection of family since 2011, is also after Erdoğan's first public declaration about his disbelief in equality between men and women. As discussed in detail in the second chapter, starting with this period, women's primary locus as the family informed the policies and institutional transformation within the state structure.

Following this, the preparation of training sets for the personnel working in the offices and the field of social work; and increasing the number of trained personnel to work in the offices, are listed as the targets (DİB 2017: 16). It could be understood from those aims that both the offices and the personnel working in those offices are under the process of establishment/development. Especially the need for the preparation of the training set reveals that a standardized training program for personnel is something desired, but not achieved at that moment. This issue was also emphasized earlier in 2008, at the 5<sup>th</sup> Family Meeting with the theme of "Family Support Services," organized by ASAGEM. It was stated that:

It is necessary to standardize the training of the personnel to be employed in Family Counseling and Guidance Offices operating under the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Cited in "V. Aile Şurası Aile Destek Hizmetleri Komisyon Kararları," 2008).

In this respect, in the latest Directorate of Religious Affairs Family and Guidance Offices Work Directives dated 23 July 2015<sup>36</sup>, under the Article 5, it was explained that one target of the establishment of the offices is to provide religious guidance and spiritual support in institutions and organizations affiliated to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Another one was indicated as to organize religious programs in places such as student dormitory, youth center, factory, etc. In Article 7, the qualifications of the personnel to be employed in the offices defined. According to that, preachers are employed in the offices. Priority is given to those who conduct academic studies on women, youth, children, and family. Keeping watch at the office on at least one day of the week, answering questions by face to face, via phone and e-mail, and providing religious guidance are under the responsibilities of the office personnel. One-day watch for preacher defined as the tasks covering either spiritual support provided in places such as children's house, children's house site, child support center, dormitory, youth center, women's guest house, factory etc., or participating to the activities, such as conferences, panels, and seminars, executed by those offices.

Maintaining religious guidance services within the framework of protocols made with relevant public institutions and non-governmental organizations; taking part in the spiritual support services planned in social service institutions; and organizing events on national or international special days related to women, youth, children and family, were all listed under the responsibilities of the personnel of the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus.

To conclude, the establishment of the family offices to provide counseling on various issues, but mostly concentrating on familial and religious problems, is a significant development in the recent history of Turkey. The institutionalization of these offices fastened after the amendments made on the organization bill of DİB in 2010. DİB's

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<sup>36</sup> Directorate of Religious Affairs Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus Work Instruction (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Aile ve Dini Rehberlik Büroları Çalışma Yönergesi*) entered into force upon the approval of the Presidency dated 23/07/2015 and numbered E.14480

sphere of influence and activity areas had expanded to provide counseling on familial problems with an Islamic understanding of women's roles.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

As a conclusion, it is clear that DİB has been and is a vital tool for politics, that is, reflected in the transformation of the organization, the structure, the roles and duties of the institution, and the conditions of its staff in the critical turning points of the contemporary Turkish History. Those turning points are clearly the establishment of the Republic, transition to the multi-party politics in the 1950s, and the restructuring of the political organization after 1960, and 1980 military coups. After all the transformations, DİB's status, duties and responsibilities, the condition of its staff, and the organization of the institution are restructured. This is reflected in the restructuring of DİB together with the recent political developments under the successive AKP governments.

The historical transformation is discussed to reflect the significant place of DİB in the history of the Turkish Republic. DİB could be seen as the successor the institution of *Şeyhülislamlık*, whose duties and responsibilities changed over time, in Ottoman government. It is argued that DİB has been established in the secular state structure of the Turkish Republic, to produce the official understanding regarding Islam, and provide services on Islamic faith and worship. After the 1960 military coup, providing the moral principles of Islamic religion, and after the 1980 military coup, enhancing the national unity and solidarity have been added to DİB's primary responsibilities. It is discussed that these are in line with female preachers' professional activities. Because female preachers are providing moral services, disseminating the official religious understanding. Moreover, as discussed by Tütüncü (2010), their operations in Eastern and South-Eastern Anatolian regions are considered as "securing the national territory through Islam when the Kurdish question is considered" (Tütüncü 2010: 608).

For Gözaydın “separating religion and state to ensure dangerous religious passions and ‘superstitions’ be confined to the private sphere” was the purpose of the “Enlightenment Secularist” (Gözaydın, 2009: 217). In this way, they aimed to secularize and modernize not only the state and politics but also the society through reducing religion to an individualized form (Gözaydın, 2009: 217). However, in contemporary Turkey, preachers are officially employed by the state, and their activities take place in the public realm of various state institutions to provide guidance. Their public work, besides religious guidance, also includes advising on familial matters and intimate relations of the private life. Therefore, it is a peculiar case, mainly when it is studied concerning the conservative gender policies of the AKP government regarding women and family. Preachers’ professional ideology is established through those intricate relations of gender, state, and society.

Moreover, the inclusion of women to the ranks and targets of DİB constitutes a significant change in the last two decades. Especially with the amendments in its particular law in 2010, the organizational structure has been reconfigured, the duties and responsibilities were expanded to cover the sociopolitical issues. Its position in the state hierarchy has increased, its budget, condition of its staff improved after that time. Moreover, the sphere of influence was expanded to include women, family, and disadvantaged groups staying in the social services institutions.

What is significant here for this study is that, after all the transformations took place within the structure and organization of DİB, in line with the AKP’s policies, preachers’ activity areas expanded. Preachers’ work definitions and professional ideology concerning gender identity were shaped and defined accordingly. They started to be responsible for the projects carried out regarding women located inside the familial sphere, as the protector and the carriers of the culture to the next generations. After 2010 coordination protocols were signed with various state institutions. Within the confines of the protocols, female preachers’ activities in these institutions were regulated and facilitated. That is, they started to conduct regular visits to penitentiary institutions and prisons, children's education houses, nursing homes,

children's houses, health institutions, student dormitories, factories, and similar places. In that regard, despite the newly created and redesigned positions for women within DİB, when the numbers are considered, they are mostly employed in the provincial organization for providing services in the field.

The most significant coordination protocol for this study and DİB's involvement for women issue is the protocol with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies signed on 26 October 2011 for the aim of protecting and strengthening the Turkish family structure and providing social services. Therefore, in contemporary Turkey, the professional activities of preachers have been shaped through all those developments starting from 2004 with the first most prominent cadre opened, and through the transformations in both DİB's structure and related sphere of influence, and the dominant political position of the AKP after 2010. They are assigned to provide religious and familial guidance in the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus (ADRB) and the various state institutions. Providing familial guidance and answering the questions on the subjects including the intimate relations of spouses, relatives, sexual life, divorce, and marriage by an officially employed religious personnel is a significant development in the gender regime of Turkey. They provide guidance services about both the religious matters and daily personal life, in line with the AKP's attempt to regulate the intimate relations through conservative policies and discourses (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2011; Acar and Altunok 2013; Yılmaz 2015; Kandiyoti 2016).

As a result, it became a significant institution when gender relations are considered due to its noticeably increasing employment and activities for women and its sermons, fatwas, and press statements regarding women's issues, with Islamic and conservative references. It is crucial especially when DİB's increasing involvement with social and political issues after 2010 (Öztürk, 2016) is considered concerning the AKP's increasing conservative tone in both policies and discourses that locates women into the sphere of family (Buğra & Yakut-Çakar, 2010; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu 2011; Yazıcı, 2012; Dedeoglu, 2012; Acar & Altunok, 2013; Z. Yılmaz, 2015; Kandiyoti, 2016; Akkan, 2017; Mutluer, 2019). In that regard, as it is discussed in this chapter, DİB's

perspective on women's issues also has been changing since 2010, from a "women-friendly tone" (Tütüncü 2010) to a view emphasizing the significance of family through developing and carrying out activities and projects for strengthening the family. Therefore, it could be argued that the AKP's conceptualization of *fitrat* which sees women's primary place as the familial sphere and her domestic responsibilities as her primary duty, is reflected at DİB's policies and activities, especially after 2010 in which the restructuring of the organization and the change of its president took place. In this context, the gender regime produced within and through preachers' profession, which is shaped by the particular Islamic reference to *fitrat*, resembles a significant example, which will be analyzed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### WOMEN PREACHERS: A PROFESSION AND A REFLECTION OF *FITRAT*

#### 5.1. Introduction

Chapter 2 explains the mobilization of the particular conceptualization of *fitrat* for the construction of womanhood, drawing upon its Islamic meanings through the policies and discourses of AKP, which has also enforced the civil society organizations, particularly KADEM. In this context, drawing upon the concept of *fitrat*, a tension is created between “gender justice” and “gender equality,” for challenging women’s demands of equality. These developments are significant for examining the profession of a particular group of veiled, educated and professional women in the ranks of DİB as female preachers. So, the construction of womanhood produced within and through the profession of preaching is questioned in terms of the gender regime, which is shaped by the concept of *fitrat*. Chapter 4 demonstrated the restructuring of *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, with an increasing focus on the prevention of the dissolution of the family and women’s roles within it, especially since 2010 under the rule of AKP government.

Further, this chapter aims to analyze the reflection of these developments on the profession of preachers, which is argued to have become a recreated profession since early 2000s. In order to show the impacts of *fitrat* concept and gender justice on the construction of womanhood within this specific profession, this chapter attempts to analyze women’s narratives in terms of their experiences of becoming a preacher at DİB and their perspectives on womanhood. For this particular aim, firstly, their accounts on *fitrat* and gender justice will be given. Secondly, the processes of their inclusion into the ranks of DİB will be discussed in the shed of the increasing focus of



DİB on the family institution. Lastly, their perspectives on women's employment concerning women's family responsibilities and chores that are defined through Islamic references to *fitrat* will be discussed.

## **5.2. The Conceptualization of *Fitrat***

One of the main arguments of this thesis is that the construction of womanhood is impacted by the gender regime, which is shaped according to the conceptualization of *fitrat*. *Fitrat* holds an important place in determining men's and women's responsibilities and duties in relation to each other as spouses, to their family, and society. As it was discussed in the second chapter, DİB's Islamic interpretation of the meaning of *fitrat* was based on only one *surah* that *fitrat* is used as a word, taken from the sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, which indicates the characteristics of human-beings that are derived from the procreation. However, it is not explained in terms of women's and men's roles that distinguish them due to their physiological and biological beings. It is explained as a sense or intuition that enables humans to differentiate the good and the bad or to sense the existence of God. The Islamic meaning of *fitrat*, which is explained by the theologians of DİB, is defined as a characteristic that is common to all human beings.

As mobilization and dissemination of the concept of *fitrat* in determining the gender regime of Turkey under AKP and KADEM policies and discourses was discussed in the second chapter, in this context, the recreated position of preaching for women in the recent history of Turkey should be revealed in terms of female preachers' perspectives on women's roles, which are constructed through the references to the concept of *fitrat*. That also influences their perspective on gender equality. The redesign of the profession of female preachers under the successive AKP governments is a significant development that bears political and social consequences when the gender regime is considered, since the preachers mobilize and disseminate the concept of *fitrat*.

Initially, it is significant to mention the account of Feriha, who criticizes the family policies of DİB, which has increased after 2010 with the resignation of Bardakoğlu. She was in the coordination unit of the various projects of DİB on issues, including the elimination of violence against women to the schooling of girls in Eastern and South-Eastern regions of Turkey. She argues that the main problem at DİB, which is also reflected in the political discourses of the AKP and its bureaucrats, is their disbelief in the equality between women and men. She argues that:

Basically I think the problem is not believing in the equality between men and women. That is what I see. Well, that is what the President says. He doesn't distinguish the ontological thing from the legal matter. President says the woman and man are not equal. Could it be possible? Then let's consider the women's vote as a half vote. Why not? If you are the president of a country, everyone is equal in terms of legal matters, as a citizens. *Fitri*<sup>37</sup> things can be discussed. Anyway, the meanings imposed on *fitrat* through tradition are variable. It could be discussed. But it is something else.

Our people and the politicians understand gender equality as something else. They understand gender (*toplumsal cinsiyet*) as "social sexuality" (*toplumsal cinsellik*). Even the very top level deputies have expressed this. They understood it as genderlessness (*cinsiyetsizlik*) (Feriha, 2019).

Based on these statements, it is clear that she differentiates between the perspectives on equality of women and men as "ontological," which is derived upon a biological basis and as "legal," which implies equality regarding the law. In this way, she criticizes the perspective, which reduces the issue to biological determinism; that is, particularly the *fitrat* discourse. As she asserted, the main problem at DİB is that they don't believe in equality between men and women. She argues that there are different approaches to the concept of *fitrat*, the nature of humans, which vary according to traditions and customs. Moreover, as she states, the concept of "gender" is understood by the politicians of the AKP and the bureaucrats at DİB as promoting a human without any gender, through obscuring the biological differences between men and women. Therefore, the mobilization of the concept of gender is understood as harmful for the conservative policies which strongly depend upon the sanctity of the heteronormative

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<sup>37</sup> The things which are related to *fitrat*.

family institution. Accordingly, the concept of gender is criticized with particular Islamic references to the concept of *fitrat*.

In that regard, Neşe also agrees with Feriha about the meaning of the concept of *fitrat*, which determines gender roles, however, which is not an obligation dictated by Islamic principles; instead, it is related to traditions and customs. However, she argues that women should act according to customs or traditions in order for the protection of the family. She puts it:

Should I do everything my husband says? It is necessary to answer this question with a reasonable explanation. If he wants something forbidden (according to Islamic principles), you cannot do it. But you cannot find it strange if he wants you to do things that are understood as women's responsibilities according to customs. Preparing food is a customary reality. It is a duty of woman according to the traditions (*Örfi*). It is not a duty which is defined in religion, but it is in the customs, it is in *fitrat*. We have to encourage the ladies to prevent problems and to prevent the things against *fitrat*. Yesterday a woman came to me and said, "My husband cooks, washes dishes, irons, and teases all of us." The woman does not want him to do her job. When he does, he becomes even worse man, she says. In other words, there is a mismatch between couples as a result of completely switching their roles with each other. The things that are contrary to *fitrat*, duties that are contrary to custom... This is real. We need to identify these issues and talk to the ladies (Neşe, 2019).

Thus, she argues that *fitrat* is not an Islamic conceptualization that defines gender roles. However, women should fulfill the duties, which are determined according to the expectations of society, customs and traditions, and her husband. Moreover, she argues it is significant to act according to *fitrat*, for the protection of the family:

Sometimes, we can hear very troubling things. "I work too, and you work too. Today I will cook, tomorrow you will cook." It's not a deal. You should talk nicely. You should say "I am tired, I don't feel good today, I don't feel like cooking. Can we eat outside?" This style is perhaps the style that would save the family. Because no one tells her to work. She is not obliged to do so. To be at home is a part of women's *fitrat*. To take care of her children, to take care of her husband, that is the *fitrat*. We are putting the burden of work on ourselves. Why are we carrying this burden? Now society has changed, when women should work or produce as well (Neşe 2019).

It is clear from her statements that gender roles are defined according to a particular concept of *fitrat*, which also helps to strengthen the family. This concept emphasizes

women's domestic responsibilities as her primary duty and even affects the conditions of her participation in employment. And, their aim as preachers is to disseminate this understanding, which suggests women not to challenge this settled state of responsibilities.

Moreover, the concept of *fitrat* is also considered by another respondent to the contrary of gender equality, that is seen as a Western-centric concept and hazardous for society. Süreyya's statements signify an example of the people at DİB, whom Feriha mentioned, who do not believe in gender equality. Süreyya argues that

There was a swamp, and there were too many frogs in the swamp. People were disturbed by the sound of frogs. A European scientist came, brought medicine to kill the frogs. After all the frogs died, then there were mosquitoes. This time he brought another medicine. In other words, there is a balance created by *Allah*, the *Sunnah*. But the West always does that. We were created as men and women. *Allah* created us like this. There is a system, and there is a balance in the system created by *Allah*. That's how *Allah* built it. So, the Istanbul Convention is like medicating frogs here. What happens if a woman ceases to be a woman and a man ceases to be a man? Then, it will be the discontinuation of the lineage of humans (*soy devamsızlığı*). (Süreyya 2019).

Therefore, she argues that both the Istanbul Convention and the feminist demands for equality between women and men are Western-centric ideas that have a hidden agenda of limiting the increase of the population in certain parts of the world. Drawing upon this, she argues that divine order created a balance that could be maintained through conforming with the gender roles, which are defined according to *fitrat*.

Moreover, it is significant to discuss that her ideas reflect the highly popular arguments of some men in the conservative circles, who attack the women's gains in Turkey. Recently, this became highly popular in social media in Turkey<sup>38</sup>. A discussion about İstanbul Convention started and reached a peak when Yusuf Kaplan, a columnist of Yeni Şafak newspaper, accused National Education and Family Ministries and

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<sup>38</sup> There started even a sign campaign for the cancelation of Law no: 6284, İstanbul Convention and CEDAW with the name "Aile yıkan yasalar kalksın (Let ban the laws that destroy the family)" retrieved April 16, 2019 from <https://www.change.org/p/tbmmresmi-tcbestepe-aile-y%C4%B1kan-yasalar-kalks%C4%B1n-%C3%B6nceaile>

KADEM of dissolving the family with implementation of their projects. This led to a discussion in the social media, particularly but not specifically within the conservative circles, regarding the women's rights and İstanbul Convention, in which KADEM assigned to monitor its implementation. This pushed KADEM to make a press statement indicating that "We will not remain silent to the defamatory campaign" together with comments on KADEM's efforts to defend the unity of the family<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, they stated that there are two sexes, of women and men, while the concept of "gender" explains the roles and duties assigned to women and men within distinct traditions of various contexts. And, the assigned functions of genders would lead to unjust applications, which will end up with discrimination of women. Therefore they defended the concept of gender while declaring that there is no a third sex beside woman and man.

Following these statements, the account of Süreyya reflects one party in the discussion that was accusing İstanbul Convention and the concept of "gender," of supposedly aiming at dissolving the Turkish family structure.

The laws which were passed when Fatma Şahin was the Minister of Family and Social Policies still apply, such as the İstanbul Convention. Through the İstanbul Convention, genderlessness (*cinsiyetsizlik*) was imposed, and it is a stick of dynamite placed into the basis of the family. The West always does so; it puts poison into the honey pot<sup>40</sup>. What are the drawbacks of the İstanbul Convention? Women should be like women; men should be like men. The body and soul are created accordingly. *Fitrat* is like this. If we go out of it, the balance will be broken (Süreyya, 2019).

Süreyya's statements reflect people, who do not believe in the equality between men and women, and who understand the concept of gender as "genderlessness." Therefore, they perceive it as the wiping away of the heteronormative genders through the promotion of decaying of manhood and womanhood. On the other hand, Süreyya's

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<sup>39</sup> See "KADEM Başkan'ından Kamuoyu Açıklaması (Press Statement from the President of KADEM)." (2019, July 12). Retrieved July 19, 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbTDg5bi8Uk>

<sup>40</sup> "Putting poison into the honey pot" is an idiom which reflects the insidious desires or ideas which are hidden behind a fancy image.

arguments can be considered as a significant reflection of the arguments of the conservative and patriarchal male elites.

As a result, there are different opinions regarding the concept of *fitrat*. Feriha's critical view on the patriarchal settings at DİB is contrary to what Süreyya argues. In this context, it is significant to repeat that Feriha retired in 2010 from DİB. However, even though it is indicated by Feriha and Neşe that the construction of the gender roles through *fitrat* does not depend upon an Islamic source, as it is mobilized and used in the discourses, according to Neşe, Süreyya, and some other respondents, women should act in conformity with the traditional gender roles and norms. And it is clear that the gender roles, norms and responsibilities are defined with Islamic references to the concept of *fitrat*. Moreover, it bears significant consequences for "gender equality."

### **5.3. The conceptualization of Gender Justice through the Concept of *Fitrat***

The tension that are created between "gender equality" and the concept of "gender justice," which is defined with references to the Islamic idea of *fitrat*, were discussed in the second chapter. I argued that "gender justice" has developed as a challenge to women's demand for gender equality. It has been defined through the biological inequality between women and men. KADEM and the AKP argued that because the justice between women and men should be sustained rather than equality because they are not equal. This is also reflected in the statements of some preachers.

Regarding those discussions, Feriha states that:

Why was KADEM founded? Previously there was KADER, Association for Supporting Women Candidates (*Kadın Adayları Destekleme Derneği*, KADER). They carried out various projects. We know them. They supported female candidates, but they did not support veiled women for a certain period. They were from more feminist and secular circles. So Mr. Erdoğan said, "If they have KADER, we should establish KADEM. And if they say gender equality, let us say gender justice (Feriha, 2019).

Therefore, she reflected upon the discussion given in the second chapter about the tension created between these two terms.

Even though Feriha has a more critical stance on both the AKP's gender policies and DİB's applications of it, some other respondents asserted the significance of justice over equality. They claimed that without justice, it is not possible to provide an equal system. For example, Yasemin argued that:

Equality does not lead to salvation but justice. I believe in justice, not equality. For example, my husband and I cannot bear the same burden (physiologically). Men are stronger; we are not equal. For example, my husband throws the trash in our house. One day he rebelled and said, why I always throw the garbage? But throwing the garbage at home is like carrying the burden of the home. Men should bear the load of the house.

Merit, license, knowledge...They are all essential. Who is more experienced, who is more improved herself/himself? It is necessary to look at these. If you secure justice, you will achieve equality. It is vital to have a fair system. Equality cannot exist, where there is no justice (Yasemin, 2019).

Her ideas about the superiority of justice over equality have been supported by the biological and physiological differences between men and women, that comes from the procreation, namely the *fitrat*. That leads to an argument about the differing responsibilities of women and men:

Allah has created men and women as equals. This has been the case since *Adam* and *Eve*. The woman and the man are created as spouses. The spouse (*eş*) was created as equal (*eşit*). They stem from the same word. Allah expects the same worship from *Ali* and *Ayşe*. *Allah* doesn't say she (*Ayşe*) shall not pray. They have the same responsibilities to *Allah* and the society. Their responsibilities towards each other are different. Both of them have responsibilities to their spouse and children, but differently (Yasemin 2019).

Therefore, even though Yasemin argues that women and men are equal in terms of worship, their responsibilities and duties are different in the sphere of the family. After that, when I asked about equality in terms of opportunities, equality before the law, not equality in terms of biology, she stated that she is the the most experienced personnel at her workplace compared to the males in the same department. However,

when there is something to be asked, people do not ask her. Therefore, she complains as “Where is the equality?”

Moreover, while we were talking about the tension between justice and equality, she gave me an example of a couple, whom she met abroad in a working group on family problems. The woman in the couple was raised abroad, but the man was raised in Turkey. Therefore, the woman knows how to do things in that context, and the man felt useless. This constitutes a problem in their marriage, which should be prevented. Afterward, Yasemin stated that:

We need strong men lately. We are looking for solutions to all problems through women. We're trying to empower her. But in the meantime, we forget the men. We need to strengthen the men. We need to see the problem here. What is the state? We always say that the state is the mother, but the state is power. The state protects you; because it is the power. We want the state to be a father. We need to empower men rather than empowering women. For example, in my personal opinion, if ten women applied for a job and they were successful, but there is also one male who applied, instead of hiring women I would hire that one man. In order to avoid oppressing women, I need to omit oppressing a man. A man needs a job, needs to bring money home (Yasemin, 2019).

Therefore, while discussing her ideas about the superiority of justice over equality, she bases her statements on the traditional roles, which are shaped and redefined according to the concept of *fitrat*. Therefore, the woman, in the previous example, who are more empowered than her husband, is leading to the problem of the dissolution of the family. Moreover, she argues that instead of emphasizing the empowerment of women, we should focus more on the empowerment of men. For the prevention of the dissolution of the family, the transformation of the gender roles of women and men should be prevented.

Moreover, Süreyya also indicated that what is significant is justice, not equality. For defending her argument, like Yasemin, she also depends upon the traditional gender roles, defined through the concept of *fitrat*. However, she goes further and also criticizes the Western-centric conceptualization of gender equality, which contradicts the *fitrat* concept.



The rights and responsibilities of women and men cannot be the same. A woman cannot be a father. The right is one thing; responsibility is another. The sense of justice is important. If it is just, it is sufficient. Sexes are divided into men and women. Compassion in women is more developed. The woman is the mother, while the man is the father, the leader, and the mighty. These are temperamental. Out of a hundred women, let's say, there could be three or four women who are more fair than men. But men are eighty percent more objective than women. Women have more compassion. The woman is physically weaker. I have seen women, who become men abroad. One day I saw a truck driver. I didn't know if she was a man or a woman. Then I realized that she is a woman with a mustache. She became a man after a while, and now she is a man. What is imposed is *genderlessness*. There's no feminine woman anymore; they are masculine. So if we are women, we should not do things that will deprive us of our womanhood. Grace, kindness, and subtlety are all gone. We became like men. I'm religious personnel; even I feel that way (Süreyya, 2019).

Therefore, as discussed in the previous part as well, Süreyya's criticisms of gender equality are mostly based on the development of feminism as a Western-centric ideology. However, similar to Yasemin, while putting her argument about justice, she is also reproducing the traditional gender roles through a particular Islamic reference to *fitrat*. Therefore, it could be understood that for providing, sustaining, and maintaining the justice, women, and men should carry out their responsibilities defined with Islamic reference to the concept of *fitrat*. Moreover, her statements that she is religious personnel but even she feels that way, reflects that womanhood should be constructed according to *fitrat* in such professions.

As a result, it could be argued that, despite the critical stance of Feriha, approaches of some women at DİB to the women's issues reflect the gender regime which is defined according to the political ideology of AKP. The backlash against the feminist movement, the challenge of gender equality through mobilizing the concept of *fitrat*, and the backlash against the İstanbul Convention and women's gains, are all significant aspects of AKP government, that is also reflected in the statements of my respondents. Therefore, it could be argued that the profession of preaching is a significant reflection of AKP's ideology regarding gender issues. Accordingly, this profession constructs womanhood as being not equal to man. Moreover, it reproduces

the traditional gender roles with Islamic references to the concept of *fıtrat* in a just system.

#### **5.4. Women's Employment in *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* as Female Preachers**

As was discussed in previous chapters that the employment of women and activities targeting them signify an essential transformation at DİB, which is a significant institution in the history of contemporary Turkey. Scholars criticized the position of DİB within the state structure under the successive governments of a conservative political party, especially after 2010 due to its increased budget, expanded activity areas, the reconfiguration of its structure, and its controversial public statements particularly in the realm of gender. The increased rate of women employment in the ranks of DİB took place together with a transformation in education and also in the structure of DİB. Therefore, in the following parts, the university education and the reorganization of DİB will be discussed based on the narratives of women. Afterwards, women's perspectives on increasing female employment and their approach to the profession of preaching will be discussed.

##### **5.4.1. Education**

After the law of *Tevhid-i Tedrisat* (unification of education) was proclaimed in 1924, all the educational institutions were connected to the Ministry of National Education, which was assigned to open schools for training religious personnel. Afterward, only for training male staff, *İmam-Hatip* High schools (*İmam-Hatip Lisesi*, hereafter İHL) were opened, while a Faculty of Theology was opened at the University of İstanbul. İHLs were closed in the 1932-1933 period due to the lack of students (Çakır et al., 2004), while the Faculty of Theology was closed one year after.

In 1949, another Theology Faculty at Ankara University was opened with the admission of female students. In addition to this, all the High Islamic Institutes which were opened since 1959 for only males, were turned into Theology Faculties admitting

women in 1982. After that, Hassan (2009) argues that theology faculties started to admit female students to their classes; however, with a small percentage.

Among my respondents, Jale mentioned the quota for female students at the Theology Faculty, where only most successful female students could enter. She stated that:

At the time I entered, there was a 4% quota for female students in the theology department. To be able to study theology, the girls had to enter one percent (in the university examination system of Turkey). Then there was such discrimination (Jale, 2019).

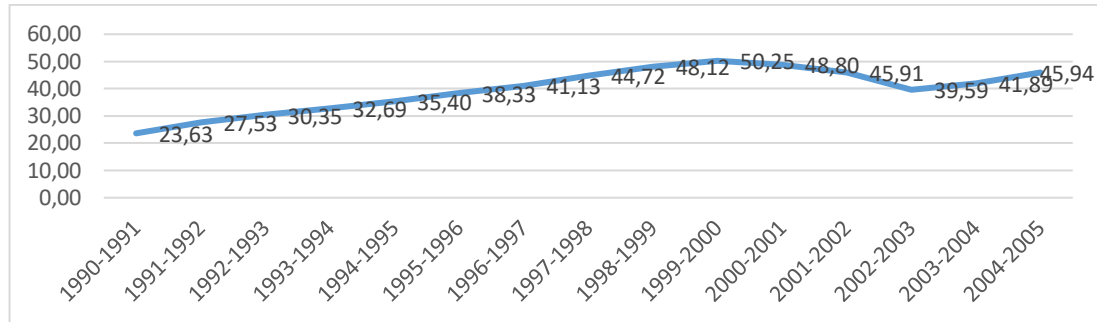
On the other hand, the admission of girls to the İHL was more controversial. As Çakır et al. state (2004), as a result of the legal struggle of a father, who wanted to register her daughter to İHL, female students started to be admitted to the İHL with the decision of the Council of State in 1976. The fact that female students could be educated with their veil caused their conservative and religious families to send their daughters to these schools (Çakır et al., 2004: 25).

Consequently, when it came to 1995, the female students of İHL consist 38.33% of all students in İHL (Çakır et al., 2004: 26). As Çakır and his friends show based on the data, in the 1990-1991 period, female students' percentage was 23.63 at İHL, increases until the 1999-2000 period to 50.25%. 2000 is significant due to the introduction of the new regulation on the coefficient calculation to get accepted into universities. That is İHL graduates were practically forced to continue with the Faculty of Theology. It is significant because, after that the number of the female students in Theology Faculties has increased despite the earlier limitation, as mentioned above, put on admitting female students. However, the reason for such a gendered consequence of the coefficient regulation remained unanswered.

After 1999, the percentage of female İHL graduates fluctuates, which was 50.25 % in 1999, decreases to 39.59% in the 2002-2003 period, and after that, it starts to increase and reaches 45.9% in 2004-2005 period. Relatedly, the number of female students

accepted to faculty of theology outnumbers male students in the beginning of 2003-2004 period.

Figure 2. The percentage of female students at İHL.

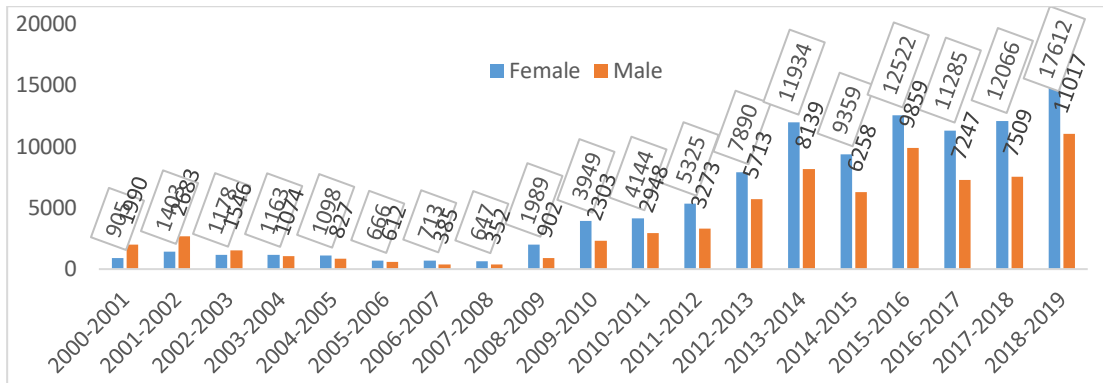


Data from Çakır et al. (2004)

In that regard, it is also significant to consider the politics regarding the condition of İHL under the rule of the AKP government. More importantly, it is vital to mention the reopening of İmam-Hatip schools' middle school section with the introduction of twelve years of compulsory education, which is known as 4+4+4 in 2009 by AKP government. According to the report of Eğitim-Sen (2018), the number of students in the İmam-Hatip schools has been increasing dramatically since 2011.

After the 2003-2004 period, the number of female students, who were accepted to Theology Faculties, was higher than male students. In addition to the increase in the numbers of female students, as can be seen from the figure below, the difference between the numbers of males and females is also increasing.

Figure 3. The new registries of Faculty Theologies by gender over years.

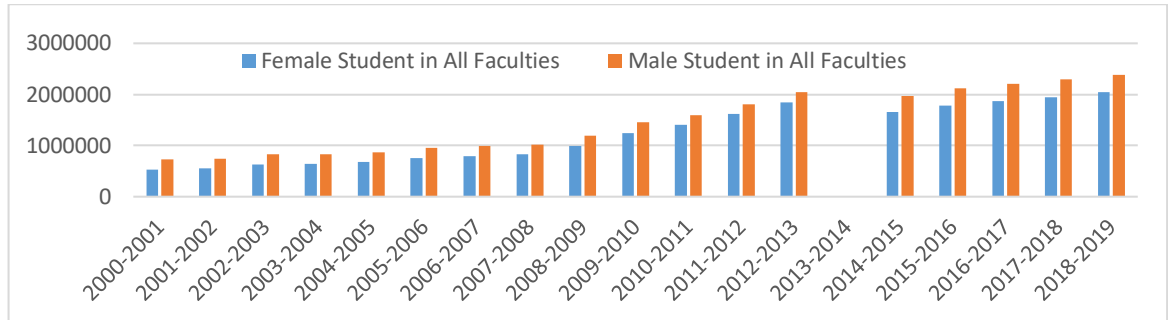


Data for the period between 2000-2001 and 2006-2007 from Furat (2012), for the period between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012 from Kızılabdullah (2016), for the period between 2013-2014 and 2018-2019 Higher Education Information Management System (*Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi*), (n.d.).

2003-2004 period is the turning point that the entries of female students to the Faculty of Theology became higher than males. As was indicated before, 2004 is also a significant year for this study. After that year, the numbers of both the female preachers at DİB and the female students' new registries to the Faculty of Theology increases. Findings show that this is a two-way relationship. Therefore, the expansion of female students in both İHL and Theology Faculties bears significant consequences for the development of the proper profession for the women in Turkey.

On the other hand, while looking at the gender breakdowns of the students in the Faculty of Theologies, it is also significant to compare it to the gender breakdowns of all students in all faculties all over Turkey.

Figure 4. Students at universities by gender over the years.

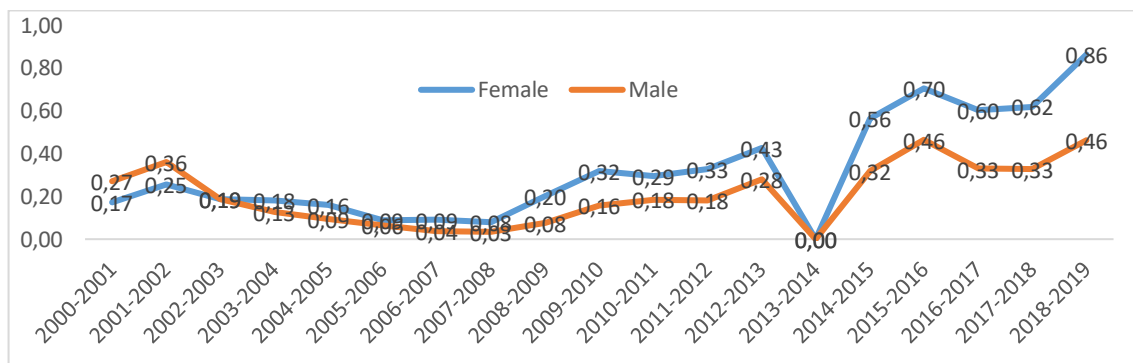


Data from Higher Education Information Management System (Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi), (n.d.).

From this graph, it could be seen that the number of students in universities increases. However, the number of female students do not outnumber male students, as it is the case for the Theology Faculties. Therefore, it could be argued that the female students' trend in the Theology Faculties is out of the norm when it is compared with the picture above.

Lastly, it is also significant to consider the percentage of the Theology Faculties students over all undergraduate students. Because both of them are increasing since the 2000-2001 period. However, the ratio between them differs:

Figure 5. The percentage of students in Faculty Theologies to all students at universities.



Data from Higher Education Information Management System (Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi), (n.d.).

Those percentages reflect that in the 2018-2019 period, one of every 116 female students preferred to study theology, while one of every 217 male students gave the preference to the same department. Therefore, both the total number of people in universities and the total number of students in Theology Faculties increased both for females and males over the years. However, the percentage of female students was much higher than the same rate of male students today. This means that religious education has been becoming a feminine area since the 2003-2004 period. It is a peculiar trend, considering increase in DİB's appointment of female personnel since the mid-2000s, particularly the preachers since 2004.

Findings obtained from the interviews are also consistent with the statistics mentioned above. While I was explaining the aim of the study as to examine the increase of female employment at DİB, some women argued that it is related to the increase of women at universities' Theology Faculties:

In addition to the employment, the number of female lecturers in the Divinity Faculties has increased. It is not like the old times. There were three or five female professors in our times. Since the headscarf was forbidden, everyone (veiled women) stayed back. With the lifting of the ban, the opportunities for this community, I mean the religious section of the society, unfolded (Dilan, 2019).

In line with these statements, and parallel to the statistics, some of them indicated that due to the new coefficient regulation, they continued with the Theology Faculties:

There were breaking off the points when passing to the Theology Faculties. Women preferred the faculty of theology more. In the period after 28 February, the number of women who study theology has increased. In the future, I suppose the proportion of women in theology faculties seems to be more (Yasemin 2019).

Thus, they asserted that the coefficient regulation impacted their decision about their future career. However, there is no statement regarding the gendered difference that the regulation led.

As a result, it could be clearly seen that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of female students at both İHL and Theology Faculties. This shows that religious education became a more feminine area. Additionally, DİB starts to employ more women in parallel to the increase of the students. Therefore, getting religious education and being religious personnel at DİB became a more preferred career prospect for women, starting with the early 2000s. This development is in line with the constructed womanhood through the concept of *fitrat* as well. Through the state's policies and the changes in the educational regulations, preaching became a career prospect for some women who have a religious education.

#### **5.4.2. Reorganization of *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı***

It was discussed in the fourth chapter that DİB had been restructured in 2010 with the new bill (Ozzano and Maritato 2018), and provided services and activities outside the mosques (Mutluer 2018) by covering areas like family and women, and became a more politicized institution since then (Öztürk, 2016) under the rule of the AKP government. I also argued that, despite the earlier women-friendly tone with projects like the elimination of violence against women and the schooling of girls, after 2010 that women-friendly tone has changed to a perspective of “protection of the family.” In the early 2010s, the cooperation protocols with various state institutions have been signed, which foresee female preachers' working areas as well as they conduct regular visits to these institutions, especially the social institutions connected to the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services.

In this context, Jale stated that “There are protocols with institutions. There was no such a thing before; it was not easy to get in and out everywhere” (Jale, 2019). The works of Family and Religious Guidance Bureau has started its operation through the end of the 2000s (Gül, 2019), and a particular head of the department established within the central organization. Gül explains this process as,



When it became the head of the department (2010), things started to progress more institutionally. Thus, working areas became more specific. In 2007, protocols with other public institutions started. Protocols were made with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. In other public institutions, the staff was not friendly to the personnel of Diyanet (who were visiting other public institutions for preaching activities) before. Of course, this could vary from region to region, from district to district. After the opening of the family offices, preachers working in other fields started to work in the offices (Gül 2019).

Because of all these developments mentioned above and mentioned in the fourth chapter in detail, it could be argued that the impact of the concept of *fıtrat* in determining the gender regime became more effective.

Initially, Feriha, who has worked in cooperation and coordination of the earlier projects of DİB on women until 2010, states that with the resignation of Bardakoğlu, her job is done at DİB, and she got to be retired (Feriha, 2019). In addition to herself, she also mentioned about another woman in İstanbul who was a preacher before promoted to mufti assistant, working in the projects like women choir and the reorganization of the mosque places for the need of women, was retired in the same period as well (Feriha, 2019). She states that,

Women's choir in Diyanet was not very welcomed either. They said Diyanet makes women sing songs. We had an assistant mufti in Istanbul, working in this field. She is now retired, actually got to be retired. She set up a women's choir there. And she had serious work on the arrangement of women's departments of mosques. They really wasted that girl. I think she was one of the most hardworking among the mufti deputies (Feriha, 2019).

Therefore, she reflects upon the exclusion of women, who worked for more gender-egalitarian projects like herself, from the DİB's ranks after 2010 despite the empowerment of women at DİB's positions through increasing employment.

Moreover, Feriha also mentions about the earlier projects and increasing emphasis on women, which she was very critical of it. She considers that her criticism of this transformation is one reason for her retirement. She states that,

The Prime Minister's Circular on the prevention of violence against women was issued in 2006. It can be called as AKP's most beautiful text. We based all our projects on this circular. It was a general notice which gave tasks and responsibilities to public institutions for the prevention of violence against women. We had been meeting once in three months with institutions that were given responsibility. We were providing reports and telling them what we were doing. We carried out projects to prevent violence against women. It was the United Nations project. In our time, it was referred to as "Combating Violence Against Women"; however, in the following period, it was named as "protection of the family." They also retouched other statements within the project. At that time, booklets were prepared. They use these booklets when they go to public institutions. They use them now to show off. Great hypocrisy (Feriha, 2019).

Based on these statements, Feriha indicated that women's issues became framed within the "protection of the family" after 2010. When I asked other respondents about this transformation, they asserted that now the focus is on the domestic violence covering all the members of the family. Because it is a broader concept with covering children, and sometimes men, who would be exposed to domestic violence as well. Considering this, Gül asserted that:

At first, the project started as the prevention of violence against women. It was a UNFPA project. Then we extended it to the family. We discussed domestic violence because it's more comprehensive. It's not just women who are subjected to violence in the family. There are also children affected by violence. Men can also be exposed to violence. Focusing on domestic violence, we look at the issue from a wider window. But there was no such change from woman to family. Domestic violence is an important issue. We aimed to protect and strengthen the family. Violence is a phenomenon that destroys the family. Therefore, we focus on domestic violence (Gül, 2019).

Moreover, Nida also repeated similar arguments by adding that the emphasis on women is positive discrimination, which should have its limits:

There is also a limit to positive discrimination. We are trying to combat domestic violence. We can't just talk about violence against women here (Nida, 2019).

The statements of Süreyya about this issue go one step further and she accuses of feminism. While we were talking about İstanbul Convention, she asserts that

It's a good cover to say stop violence against women. There have been girls (like Özgecan Aslan) who have been raped and murdered in the past years. Things got

confused, and there was a lot of reaction. I think we should say “violence against people,” not “violence against women.” We have to fight it. Children are exposed to mobbing too much. Mobbing is not only done to women. The female manager can do it to a male inferior. If she is older, she can do it to the younger one. I am against being called it as violence against women (Süreyya, 2019).

Therefore, as was indicated by them, the emphasis on women expanded to cover all members of the family. It could be considered as a similar way of producing concepts as in the example of “gender justice” against gender equality. In this example, that is “domestic violence” or “violence against humanity” instead of “violence against women.”

Lastly, about the reorganization of DİB regarding women’s issues, and its increasing emphasis on the family which is considered as the primary locus of women according to the conceptualization of *fitrat*, and according to the traditional gender roles as well, it is significant to mention about the establishment of the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus. It is indicated by Feriha, these offices are established in the first place with an increase in the questions coming to DİB from women. According to some other respondents, they were established after observing the increase in the divorce rate in Turkey. Feriha explains the establishment process as:

The *Diyanet* has annual meetings. In one of them, it is decided to open Family and Counseling Guidance Offices. Because the questions have been coming to the Diyanet were mostly about worship, about fasting, sacrifice, and praying before. However, women started to consult more. With increasing questions from women, they said, let’s open offices that will work in this field and hire women to specialize. It is decided to appoint women, who are university graduates, who will be given training, and become experts. They were planning to allocate a room within the mufti offices. But do women come to the mufti offices? (Feriha, 2019).

In addition to Feriha, Gül also indicated that due to the transformation in modern daily life, questions coming from women to DİB has increased. Therefore DİB established these offices. However, she also adds that these offices are opened because DİB has things to say about family, and DİB’s works were necessary on the social field (Gül, 2019). Moreover, some respondents, such as Meltem, argued that these offices are established due to the increase in the divorce rates:

In our society, the divorce rate has increased. Because of that, ADRBs are being established and increasing in number. People are getting divorced for a lot of worthless reasons. Problems occur at the wedding. They don't know what engagement is. Young people need a lot of help in matters such as weddings and divorce (Meltem 2019).

Therefore, there is different reasoning presented by women about the establishment of these offices. As Feriha argues, they firstly opened for answering questions of women, for DİB to provide services not only for men but also for women. However, as in the statements of Meltem, who is working in one of these offices, they offer services with a particular aim of prevention of the divorces and the protection of the family. Even though the approach could change for this specific aim, such as giving seminars about bettering the communication between couples or about domestic economy as they mentioned about the “marriage schools” or “engagement schools” (Yasemin, 2019; Elif, 2019, Neşe, 2019), protecting the institution of family through the activities of DİB with Islamic references signifies a particular development about the gender regime in Turkey.

As a result, it is argued that, especially since 2010, the approach of DİB has changed from a women-friendly tone reflected in various projects, seminars, and activities to a more conservative attitude about the protection of the family in which women are assigned as the main subject. When these developments are considered together with the first public proclamation of Prime Minister Erdoğan on his disbelief in equality between genders and his emphasis on the concept of *fitrat*, those imply significant aspects of the development of the gender regime through the activities of DİB with conservative and Islamic references.

#### **5.4.3. Perspectives on Women’s Employment at *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı***

Women’s increasing employment, particularly as preachers, at DİB since 2004 constitutes the main context of this study. Its relation with the gender regime that constructs the proper womanhood within and through the professions for females at

DİB in line with the social and political atmosphere of Turkey is the main discussion of the study as well. Therefore, their perspectives on the employment of women at DİB, whether it is an empowering condition or not, will be discussed in this chapter. Specifically, the conditions of their employment, the reasoning of their mobilization in the cadres, and the limitations set are analyzed through the narratives of women reflecting their perspectives on the issue. Firstly, their views on increasing women's employment are discussed. Following this, the opportunity of working with a headscarf will be examined, because it is one main reason for them to choose to work at DİB.

Initially, it is significant to mention that it is repeatedly asserted both in the discourses of women and in the publications of DİB and public speeches of its presidents that they intend to reach more women and provide services for women within and outside the mosques, it is of great importance to increase women's employment at DİB. Additionally, it is also reflected in the narratives of my respondents that women's employment is significant for providing services in the social service institutions for the disadvantaged groups. This reflects the central aspect of the gender regime of the profession; that is, her professional activities are in line with traditional gender roles. That is, women's employment is significant for her "natural" characteristics of care-giving and compassion. Moreover, women's work for providing services for women also reflects one aspect of the gender regime as "segregationist." That is, as argued by Walby (1990) as the differentiating point of the public patriarchy, which is segregationist, from private patriarchy, which is structured as "exclusionary."

In that regard, after I introduced the central theme of the study as to the increase of the employment of women at DİB, Yasemin indicated that it is logical for DİB to employ more women for providing services to women, who constitute the half of the society:

Women's employment everywhere in Turkey in the 2000s, especially before the 2010s was not very high. Then it starts to increase, which is a state policy. The increase in these years in the *Diyanet* is a state policy. That is what makes sense. The mission of the *Diyanet* is to illuminate the religious life of society. Half of society consists of women. It makes more sense to approach women with women. As of 2011, the

assignment of women for the pilgrimage in the *Diyanet* is increasing. Women's employment is increasing. Because men cannot deal with the situation of women in pilgrimage. The woman has a special situation which she cannot share with the male personnel (Yasemin, 2019).

Therefore, Yasemin argues that women's employment at DİB is needed for their services for women. This is significant in shaping the gender regime of the profession.

Additionally, Jale asserted that women's employment is essential for the disadvantaged groups that DİB provide services:

Women and girls are in the disadvantaged group. They are critical. Therefore, women are employed in all areas of *Diyanet*. We have a female vice president. We have women as department heads. These are very important. They work very selflessly. Women's employment is important not only for women but also for all neglected groups (Jale, 2019).

Following these statements, it could be argued that women's employment at DİB has increased within the last decades, in line with the expansion of DİB's activity areas, for women's feminine characteristics of working selflessly with compassion for the good of the society.

In addition to this, most of my respondents treated increasing women's employment at DİB as a positive development, as reflected in Jale's previous statements. Rather than the position of the preacher, they indicated that women are employed at DİB now in almost all areas wherever men are employed except the positions of imams and muftis. Besides the position of Qur'an course instructor as the most crowded and oldest position for women at DİB, they mentioned about the higher ranked positions recently available to women.

Qur'an course instructor is the oldest position for women, for 30 years. Other than that, they are in the preacher position, they work as religious services specialists, they are present in the Supreme Council of Religious Affairs, as deputy muftis, there are heads of departments, and *murakıps*<sup>41</sup> have recently been appointed. Women were

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<sup>41</sup> *Murakıp* is the name given to the inspectors working in the Religious Affairs.

recruited as astronomers in the central organization. Women can work in many places at Diyanet (Gül 2019).

Furthermore, Yasemin asserted that increased presence of women in the hierarchically higher positions is the order of the president Erdoğan. In that regard, the policies of Erdoğan regarded as empowering for women at DİB:

In 2014, the first female head of the department was appointed. From 2014 to 2017, there was only one female head of department. Afterward, President Erdoğan gave instructions, and at the end of 2017, there were seven women as the heads of departments. This has changed for the last two years. Provincial mufti deputies are appointed as women. The woman appointed as vice president. All this shows that there is an acceleration in female employment (Yasemin, 2019).

Therefore, it is indicated that women are employed in almost every position, including the higher ranks along the the instructions of President Erdoğan.

However, at this point, it is very much significant to mention Feriha's perspectives on women's employment at DİB because she argues that women are not given the authority in the hierarchically higher positions they are appointed, as in the example of the deputy muftis.

They appointed women as deputy mufti. This first started in the Bardakoglu period, and later diminished. They do not provide clear statistics. For example, nobody would say that, but they do not give power of attorney to the deputy mufti of women. In the bureaucracy, if the mufti is not in his office, he has to give a power of attorney to his senior assistant. But they don't give attorneys to the female deputy mufti. But nobody says that. Why is that? Because the ban (on headscarf) is lifted, the cadres are good; salaries are high. So everyone is satisfied (Feriha 2019).

In addition to this, Feriha argued that even though women are increasingly employed at DİB, their working conditions are not facilitated:

Here, the will of the head, whoever is high-level responsible, is important. This is not the case only when the Presidency (of Turkey) says to appoint a deputy mufti. Okay, it is a good thing. However, you have to create those environments, give them (women) the initiative (Feriha, 2019).

Feriha indicates that women's employment has been increased at DİB; however, it is necessary to establish the conditions for women to work. Thus, following these statements of both Feriha and others, it could be argued that despite the empowerment of women through employment at DİB's cadres, their working conditions are not facilitated, and they do not have the same authority as their male coworkers.

Secondly, women mostly indicated that the one significant reason for them to start to work at DİB is the opportunity to work with their veil. It is a significant aspect, especially in the period before the abolition of the ban on the headscarf which restrained women from working in public offices.

When we started working (2005), the *Diyanet* had the following advantage. There was no headscarf ban in teaching the Qur'an course. But it was forbidden in all the other areas. Everyone was continuing to work without using the headscarf (Neşe, 2019).

Hence, DİB has a relative advantage for veiled women who had a religious education. Moreover, Dilan also asserted that after her experience of being expelled from her position of religious culture and moral knowledge teacher after the 28 February process, she transferred to DİB.

Anyway, in June 2000, our job is over, so I was expelled from teaching. Then we stayed at home for six years. Amnesty went on in 2006. Then I was assigned to an Imam Hatip High School. But I was scared to work there, so we'd have gone through the same thing. I applied for the transference to the Diyanet. We have graduated thinking of teaching. But when we couldn't work as a teacher... Life obliged us; the transition to the Diyanet was compulsory. You can't work with a headscarf. While we were studying at the university, the number of ladies in the Diyanet was really very less. So we never thought of Diyanet. In other words, these things are constantly changing under the influence of political power (Dilan, 2019).

These statements of Neşe and Dilan were repeated in other interviews as well. Thus it could be argued that one significant reason for choosing to work at DİB is due to its toleration for the headscarf. Later, the ban on the veil was abolished with the initiative of the AKP government with much controversy and public dispute. Feriha mentioned about this process as:



Then the amnesty (for the women who fired from civil occupations due to wearing headscarves) came. In the period before the pardon (2006), it was said not to create problems for the AKP. A big mess. After the amnesty, some (women) were transferred to the Presidency. Some switched for the cadre, and some switched for the name, some switched because of the convenience of working hours, some switched for being assertive (Feriha, 2019).

After that, she continues by indicating that even though the lifting of the headscarf ban was something desired and necessary, DİB appointed veiled women who were chosen by the government

Yes, the possibilities for women increased at Diyanet. But for which women? Power (iktidar) takes its own veiled woman. Women with a headscarf of their own choice. Women who do not interfere with anything, sit with his head tilted, do not make a sound, agree with the men at Diyanet, maybe joking at most. Diyanet has very good cadres for women. Huriye Martı was appointed as vice president (2018). Women became heads of departments. But, as I said, the veiled women whom the government has chosen. All the female friends are like freshwater fish<sup>42</sup>. Let be like a lady and not talk to men. The women who greet or joke with men the most. They (DİB or the government) choose roses without thorns. Let it look like a rose and smell like a rose, but without thorns<sup>43</sup> (Feriha, 2019).

Feriha asserted that the new cadres at DİB for women, particularly the hierarchically higher cadres, were appointed according to the government's choice. Even though it is supposed to be a positive development both for DİB and for women working at DİB, this way of its happening has not been regarded as positive for women by Feriha. Moreover, she argued that even though the removal of the ban on the headscarf is significant, and the existence of veiled women in the public spaces of employment is essential, there are other aspects to be considered as well.

Mr. Erdoğan wants the representation of the veiled women. Now there are veiled ambassadors and veiled women in the parliament. It's hard to find someone to interview. Women won't talk because they are comfortable, happy with their condition. Cadres are very good, salaries are good, the working hours are convenient, the headscarf ban has been lifted. Everyone is happy with their life. The headscarf is liberated. That was our biggest problem. Therefore, how important is the quality, qualification, competence and merit in it? The veil is very visible. In the period when

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<sup>42</sup> Here "Being like a freshwater fish" is a metaphor to describe their condition which is not challenging and facing hardships, but swimming in the safe waters.

<sup>43</sup> The metaphor of "rose without thorn" is used to describe something beautiful without any challenges.

we were expelled, a western person called the veiled women in his doctoral thesis as “walking billboards” (Feriha, 2019).

As a result, the women’s increasing employment at DİB is regarded as a positive transformation for some women, but Feriha criticizes its conditions. Because women, who considered it as a positive transformation, asserted that women are employed and are active in every field at DİB. On the other hand, Feriha argued that even though the ban on the headscarf is abolished and the representation of the veiled women increased with the policies of Erdoğan, there are different aspects to consider. She argues that women do not have the same authority and their working conditions are not facilitated. Additionally, as Feriha explains, the employment of veiled women is also dependent upon various aspects that the government determined. Therefore, it could be argued that the empowerment of veiled women through employment does not necessarily bring about the liberating conditions for women. Moreover, their professional activities have been mobilized for their feminine characteristics of caring, in especially their duty of regular visits to social institutions. To conclude, the employment of women in the ranks of DİB is in line with the interpretation of the concept of *fitrat*. That is both a convenient profession to work with their veil, and also their work is needed for their feminine attributes.

#### **5.4.4. Perspectives on the Profession of Female Preachers**

Views of women’s employment at DİB’s ranks are discussed above. Therefore, in this part, more specifically, the views on preacher’s professional activities will be discussed based on the narratives of women who reacted upon their works. It will be examined firstly in terms of the difficulties they encounter during their professional activities, and secondly in terms of the social status of the profession.

As it is stated in the previous chapters, preachers’ work directives define their jobs as to performing many tasks such as preaching in various institutions on certain days of

the week, keeping watches for *fatwa*<sup>44</sup>, and serving in Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus. Even though there are three different cadres of preachers – preacher, prison preacher, and Family and Religious Guidance Office preacher—; they indicated that they all perform similar tasks. One most significant difference for prison preacher is that only they are visiting prisons for preaching activities. Besides, they are keep watch in the family offices and answer the questions coming to the offices through visits or by phone.

Initially, providing “spiritual/religious guidance” is defined as to provide counseling to the people who come to offices or call by phone. The questions vary from the issues about the religious practices to the relations with husbands. In addition to the religious counseling, family counseling comprises the listening and providing solutions for the problems of counselee about her, sometimes his relationships with their intimate circles, and about their private life with Islamic knowledge. In that regard, they come across with various people with distinct problems. Even though they are going through the in-service training seminars organized by DİB about how to approach the counselee, they are encountering difficulties in counseling activities.

For example, Süreyya explained that

I have been going to female guest houses for a year and a half. The situation in these houses cannot be understood from the outside. Our subject can be moral issues, faith-reinforcing issues, and spiritual aspects. I can stay in guest houses for 2.5-3 hours. I'm talking half an hour or forty-five minutes. Then I listen more. They want to tell me something. The guest house I went to is not normal. Women with psychological disorders are staying. For example, there was a woman, and she said she wanted to meet in private. She abused when she was little, and now she's diagnosed with OCD. There was someone else with schizophrenia. In there, the psychology of the workers was very bad also. I only go once a week and stay for two or three hours. I was still very impressed (Süreyya, 2019).

As was indicated by Süreyya, it is a difficult task to take care of the people who stay in social institutions. In this example, Süreyya would not have known how to deal with someone with OCD or schizophrenia.

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<sup>44</sup> Keeping watch for fatwa means staying at the family offices for the visitors and for the phone calls.

Neşe also mentioned about the difficulties she experienced as

There was one young bride who was subjected to harassment by her father-in-law. Although she shared this with her husband, she never recovered. Her husband supported his wife, but the woman's psychology never improved. We've been tracking her for a long time. However, as we understood that we could not deal with it, we sent her to the Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Policies. There were advisors; we were in direct contact with them. They also realized that the case is so serious. They sent her to a psychiatrist, and she is hospitalized (Neşe, 2019).

Preachers who work in the field mentioned similar problems that they experienced, and that they could not bear.

The hardship of encountering distinct problems has also been regarded as one positive aspect of the profession of preaching when compared to other positions at DİB, particularly the Qur'an course instructors. Because they repeatedly stated that they like to be preacher more than the Qur'an course instructor due to its dynamic structure that forces them to expand their knowledge about anything that takes place in everyday life. They indicated that it is a dynamic profession, not routine like the Qur'an course instructor, in which there is the same audience with the same topics every year. However, preachers come across with different groups of people, varying from the children in the nursing house to the women staying in the shelters. For example, Süreyya asserted that

Every year, the same curriculum, everything repeats itself. I wanted to be a preacher; I wanted to be promoted in the profession. The preacher is more active, always needs to learn new things. You need to develop yourself and your general knowledge. Sometimes our officials in the *Diyanet* say about preachers as "They don't work much, they only go preaching for 1-2 hours." But that's not true, and it's not as easy as they say. Sermons need to be prepared; there is a preparation stage. Your general culture needs to be high. We go to various institutions, primary schools, and high schools. After becoming a preacher, I learned a lot. I developed my diction; I developed my general knowledge. To work in ADRBs, a certificate is required. Many training seminars and programs are organized. Pedagogues come as speakers, known and recognized professors from universities come for seminars (Süreyya, 2019).

The comparison between the position of Qur'an course instructor and the preacher has been repeated in many interviews, as most of them promoted from the first to the latter. They reiterated that the professional activities of preachers are more active and not restricted to a group of people as in the Qur'an course, with the same repeating syllabus in every year. They also repeatedly asserted that they need to improve themselves about anything due to the questions asked to them could be in any area.

Not only the position of preacher allows them to be more active, but it should also be considered that it is a hierarchically higher position. As reflected in Süreyya's statements that she wanted to be promoted, Azize also reflected upon her decision to be promoted as:

They recruited too much Qur'an course instructors in that period (2011-2012). Everyone was a Qur'an course instructor. It was not clear who was sufficient and who was not. They took everyone. They took people who are graduated from distance education (*açık öğretim*). There were transfer program graduates, IHL graduates, the ones who transferred from the transfer program to 4-year university programs, and the Faculty of Theology graduates. I thought I should try the preacher position. Apart from that, the position of the preacher is a higher position than the Qur'an course instructor. I thought I should give it a try. I knew the preaching exam was very difficult. Your Arabic knowledge must be very strong. Then I bought books, refreshed my knowledge, learned the questions of the old exams (Azize, 2019).

Therefore, it is clear that the female preachers perceive their professional career is better than the Qur'an course instructors due to it is both more active and hierarchically higher. They asserted that they should know more about both the Islamic knowledge and general knowledge. Therefore, it could be argued that they perceive their profession as a good career with a good social status.

To sum up, the recreated position of the preacher for women is both a profession that involves many difficulties and presents a good career opportunity for the graduates of Theology Faculties. It involves the difficulties because it is a recreated sphere that they do not have clear directives and background about what they should do when they come across unique situations. For example, Neşe mentioned a person who called her with suicidal tendencies because she/he is an intersex person who does not know how

to deal with the daily life and the religious practices arranged according to a two-sex system (Neşe, 2019). Neşe mentioned how much she was badly influenced, and stated that “I realized we should be thankful to God for even our sex” (Neşe, 2019). Moreover, the people who come or call the family offices and connected to female preachers have distinct problems with various issues. Providing a solution with Islamic references is not an easy task for the people who are diagnosed with schizophrenia, who have suffered incest in their childhood, or who is raped by her father-in-law. In this context, for instance, in the example of the intersex person, the *fitrat* discourse has its limits and does not help preachers anymore to practice the profession. On the other hand, despite the hardships mentioned, they also perceive their profession as a good career opportunity with high social status in line with the *fitrat* discourse that constructs proper professions for women. As mentioned in the previous part, working with the headscarf in almost any field at DİB provided them the opportunity of empowerment through employment. However, as Feriha argued, this empowerment is limited to women who conform to the AKP’s ideology, in particular, the gender policies which are shaped with a specific reference to the *fitrat* concept.

### **5.5. Female Preachers’ Perspectives on Family-Work Balance**

In the previous parts, it is argued that gender roles defined according to the idea of “*fitrat*,” and relatedly, the gender hierarchy is conceptualized in terms of gender justice, not equality. The conditions of women’s employment at DİB, particularly in the positions of the preacher, is discussed in terms of the limitations set by the concept of *fitrat*. Therefore it could be argued that the female preachers’ perspectives on women’s employment have shaped by the construction of the proper women’s roles through the particular Islamic references to the concept of *fitrat*. According to the *fitrat* discourse, women’s primary responsibility is constructed in the familial sphere and men’s in the public spaces of employment for him to supply the economic needs of family. Therefore to discuss the construction of the proper womanhood, it is significant to examine preachers’ perspectives on women’s roles in the sphere of employment. In this context, firstly, their views on the conditions of women’s participation in the

workforce will be explained below, and secondly, preachers' ways of balancing the familial and professional responsibilities.

#### **5.5.1. Preachers' Perspectives on Women's Employment in Terms of Women's Responsibilities**

Initially, limitations of women's employment were defined in terms of her domestic responsibilities, particularly to her family. Because, as repeatedly asserted by preachers that family is a critical institution of society. They work in the family offices for the protection of family. Therefore they aim to prevent the dissolution of family and the divorces. When I asked why family is a significant institution for DİB which needed to establish these offices, they argued that

Family is the cornerstone of society. The first role in Islam is the role of husband and wife. God first created *Adam* and *Eve* so that they might be wives. The best place to show the behavioral dimension of Islam is family. Because of the problems in society, the divorce rate has increased. For that reason, ADRBs was established and had been increasing in number (Meltem, 2019)

Other respondents also repeated similar statements about the sanctity of the family, which stems from God's procreation of *Adam* and *Eve* as spouses. Therefore, it is argued that living in a family is in a human's *fitrat*. Moreover, Neşe argued that living alone is against the *fitrat*.

Family is a very basic structure. Who is going to raise us? Of course, the family. We receive from them the education, manner, and customs. These are the qualities that will determine if people feel happy or uncomfortable about us. So it will affect society in the end. Therefore from a very basic sense, from the beginning, it is the one fundamental structure. When Adam was first sent to the world, he was not alone. He was sent with Eve to establish a family. They had kids and became a family. So a lonely life is against the *fitrat*. As because it is opposed to *fitrat*, as you go against your *fitrat*, your psychology will take shape accordingly. It also determines your benefits within society. So it's important to establish a family. It is vital to raise children in your family (Neşe, 2019).

Therefore, in addition to the Islamic references dependent upon the belief in the procreation of *Adam* and *Eve* as family, Neşe also argued that a lonely life is against

the *fitrat*. Therefore, it is evident that the significance of the family is defined with Islamic references.

In this context, the conditions of women's employment are shaped accordingly. Preachers asserted that women could work if it is beneficial to her family. Because, according to the statements of preachers, as was mentioned repeatedly, it is not her primary duty, it is not in her *fitrat*. Neşe argues that:

Pushing woman to work causes the dissolution of the family. It causes decay before it even starts. It will not take long for the marriage to dissolve if she thinks like "Let me work and have a skill which I can use to support myself. I don't know what will happen tomorrow. If I divorce one day, my salary will be in my hands." She should think like, "Let me work and be useful. Let me feel happy and let me reflect that happiness in my house." If she works with such a thought, let her work. But "I'll make money too. Tomorrow one day, when this man put me in front of the door, I can not stay in need". If she thinks like that, it is a problem (Neşe, 2019).

Therefore, the preachers indicated that employment is not women's duty; it is not in her *fitrat*. This could harm the family if a woman thinks like because of her salary, she does not have to stand her husband. They could work without harming the family and without forgetting their womanhood. Working could lead them to forget their womanhood if it is against the *fitrat*. Because Süreyya indicated that even she is religious personnel, she sometimes thought that she is not the woman once she was (Süreyya, 2019). Therefore, as they repeatedly asserted, the employment of women is suitable, if it does not harm the family life and if it does not harm her womanhood. The gender regime of the profession of preaching is convenient for women, for her *fitrat*, and her family.

In addition to this, while we were talking about women's responsibilities and duties to her family, Meltem also asserted that if a family is experiencing hardships economically, then the employment of women will be justified:

The woman has responsibilities to her family. We cannot mention all. Because there can be different situations and distinct families. Mutual respect and sacrifice are fundamental. Both spouses must be respectful and generous to each other and their



children. If a family's economic situation is bad, if they will live well after women's employment, then women should work. But, if there are other problems in another family, if the woman's employment will dissolve the family, it is better for women not to work (Meltem, 2019).

As discussed repeatedly, women's priority should be her family, not to work. However, according to the conceptualization of *fitrat*, which is disseminated within and through the profession of preaching, men must satisfy economic needs.

Rent of the house, electricity, water ... Let my husband worry about them. It is the duty and obligation of the man to make a living. Men have to think, worry, solve. I worry about my womanhood. I worry about my husband, my job (Yasemin 2019).

This was reflected in the discourses of the other preachers as well.

Besides all these statements, there was again one critical stance of Feriha towards the patriarchal perspectives about women's employment. While she was talking about the seminars given in the period before 2010 on topics including gender equality, she criticized the deep patriarchal understandings embedded in the male personnel of DİB.

There are also discussions in specific parts. The moderator is directing the personnel. There, one muezzin friend held the floor when the subject is women's work. He said, "There are certain rules for women to work for me," that is, "according to our religion," because they all speak in the name of religion. "First," he said, men and women should be segregated. After the man said it, he came eye to eye with me, because there are forty men and one trainer who is a man. I am the only woman. 'You were not taken it personally, didn't you?' he said. 'No,' I said, 'You're directly telling it to me.' Then he said, "She should wear the headscarf." He said that if she will not be veiled, then what she has earned is illicit according to Islam (haram). These are never spoken. No one will talk to you about these (Feriha, 2019).

Therefore, as a result, it could be argued that women's employment is dependent upon certain conditions, which could be justified in terms of her contributions to her family. It is repeatedly argued that working is not her duty defined in her *fitrat*. Women make herself this burden to carry; it is not her responsibility set according to this particular Islamic reference. "Because they all speak in the name of religion," as stated by Feriha (Feriha, 2019).

### 5.5.2. Family-Work Balance of Preachers

As was discussed in the second chapter, women's participation in the work-force affected by their ability to reconcile the work and family life (Buğra & Yakut-Çakar 2010). Women's domestic responsibilities significant due to their role in determining women's decision-making for workforce participation as well as in assessing the quality of labor they offer (Dedeoğlu 2000: 140). In that regard, in the profession of preaching, in which the proper womanhood is constructed through both the activities and the discourses of the female preachers, it is significant to look at how they arrange the balance between these two realms.

Dedeoğlu (2012) argues that without any support for reconciliation of the work and family life, legislative amendments about gender equality do not bring about changes in female employment. In the example of the female preachers, even though there were no legislative amendments, their workload could be shaped according to their domestic responsibilities:

Normally, in the preaching, the duties are four sermons and one fatwa-watch. You need at least four times to go to the sermon, and one time to go to the watch. You can leave a weekday empty. I never tried to leave it blank. I left blank; three weeks later, they called and said, come. I said, okay, it doesn't matter; I can do that. I was working five days a week. I was called to the dormitories in the evening. I was called on the weekend, and I said okay. But after having children, I had to bring some restraint. The baby needs you. She is just one year old, too small. Until the age of two, I tried to take my minimum duty at least to tolerate it: four sermons and one fatwa watch (Neşe, 2019).

It is clear from these statements that female preachers could arrange their workloads according to their familial responsibilities. An application, as such, cannot be practiced in another professional organization of a civil servant. Even though Neşe states that she is not comfortable with her practice to put a restraint on her professional activities, she can balance her work as a preacher and her responsibility as a mother.

We need to run wherever it is needed. But now, when you have a baby, the priorities are shaped accordingly. I don't know if the people need me as much as that baby. It

doesn't matter whether I'm going or not; I have to do my duty. But nobody else can fill that baby's needs at this stage. So we left the previous procedure a bit for a while now. Normally I never had time, any daily limit. I was going; I was coming everywhere. But the situation changed a little more when I had a baby (Neşe, 2019).

When the conceptualization of fitrat is considered as assigning women into the role of motherhood, the preaching profession is in line with this concept.

Moreover, it is also stated by Meltem that this profession is a convenient and comfortable profession for women due to the applications mentioned above.

It is a comfortable profession. Very comfortable for a lady. A very comfortable profession in terms of working hours. For example, I have never given my children to the babysitter. If you can't go in the morning, if you have another job, in the evening you can go to KYK dormitories. You can set your own time (Meltem, 2019).

Preachers stated that due to the flexibility of the institutions they visit, which is also dependent on the assignment of the mufti, they could arrange their working hours. They indicated that the workload is not that strict that they could look after and spent time with their children. This is a significant aspect of the gender regime embedded in the profession of preaching.

Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2011) assert that there have been “new grounds in patriarchy” developed under the AKP government while analyzing the AKP’s women policies in terms of its neoliberal-conservative political position. They argue that this political stance shares much with liberal patriarchy calls for women’s participation in the flexible labor market while reminding them of the hardship of reconciling working life and familial responsibilities (Coşar Yeğenolu 2011). In that regard, the preaching profession for women established and developed in a way that this hardship could be overcome through the organization of the working hours. In that way, preachers do not contradict their perspectives, as mentioned above on the women’s primary place within the family.

## 5.6. Conclusion

This chapter firstly reveals the significance of a particular conceptualization of *fitrat* in shaping the gender regime of the profession of preaching. Even though, preachers' perspectives on the Islamic interpretation of *fitrat* changes, in terms of whether it is an Islamic dictate or it is the construct of tradition and culture, they conceptualize women's and men's *fitrat* as the biological difference of two genders that determines what they can do. The emphasis on the difference also justified through the concept of gender justice, which mobilizes the idea of inequality of women and men through promoting a just system that contains the balance between the two sexes.

Following these arguments, female preachers' employment at DİB depends upon various institutional transformations. In parallel to the increase of female religious education and reorganization of DİB, the preaching profession has been recreated and became a significant career prospect with high social status for veiled women. However, it could be argued that the inclusion of women to the ranks of DİB were limited with women who are accommodating to the conservative policies of DİB on women's issues. Even though various women indicated that with the instruction and initiatives of President Erdoğan, women could work in almost every field at DİB, even in the hierarchically higher positions, as was reflected in the narratives of Feriha, their authority was restricted and their working conditions are not facilitated for them to use their authority. However, it could be argued that this is in line with the conceptualization of *fitrat*. Because preachers' professional activities, especially in the social service institutions with their feminine characteristics of compassion, and their work in the Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus to provide counseling about the familial problems to prevent the dissolution of family, are all constituting the convenience of the profession with the conceptualization of women's *fitrat*. In addition to this, the organization of the flexibility of their working loads resembles that they do not need to challenge their domestic responsibilities defined according to women's *fitrat*.

As a result, the reflection of *fitrat* in the construction of womanhood, that is disseminated through the professional activities of preachers, could be observed at many points including mainly their perspective on family as the primary locus of women and their approach to women's employment which is needless if it leads to the dissolution of family.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the life narratives of female preachers, with an aim to identify the construction of womanhood through the gender regime which has been shaped by the particular Islamic references to the concept of *fitrat* and produced within and through the professional activities of women by focusing on the last two decades. In doing this, the study also followed the institutional transformation of DİB, in which reaching out and employing more women was emphasized as a policy within this period, and the AKP's policies and discourses on women and family.

According to the interpretation of theologians of DİB, based on sayings and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, and the only one surah in which *fitrat* used as a word in the Qur'an, *fitrat* can be defined as a common characteristic of human-beings stemming from the procreation. It has been defined as a sense or intuition which enables humans to sense the oneness and greatness of *Allah*. However, in the contemporary social and political context of Turkey, in the discourses of conservative politicians, it is interpreted as biological characteristics that distinguish between men and women. Women's domestic and family responsibilities, especially the motherhood role, has been naturalized and has repeatedly been emphasized with a moral discourse through drawing upon the particular Islamic references to *fitrat*. Mostly what women, and sometimes men, can do is defined according to this conceptualization of *fitrat*.

What is more, AKP enforced its civil society organizations, particularly KADEM for this study, for the mobilization of the concept of *fitrat* and conceptualization of gender justice. In this context, KADEM has become a dominant organization that develops discourses and projects on women's issues, organizes gender justice congresses, 8<sup>th</sup> March meetings with the participation of R.T. Erdoğan, and publishes a peer-reviewed

academic journal. In the articles of A.S. Yılmaz, who is the director of KADEM, gender justice is defined as a superior and broader concept that includes equality as well.

As it was discussed, particularly in the second chapter, since the public declaration of Prime Minister Erdoğan on his disbelief about the equality between men and women in 2010, the concept of *fitrat* became a significant aspect of the discourses and the policies of AKP on women and family. Together with the institutional transformations, particularly with the abolishment of the Ministry of Women and the Family, and the establishment of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011, the AKP's discourses and policies on women's issues have become more conservative when it is compared to the reforms made in the early 2000s. Women's place within the family was emphasized; her domestic roles were reorganized while her flexible participation in the workforce was demanded in the new neoliberal market organization. Various authors assert that there is a trend of convergence between the dependent status of women who are positioned in family, which is enforced by the family policies and the neoliberal transformations in the welfare and employment regimes under the AKP's ruling ideology. Moreover, in this context, especially after 2010, the year in which the legal change was made in the relevant law, DİB's activity areas have expanded with a specific focus on the protection of family. Moreover, a cooperation protocol was signed between DİB and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies for the protection of family. Therefore, women's employment within the ranks of DİB should be considered in the light of these developments.

As this study aims to understand the construction of womanhood within and through the profession of preaching with particular Islamic references to *fitrat*, the historical evolution of DİB dates back to its establishment in the very early years of the Republic. This is because the professional activities, the duties, and responsibilities of preachers at DİB were defined according to the responsibilities and duties of DİB, which has developed over time. Providing the moral principles of Islamic religion, enhancing the national unity and solidarity were imposed on DİB's responsibilities respectively after

the 1960 military coup and 1980 military coup. As a result, DİB's duties and responsibilities have changed since its establishment as harmonious with the political atmosphere. It is discussed that these are in line with female preachers' professional activities. In this thesis, DİB is analyzed as an ideological state apparatus, and its position, its presidents, and its duties and responsibilities were transformed with the political ideologies of different times in the history of the contemporary Turkey. In that regard, the institution has changed radically under the successive AKP governments, particularly after 2010. Those transformations enabled today's construction of the duties of female preachers because the female preachers provide the moral foundation of the Islamic religion through their roles in Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus. As it is discussed by Tütüncü (2010), their activities in the Eastern and South-Eastern regions are mobilized for providing national unity. It is argued that DİB has been redesigned to provide a link between state, community and family according to the gender policies of the AKP. This is examined in respect with the transformation of the bill on the organization of DİB in 2010, in which DİB's administrative capacity has improved through the institutional change. It has become possible through increasing personnel number and its budget, thanks to which expansion of the sphere was enabled and it sprawled to the socio-political activities.

Following the relevant legislation, it was stated that preachers perform many tasks such as preaching in mosques, prisons, hospitals, nursing homes and kindergartens on certain days of the week, keeping watches for fatwa, and serving in Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus. Therefore, their primary responsibilities are defined as to keep the fatwa watch at the family offices, which includes answering questions coming to these offices by phone, e-mail or face-to-face, at least one day of the week, and paying visits to various institutions on certain days of the week, as decided by the mufti whom they are connected in the provincial organization. Even though the cadres are differentiated as the preacher, ADRB preacher, and the prison preacher, the preachers indicate that they do the same work. The only difference is among the prison preachers who visit the prisons, and ADRB preachers who participate in the training seminars specifically about family. However, besides ADRB preachers, others are also



keeping the fatwa-watch in the family offices when they are not visiting an institution or are not assigned some other duty on that day. They provide religious/spiritual guidance both in those visits and in their working at the family offices. Even though the guidance they provide has caused some controversy due to the absence of a psychological license they have, it consists of one central part of their job. It is defined in the interviews as illuminating people with Islamic knowledge based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah*.

In 2004 the most prominent cadre for female preachers was opened. They were started to be appointed as vice muftis since 2006, head of departments within each general directorate of DİB since 2017, and as vice president for the first time in 2018. Even though women were employed at DİB as Qur'an course instructors long before, these newly-constructed professional positions for women are peculiar developments when DİB's male-centered approach and institutional organization is considered. The inclusion of women on the ranks of DİB as preachers with big numbers compared to the period before 2004, gave way to the recreation of the profession of preaching through the redefinition of the roles of preachers. Even though these developments were exposed to harsh criticisms from some conservative sections of society through questioning whether women can give fatwa, or does feminism have a place within DİB, findings of the study show that this does not involve a feminist development within DİB. As Havva indicates, "you cannot find women's empowerment when you look through a feminist lens" (Havva, 2019). Despite the increasing authority of women in the realm of religion through the employment of women onto the hierarchically higher ranks of preachers and other positions, numerical data shows that the women's increase at DİB is observed mostly at the provincial organization, mainly in the cadres of Qur'an course instructors. Even though they are appointed in higher managerial positions in the central organization of DİB as well, the main increase of them is in the provincial organization. They are mostly employed to provide services in the field, which is serving for the dissemination of the concept of *fitrat*. This shows that, rather than an increase in religious authority, they are mostly employed to provide religious services. Besides, they do provide religious services in line with DİB's

interpretation of Islam which is reflected as the correct knowledge regarding Islam. They do not offer their own interpretation of the original sources with their increasing authority, even though they could do it owing to their educational backgrounds formed in the Theology Faculties.

Even though female preachers existed before, their numbers were very low before 2004, in which the first most prominent numbered cadre allocated to female preachers. Their numbers were 34 in 1991, reached 78 in 2002, and with the first multiple appointments in 2004, it reached 182. Afterward, the number was 226 in 2010, 727 in 2014, and reached to 833 in 2018. The first most significant number of positions for female preachers opened in 2004 as 100 tenured positions opened at once. The finding of this study shows that there are two trends when women's career prospects are considered. The first is the women who graduated from Theology Faculties earlier than 2000 indicated that they were thinking of becoming a religious culture and moral knowledge teacher. Because of the ban on the headscarf, they are either expelled or didn't start to work as a teacher. The second group of women who graduated later than 2000 indicated that they were thinking of working at DİB. This is one significant finding of the study that it became a professional career opportunity for women graduates of the Theology Faculties, which is increasing in numbers recently. In the interviews, they indicated that one reason for them to choose to work at DİB is because of the comfort of the dress code which allowed them to work with their veils. Therefore, in line with the conceptualization of *fitrat*, preaching career has been recreated for veiled women with the higher social status than the the Qur'an course instructor have.

While analyzing the construction of womanhood through the gender regime which is shaped according to *fitrat*, firstly, their accounts on the conceptualization of *fitrat* are discussed. Despite the varying perspectives on the concept of *fitrat*, and its roots, whether they stem from the Islamic dictates or traditions and customs, it is clear that *fitrat* implies a differentiation of the roles of women and men. It is indicated by some

preachers that women should act conforming to the traditional gender roles and norms, which are justified through Islamic references to the concept of *fitrat*.

Secondly, their conceptualization of gender justice is discussed based on the narratives of women at DİB. It was clear that their perspectives on the concept have been reflecting the discourses of AKP and KADEM about gender justice. In line with the ideas in the article of S.A. Yılmaz, it is indicated that justice is a broader concept which also provides equality. One woman also reflected the argument of S.A. Yılmaz about the western-centric connotations of feminism and feminist demand on gender equality. The idea of gender justice has been defined in terms of the “natural” characteristics of women with referencing to the particular Islamic interpretation of the concept of *fitrat*. Therefore, it is evident that preachers’ construction of womanhood is harmonious with the AKP’s gender policies that emphasize women’s domestic responsibilities as their primary duties which are justified through both these concepts of *fitrat* and gender justice.

The main finding of the study is that gender regime of the profession of preaching is constructed through the gender identity shaped by the traditional gender roles and hierarchies with particular references to the concept of *fitrat*. Because of both their professional activities and their narratives about womanhood, it could be said that the proper womanhood is constructed with particular Islamic references to *fitrat*. It is reflected in their professional activities because the limitations of the profession have been determined by what women can do according to her *fitrat*. For example, the work of taking care of the family, children, disabled and elderly is in women’s *fitrat*. On the other hand, it is reflected in their ideas about womanhood, *fitrat* and gender justice. Because female preachers asserted that women and men are not same but they are different according to their *fitrat*, and therefore they should have different responsibilities and duties. They claimed that women’s duty is to take care of her family which is a very significant institution since the meaning of Islam is best understood in family life. Therefore, it could be argued that the gender regime

embedded in the profession of preaching has been shaped by the concept of *fitrat* which is reflected both in their professional activities and in their discourses.

Moreover, in this study, it is argued that the preaching profession for women has been recreated under the rule of the AKP government as a convenient profession for veiled, modern, and urban women. It became a convenient profession for the women who are graduated from the Theology Faculties. The findings show that the female graduates of Theology Faculties are increasing in numbers, and it outnumbers the male graduates since the 2002-2003 period. In the interviews some women stated that the process starting with 28 February 1997, the female students preferred both the İmam-Hatip high schools and also the Theology Faculties more than the male students. The reasoning of such a gendered impact of the transformation that took place in this era remained unanswered and needs further research. Because despite the related disadvantage of the religious education for the career prospects of the graduates after the 28 February, why women preferred more to be in this disadvantaged position is an interesting question from a feminist perspective. However, this gendered impact is one significant finding of the study, which is reflected both in the interviewee's narratives and also in the numerical data about the percentage of the female students. The feminization of the religious education has a significant impact on the construction of such a profession for women both in the ranks of DİB and in the career prospects of women.

Futhermore, the profession of preaching is suited to women's *fitrat* when women's traditional roles of caregiving and compassion for others are considered. Because their work is defined as providing religious/spiritual guidance in Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus and various state institutions including the social institutions of children's houses, nursing homes, women's shelters, and so on. They have repeatedly indicated that they do not provide psychological counseling, and they do not treat any disorder. If they come across a serious situation, they make the necessary referrals to the psychiatrist, psychologists or consultants connected to the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policies. However, the profession is redesigned to serve women with

an attitude of compassion and care with the Islamic references. Especially the preachers who visit the social institutions are appointed to work as a social worker, together with the role of illuminating people religiously. They must show compassion and care for the people staying in the social institutions. This work directive is in line with women's traditionally defined roles. In this regard, Kandiyoti (2016) argued that, with the transformation of Ministry of Women and the Family to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, "discrimination against women was placed alongside the protection of children, the disabled, and the elderly, clearly marking it out as a social welfare issue" (107). Therefore, she argues that women issue is confined to the social policies and social assistance for the disadvantaged groups, and women are located in the family policies. In addition to the confinement of women's issues to the protection of children, the disabled, and the elderly, professional activities of female preachers are confined to the same field. Similarly, it is also reflected in the confinement of the increasing employment of women to the provincial organization for providing services in the field. Compassion and care are defined as main characteristics of women which exist in her *fitrat* as well.

Furthermore, it is argued that women's labor force participation impacted by their domestic responsibilities and by the arrangement of it. It is discussed in the second chapter that policies on women and family during AKP period are shaped by a particular combination of neoliberal and conservative policies. These policies lay the burden of the domestic responsibilities, care of the children and elderly to women, at the same time demanding her flexible participation to the workforce that would create time for her household duties. However, in the case of the female preachers, their workload is designed as flexible. That is based on the institutions they visit, they would arrange the family-work balance, and they would spend time with their children and family. They could carry out their domestic responsibilities at the same time having a professional career with a good university education. In this context, the recreation of the profession of preaching resembles the crystallization point of the discourse on *fitrat*. The preachers serve for the dissemination of the concept of *fitrat*, while they do

not also contradict with it through balancing their work and family lives with the flexible working hours and high social status that they have.

Related with the previous argument, in the narratives of women, it is reflected that the women's responsibilities to her family should determine the condition of women's employment. It is asserted that after the employment and earning her money, if a woman starts to think that she does not have to stand the husband anymore, it is not good for the woman to work. If she feels that working is also beneficial for her family, then she should work. According to the preachers' statements, the primary duty of woman is to deal with her home, her child and her husband. Working is a woman's self-created responsibility. If she works and this creates a problem for her family, she must not work. This argumentation is mainly built upon the concept of *fitrat*, which defines women's and men's roles according to traditional gender roles with Islamic references, and in terms of gender justice, which necessitates a balance between men and women. In that regard, women's roles and responsibilities, according to *fitrat*, should be in line with her nature. Employment would lead women to lose her womanhood. This signifies an essential aspect of the gender regime of the profession of preaching.

Lastly, their work of providing religious/spiritual counseling includes listening to women who have problems in their daily lives. The female preachers try to develop solutions to the issues people face in their private lives. They target, if not exclusively, but mostly to reach women. In that regard, they are assigned to provide solutions, show the right way with Islamic references to *fitrat*, to the women who had problems with their husbands, relatives or with themselves. In doing this, it could be argued that the female preachers are also assigned to disseminate and mobilize the concept of *fitrat* and gender justice. For that reason, during the spiritual counselling sessions at the Family and Religious Guidance Offices, they answer the questions about the intimate life with the particular Islamic references. In that regard, they help women to organize their private lives according to the conceptualization of *fitrat*.

As a result, despite the empowerment of women through the inclusion into the public spaces of employment with a hierarchically higher position, and with a high social status, with the directions and initiatives of R.T. Erdoğan, the gender regime of the preaching profession is shaped by the traditional gender roles, that is justified and naturalized through a discourse of *fitrat*. In this context, DİB became a significant institution under the successive AKP governments, especially after 2010, to provide a link between gender, religion, and the state. In this context, the female preachers employed by DİB also became significant actors in disseminating and mobilizing the the gender regime shaped by the AKP's gender ideologies with particular Islamic references to the concept of *fitrat* and gender justice.

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## APPENDICES

### A. APPROVAL OF METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ  
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ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

21 AĞUSTOS 2019

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Prof.Dr. Ayşe Nur SAKTANBER

Danışmanlığını yaptığınız Betül ERGİN'in "Vaizelik Mesleğini İcra Eden Kadınlar ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Rollerinin Tanımlanması: Ankara Örneği" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve 322 ODTÜ 2019 protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

  
Prof. Dr. Tülin GENÇÖZ

Başkan

  
Prof. Dr. Tolga CAN  
Üye

İZİNLİ

Doç.Dr. Pinar KAYGAN  
Üye

  
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ali Emre TURGUT  
Üye

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Şerife SEVİNÇ  
Üye

  
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Müge GÜNDÜZ  
Üye

  
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Süreyya Özcan KABASAKAL  
Üye

**B. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/ DERİNLEMESİNE  
MÜLAKAT SORULARI**

Could you tell us about yourself / your life story?

What is your date of birth?

What is your year of graduation from university?

In which university did you graduate from?

When did you start working at DİB?

When did you start to work as a preacher?

How did you decide to study at the Faculty of Theology?

What did you want as a profession when you were studying at Theology Faculty, what kind of future you were imagining?

Which profession were you planning to choose when you graduated?

What were your thoughts on the DİB then? Were you planning to work at DİB?

How did you decide to work at DİB? What motivated you?

How did you decide to become a preacher?

How do you spend a day doing the profession? What do you do?

What do you think are the duties of a preacher?

What resources do you benefit from when you practice your profession?

Which institutions do you visit as a preacher?

What do you preach about?

What has changed in your life after becoming a preacher? Did you have to organize your life according to your profession?

Do you have difficulty in balancing work and family? Do your friends, family, close circle support you?

What are the difficulties and conveniences of being a preacher?

Do you find it difficult to answer questions asked to Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus?

Which issues do you have difficulty with?

Which ways do you apply?

Do you find it difficult to answer questions about private life (sexuality, human relations, family relationships)?

Do you have different methods and sermons for different groups?

What kind of woman should a preacher be?

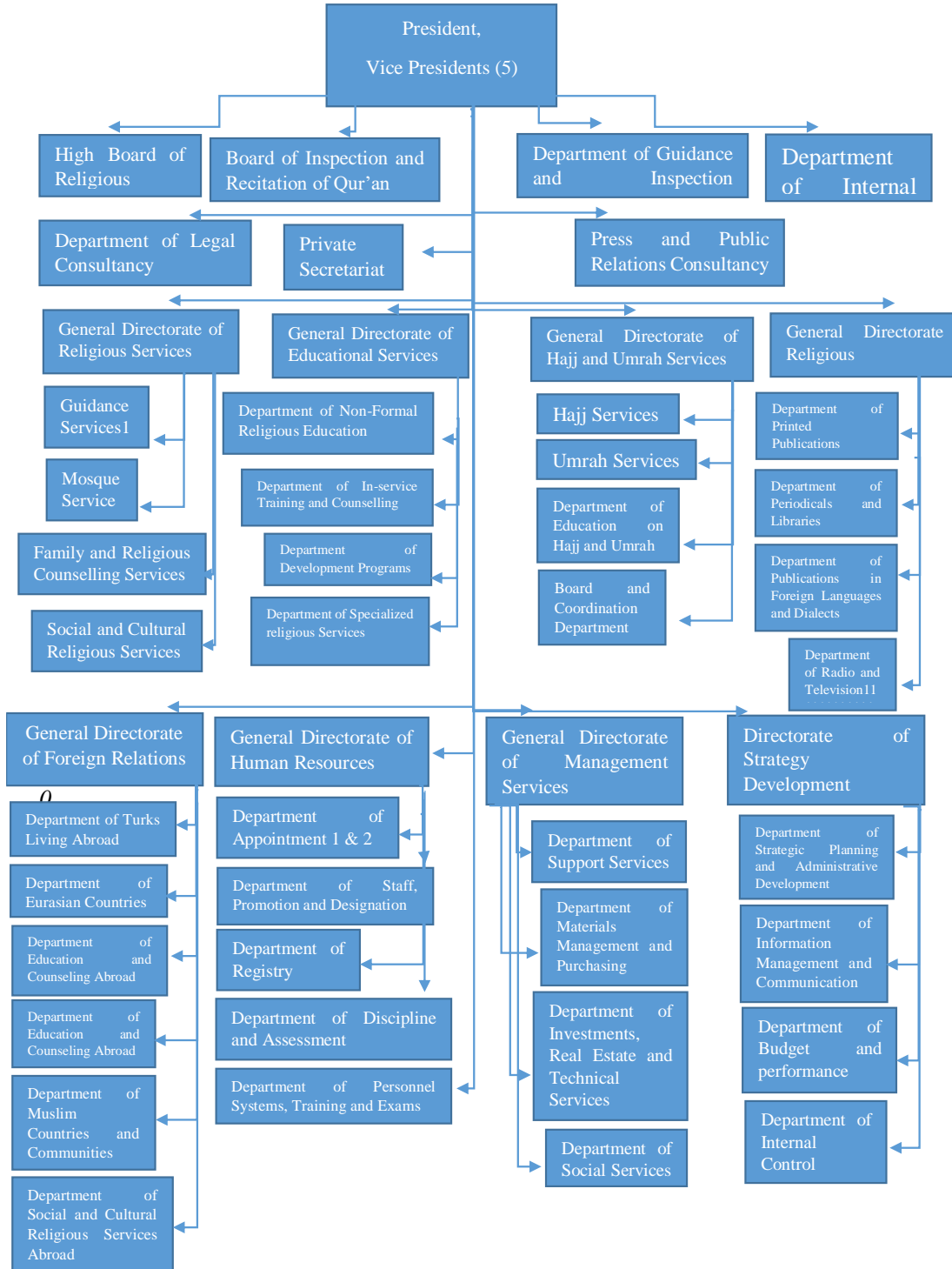
What do preachers tell and advise women? Why?

What is the family for you? Why is it important institution?

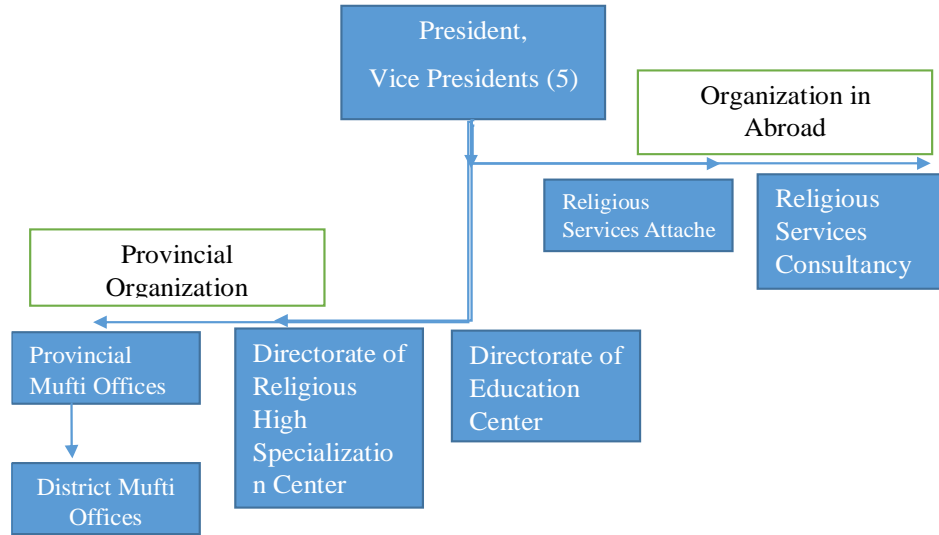
What are the responsibilities and duties of woman towards her family?

What are the responsibilities and duties of women towards the society in which they live?

## C. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF *DIYANET İŞLERİ BAŞKANLIĞI*



**C. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF *DIYANET İŞLERİ*  
BAŞKANLIĞI, CONTINUED**



## D. TURKISH SUMMARY/ TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu tez, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (bundan sonra AKP olarak anılacaktır) altında son yirmi yılda Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nda (bundan sonra DİB olarak anılacaktır) kadınların artan bir şekilde istihdam edilmesinden esinlenmiştir. Bu dönemde hem DİB'te çalışan kadınların sayısı artmış, hem de kadınları hedefleyen faaliyet ve programlar artmış ve kapsamı genişlemiştir. Kadınlar için en eski istihdam alanı olan Kur'an kursu öğreticiliği pozisyonu yanı sıra, yeni kadro türleri tahsis edilmiş ve hali hazırda var olan alanlardaki sayıları da son yirmi yılda önemli ölçüde artmıştır. Ancak bu tez, İlahiyat Fakültelerinden mezun olan ve vaiz olarak DİB'te istihdam edilen kadınların mesleki deneyimlerini tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çünkü vaizlik son dönemlerde genişletilmiş etki ve çalışma alanları ve kadınlar için ailevi ve dini konularda danışmanlık sağlama rolü ile Kur'an kursu öğreticiliğinden hiyerarşik olarak daha yüksek bir konumda ve yeniden yaratılmış bir meslektir. Bu tezde kadınlar için vaizlik mesleği, kadınların daha önce de vaiz olarak DİB saflarında var oldukları bilinmesine rağmen, sayılarının önemli ölçüde artması ve çalışma alanlarının genişlemesi suretiyle AKP hükümeti tarafından yeniden düzenlenen bir meslek olarak görülmektedir. AKP hükümetinin fitrat kavramına yaptığı İslami göndermeler üzerinden “doğallaştırdığı” toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin önemli bir yer tuttuğu muhafazakar toplumsal cinsiyet politikaları ile uyumlu olacak şekilde, yüksek sosyal statüye ve yeni oluşturulmuş misyonlara sahip vaizlik mesleğinin toplumsal cinsiyet rejimi yeniden tasarlanmış ve inşa edilmiştir.

Türkiye’de kadınların kadın vaiz olarak dinin kamusal alanlarına, artan resmi dini otoriteleri ile dahil edilmeleri, literatürde akademisyenler tarafından tartışılmaktadır (Hassan, 2009, 2011; Tütüncü, 2010; Chiara, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). Bu çalışmalar konuyu daha çok devlet, toplum ve dinin karmaşık ilişkisi açısından ele alırlar. Bu alanda erken çalışmalardan biri olan Mona Hassan'ın çalışması (2011) modern Türkiye tarihinde seküleristler/Kemalistler ve dini gruplar arasındaki ikilemin

yapılandırdığı karmaşık ilişkilerin kısa bir tartışmasını yaparak, İstanbul’da kadın vaizlerin farklı dini gruplara ve cemaatlere dahil kadınlarla karşılaşmalarına odaklanır (Hassan, 2009, 2011). Hassan (2011), kadın vaizlerin entelektüel kapasiteleri ve kurumsal otoriteleriyle bu karşılaşma süreçlerini yönlendirebildikleri sonucuna varmıştır. Chiara Maritato, kadın vaizlerin faaliyetlerini, din ve devlet ve devletin kadın dindarlığı üzerindeki kontrolü bağlamına odaklanarak, daha farklı bir açıdan analiz eder (Maritato, 2015, 2016, 2017a). Maritato'nun kadın vaizlerin erkek egemenliğine feminist bir perspektiften meydan okumadığını iddia ettiği ifadeleri göz önünde bulundurulduğu zaman Hassan'ın kadın vaizlerin dini otoritesinin arttığı argümanı ile aynı fikirde olmadığı söylenebilir (Maritato, 2011). Ancak Maritato’ya göre kadın vaizlerin DİB içerisinde artan istihdam ve faaliyetleri ile dini otorite ve yapılara dair yeni soruların gündeme gelmesine sebep olduklarını söyler (Maritato, 2017a, 2017b). Son olarak, Fatma Tütüncü (2010), kadın vaizlerin Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu Bölgelerindeki deneyimlerini analiz ederek, vaizlerin faaliyetlerini İslamcı dindarlık ile laik devletin egemenliği arasında bir yere konumlandırıp daha kapsamlı bir çalışma sunar. Tütüncü DİB'in, İslam'ın “doğru” anlamını yayan kadın vaizler aracılığıyla ulusal toprakları güçlendirmede siyasi bir rol oynadığını savunur. Bu nedenle, bağlama bağlı olarak, geleneksel kadın vaizliğinin günümüz Türkiye'sinde cinsiyet, etnik köken ve farklı dinlerle ilgili siyasi bir pratiğe dönüştüğünü gösterir (Tütüncü, 2010).

Bahsedilen çalışmalardan farklı olarak, bu tez, cinsiyet ve kadın çalışmaları perspektifiyle, fitrat kavramı üzerinden şekillenen vaizlik mesleğinin toplumsal cinsiyet rejimini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Fıtratın etimolojik kökeni, “yaratılış, belirli yetenek ve kullanılacak yatkınlık” anlamına gelen *fatr* kökünden gelir (Hökehenli, 1996). Fıtrat kavramı, Kuran'da geçtiği tek bir ayet ve Peygamber Muhammed’in fitrat kelimesini kullandığı sözlerinin farklı zamanlardaki farklı ulemaların tartışmalarına dayanarak yorumlanması sonucu bütün insanların yaratılış yoluyla sahip oldukları öz olarak ifade edilmektedir (Hökehenli, 1996). Ayşe Sucu, fitrat kavramını, insanların doğru ile yanlış arasında ayırım yapmalarını ve yaratıcısının



birliğini ve büyüklüğünü hissetmelerini sağlayan sezgi veya yetenek olarak açıklar (Sucu, 2009: 10). Bu nedenle, fitrat kavramı, DİB teologları tarafından yorumlanan İslami metinlerin orijinal kaynaklarında, tüm insanlarda ortak olan, gerçeği anlamalarını sağlayan manevi bir özellik olarak tanımlanmıştır. Ancak, günümüz dünyasında, “hakikatin”, gücün gerekçelendirilmesinde bir araç olarak kullanıldığı düşünüldüğünde, bugün, hem fitratın anlamı hem de fitrat yoluyla anlaşılabilircek gerçek, iktidarın çoğunluğunun olağan eylemlerinin doğrulama aracına dönüşür.

Çağdaş Türkiye’de ise AKP söylemlerinde çokça kullanılan fitrat kavramı, kadın ve erkek cinsiyetinin “doğal” ve “manevi” farklılıklarına dayandırılan “doğal özlere” göre tanımlanan kadın ve erkek rollerini ifade eder. Bu nedenle, öncelikle AKP’nin muhafazakar politik söylemlerinde ve özellikle Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği (bundan böyle KADEM olarak anılacaktır) olmak üzere hükümet tarafından organize edilen sivil toplum örgütleri tarafından kullanılan fitrat kavramı kadınların ev içi sorumluluklarına, özellikle birincil görevi olarak görülen annelik ve birincil alanları olarak tanımlanan aileye işaret edecek şekilde kavramsallaştırılır. AKP’nin sosyopolitik söylemlerinde kadınların ve erkeklerin ne yapabileceklerini tanımlamak için kullandığı fitrat kavramı, ilk olarak 2010 yılında Başbakan Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’ın feminist örgütlerle yapılan toplantıda kadın-erkek eşitliğine inanmadığını kamuya duyurduğu zamandan beri AKP’nin toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarında önemli bir yer tutar. Kandiyoti’nin de açıkladığı gibi toplumsal cinsiyet normları ve muhafazakar aile değerlerinin polisliğini yapmak AKP siyasetinin merkezi yönlerini oluşturur (Kandiyot, 2016).

Buna göre, fitrat kavramı üzerinden kavramsallaştırılan “cinsiyet adaleti”, Türkiye’nin yakın tarihli siyasi ve sosyal atmosferinde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine karşı seferber edilen bir kavramdır. Bu bağlamda, KADEM, 2013 yılında şu anki Cumhurbaşkanı R. T. Erdoğan’ın kızı olan Sümeyye Erdoğan liderliğinde kurulan önemli bir organizasyon olarak ele alınmalıdır. Muhafazakar bir tondan kadınların güçlenmesine

yönelik projeler yürüten KADEM'in Başkanı Sare Aydın Yılmaz (2015a, 2015b) makalelerinde “fitrat” ve “cinsiyet adaleti” kavramlarını akademik çalışma ile anlamlandırmaya çalışır. Bu makalelerde, özellikle annelik olmak üzere kadının yeteneklerinin ve ev iç sorumluluklarının yüceltilerek iki cinsiyet arasındaki farklılıkların keskinleştirildiği bir kavram olan “toplumsal cinsiyet adaleti” kadın hareketinde yeni bir momentum olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Yılmaz makalelerinde, kadınlar arasındaki farklılıkları görmeden, kadınlık kategorisini evrenselleştiren liberal feminist teoriye getirilen eleştirilere atıfta bulunarak, kadınlar ve erkekler arasındaki biyolojik ve “manevi” farklılıklara gönderme yapmak suretiyle “toplumsal cinsiyet adaleti” kavramını oluşturmaya ve teşvik etmeye çalışır (Yılmaz, 2015b).

Ayrıca, aile ve anneliğin kutsallığına özel atıflarda bulunmak suretiyle kadın meselesine muhafazakar bir taraftan yaklaşmasına rağmen, KADEM son zamanlarda toplumun muhafazakar kesiminin bazı erkeklerinin saldırı hedefi oldu. Yeni Şafak gazetesi köşe yazarı Yusuf Kaplan'ın ile Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı ile Aile, Çalışma ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı ve KADEM'i yürüttükleri projeler dolayısıyla aileyi yıkmakla suçlamasıyla başlayan tartışma, sosyal medyada kadın hakları ve KADEM'in uygulanmasını izlemekle görevlendirildiği İstanbul Sözleşmesi ile ilgili bir tartışmaya yol açtı.

“Cinsiyet adaleti” ile “cinsiyet eşitliği” arasında yaratılan gerilim, vaizlik mesleğinin cinsiyet rejiminin önemli bir yönüdür. Şu anda, kadın vaizler, hem söylemleri hem de mesleki faaliyetleri yoluyla fitratın belirli bir İslami yorumu açısından tanımlanan kadın ve erkek rollerine dayanan bir cinsiyet rejimini yaymaktalar. Bu, hem kadın vaizlerin düzenli olarak ziyaret ettiği sosyal kurumlarda hem de bu bürolara gelen soruları cevaplamak için düzenli olarak nöbet tuttukları Aile ve Dini Rehberlik Bürolarında gerçekleşir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma, vaizlik mesleği içerisinde ve aracılığıyla belirlenen kadınların vaiz olma süreçlerinde, cinsiyet rolleri ve cinsiyet

eşitliği kavramları hakkındaki görüşlerinde ve sosyal statülerinde fitrat kavramının yerini tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Bu nedenle, çalışmanın temel amacı, kadın vaizlerin DİB saflarındaki profesyonel faaliyetleri aracılığıyla fitrat anlayışı çerçevesiyle oluşturulan kadınlığı tartışmaktır. Bu çalışmada kadın vaizlerin, AKP hükümeti altında gerçekleşen kurumsal değişimlerin sağladığı alanlarda, yürüttükleri faaliyetleri hakkındaki yaşam anlatılarını analiz etmek suretiyle, DİB'de artan kadın istihdamı ve kadınlara yönelik faaliyetleri tartışıldı. Vaizlik mesleğinin özellikleri, fitrat kavramı üzerinden meşrulaştırılan toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine dayanarak yapılan uygun kadınlık inşası ile ilişkili olarak analiz edilecektir. Çünkü yüksek sosyal statüye sahip bir meslek olarak yeniden yaratılan vaizlik mesleği Türkiye'nin yakın tarihine dair önemli bir sosyal ve politik gelişmedir. Çağdaş Türkiye'de fitrat kavramına göre şekillenen toplumsal cinsiyet rejimine göre inşa edilen uygun kadınlık ve kadın rolleri anlayışlarını yansıtır.

Bu çalışmada, kadın vaizlerin mesleki aktiviteleri içinde ve aracılığıyla şekillenen cinsiyet rejiminin analizi için, ilk olarak kadınların birincil alanını aile olarak tanımlayan ve bunu fitrat kavramı üzerinden meşrulaştıran AKP'nin toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarını, sonra AKP döneminde DİB'in özellikle kadınlarla ilgili olarak geçirdiği kurumsal dönüşüme odaklanıldı.

İlk olarak, 2002 yılından beri iktidar olan AKP döneminin ilk toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine ilişkin olumlu yasal gelişmelere rağmen, akademisyenler kadın haklarının AKP tarafından hiçbir zaman önceliklendirilmediğini (Coşar ve Yeğenoğlu, 2011) ya da 2007'de başlayan ikinci dönemi sonrası dindar ve muhafazakar toplumsal cinsiyet iklimine dönüştüğünü (Güneş-Ayata ve Doğangün, 2017) söylerler. Örneğin Dedeoğlu, cinsiyet eşitliği politikalarının mevzuatta var olduğunu ancak uygulamada olmadığını, çünkü geleneksel cinsiyet rollerini değiştirecek ve kadınların istihdamını etkileyecek kadının bakım iş yükünü azaltmaya yönelik politikalar üretilmediğini

savunmaktadır (Dedeoğlu, 2012). Yeğenoğlu ve Coşar, erken dönemde gerçekleşen reform sürecinde kadın gruplarının mücadelesi ile toplumsal cinsiyete duyarlı düzenlemeler gibi kazanımlara ulaşılmasına rağmen, ailenin AKP politika ve söylemlerinde sürekli tekrarlayan bir kurum ve tartışma odağı olduğunu söylerler (Coşar ve Yeğenoğlu, 2011). Çünkü AKP aileyi kadınların öncelikle alanı olarak tanımlar ve kadınların aile içindeki rollerini biyolojilerinden ve fitratlarından gelen özellikleri ile doğallaştırır (Coşar ve Yeğenoğlu, 2011).

Erdoğan'ın 2010 yılında kadın-erkek eşitliğine inanmadığını kamusal alanda ilan etmesinden bu yana, AKP'nin söylemlerinde ve politikalarında, fitrat kavramı ve buna göre tanımlanan uygun kadınlık rolleri önemli bir yer tutar. Dahası, “toplumsal cinsiyet adaleti” kavramsallaştırması, kadın hareketinin “toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği” talebine karşı gelecek şekilde seferber edilir.

Bu bağlamda, 2011 yılında AKP'nin, Kadın ve Aileden Sorumlu Devlet Bakanlığını, Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığına (ASPB) dönüştürmesi önemli bir kurumsal değişimi temsil eder. Aynı yıl içerisinde, DİB ile ASPB arasında ailevi değerleri korumak, aileyi güçlendirmek ve sosyal hizmet projeleri yürütmek amacıyla işbirliği protokolü imzalanması da AKP'nin kadın meselesini aile alanına yerleştiren ve bu politikalarını da fitrat kavramıyla meşrulaştıran muhafazakar duruşuna dair önemli bir göstergedir.

İkinci olarak, AKP hükümeti tarafından, yukarıda bahsedilen fitrat kavramını ve “cinsiyet adaleti”ni vurgulayan kurumsal dönüşümlere paralel olarak DİB'in organizasyonu ve yapısı iyileştirilmiş, özellikle 2010'dan sonra faaliyet ve etki alanları da kadınları ve aileyi de içine alacak şekilde genişletilmiştir. Mutluer, AKP yetkililerinin 2002 yılında iktidara geldiklerinde devlet düzeninde DİB gibi bir kurumun varlığına eleştirel yaklaşımlarına rağmen (Mutluer, 2018), özellikle 2010'dan sonra DİB'in Türkiye'nin modern sosyal ve siyasi tarihinde çok önemli bir

kuruma dönüştüğünü belirtir (Mutluer, 2018; Öztürk, 2016; Öztürk ve Sözeri, 2018). Öte yandan çeşitli akademisyenler, DİB'in AKP'den önce devletin ideolojik bir aygıtı olarak kullanıldığını söylerler. Örneğin Gözaydın için, 1960 darbesinden sonra, “İslam ahlakına ilişkin çalışmalar yapma” sorumluluğunun eklenmesi ile (Gözaydın, 2006: 4), DİB’e devlet tarafından İslam ile ilgili resmi ideolojiyi yaymak görevi verilmiştir (Gözaydın, 2008: 221). Ayrıca Ahmet Erdi Öztürk için, 1980 darbesinden sonra, 1982 Anayasasında belirtilen Türk-İslam sentezini yaymada DİB’in bir ideolojik aygıtı dönüşmesinin yanı sıra, DİB’in misyonu Türk ülkelerine ve Türk ve Müslüman göçmen nüfusu büyük olan ülkelere doğru genişletilmesiyle Türkiye dış politikasında da önemli bir araca dönüştüğünü söyler (Öztürk 2016: 626). Dolayısıyla, darbe dönemlerinde devlet teşkilatının yeniden yapılandırılması esnasında kuruma verilen ek sorumluluklar ve görevler, DİB’in devletin ideolojik bir aygıtı olduğunu yansıtmaktadır.

Bununla birlikte, AKP hükümeti zamanında ve Prof. Dr. Bardakoğlu döneminde artmaya başlayan kadınlar için istihdam ve faaliyetler göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, DİB toplumsal cinsiyet rejimini belirleme de önemli bir kuruma dönüşür. Özellikle DİB’in 2010’dan sonra sosyal ve politik konulara dair artan söylemleri düşünüldüğünde (Öztürk 2016), AKP’nin kadınları aile alanına yerleştiren politika ve söylemlerinde artan fitrat vurgusu ve bunun üzerinden tanımlanan toplumsal cinsiyet roller beraber düşünüldüğü zaman, DİB’in konumu Türkiye’de toplumsal cinsiyet rejiminin belirlenmesinde önemli bir yere oturduğu çok açık bir şekilde görülebilir.

DİB Başkanlarının çeşitli yayınlarında ve halka açık konuşmalarında, DİB tarafından basılan DİB’in kadınlara yönelik hizmetlerine ilişkin kitapçıklarda ve DİB’in çeşitli raporlarında politika olarak belirtilen hem kadın istihdamını artırmak hem de daha fazla kadına hizmet sağlayarak ulaşmak hedefi, DİB’in ataerkil yapısı ve perspektifinde meydana gelen önemli bir dönüşümdür. Kadınları kadınlara ulaşmak için

istihdam etmek ve ailelere ulaşmak için sahada seferber etmek, geleneksel cinsiyet rollerine göre şekillenen mesleğin cinsiyet rejimini yansıtır.

Kadın vaizlerin AKP hükümetinden önce de DİB saflarında bulunmalarına rağmen, 2004'ten bu yana artan istihdam oranları ile birlikte çalışma tanımları ve iş alanları genişlemiş ve yeniden düzenlenmiş, dolayısıyla vaizlik kadınlar için uygun bir meslek olarak yeniden tasarlanmıştır. Dört yıllık teoloji mezunları DİB'nin yazılı ve sözlü mülakatlarıyla işe alınmıştır. Kadın vaizler, çeşitli devlet kurumları ile imzalanan protokoller kapsamında ve yakın zamanda yapılandırılan hizmet alanlarının genişletilmesi ile il ve ilçe müftülüklerine bağlı olarak çalışır, çeşitli kamu kurum ve kuruluşlarında “manevi destek/rehberlik” adı verilen hizmeti sunarlar. Manevi rehberlik/destek, dini sorulara ve insanların modern günlük yaşamda karşılaştıkları sorunlara Kuran ve Sünnete başvurarak cevaplar sağlamak olarak tanımlanır. Bu hizmetler, özellikle ilçe müftülüklerine bağlı Aile ve Dini Rehberlik Bürolarında, ayrıca düzenli olarak ziyaret ettikleri çeşitli devlet kurumlarında, başlıca dezavantajlı grupları, ceza kurumlarında kalan mahkumları, devlet hastanelerindeki hastaları, devlet yurtlarında kalan öğrencileri ve kadınları hedefleyerek, ADRB'leri ziyaret eden ya da telefonla bağlanan herkese sunulmaktadır. Şu anda, vaizler, dini konular hakkında toplumu bilgilendirmek ve rehberlik sağlamak üzere haftada en az beş kez vaaz görevi yerine getirmekle yükümlüdürler. Vaaz faaliyetleri, Aile ve Dini Rehberlik Bürolarına yüz yüze ya da telefonla alo- fetva hattı üzerinden gelen soruları cevaplamak, rehberlik programlarıyla ilgili çalışmalarını takip etmek ve çeşitli devlet kurumlarında irşat ve rehberlik hizmetleri sunmak olarak tanımlanmıştır.

Kadın vaizler, insanların aile yaşamlarında karşılaştıkları sorunlar konusunda halka rehberlik hizmeti vermektedir. Bunun için DİB tarafından düzenlenen ve koordine edilen hizmet içi eğitimlerle düzenli olarak eğitilirler. Bu eğitimler psikoloji, sosyoloji, iletişim ve teolojinin çeşitli alanlarından gelen “uzmanlar” tarafından verilir. Yukarıda belirtildiği gibi, ASPB ile imzalanan işbirliği protokolü kapsamında ailenin

korunmasına dair alıřmalar yrtrler. Son zamanlarda "Evlilik Okulu" ve "Niřanlılık Okulu" gibi yeni projelerde de grev almaya da bařladılar. Bu programlar, eř olmak, eřin hakları ve sorumlulukları, evlilikle ilgili ulusal mevzuat, akrabalarla iliřkilerin nasıl dzenleneceęi ve hane halkı ekonomisinin ynetimi gibi temaları ieren birka hafta sren seminerler řeklinde planlanmış mfredatlara sahiptir.

Dolayısıyla, kadın vaizler, DİB tarafından retilen resmi İslam anlayıřı erevesinde kadınların aile iindeki sorumlulukları hakkında kadınlara vaaz vermekle ykmldrler. Vaizler devlet grevlileri olarak dini rehberlik saęlarlar. Bunu, din konusunda İlahiyat Fakltesi mezunu olarak son derece eęitimli gemiřleriyle profesyonel bir iř olarak yaparlar. Vaiz olmak iin DİB tarafından yapılan Kuran, Hadis ve klasik metinler de dahil olmak zere kapsamlı bir yazılı ve szl sınava tabi tutulurlar. Ayrıca sosyoloji, psikoloji, genel kltr ve gnlk hayattaki deęiřimleri de takip etmeleri ve retorik sanatına sahip olmaları beklenir. Dolayısıyla kadın vaizler, eęitimli, profesyonel ve dindar kadınlar olarak mesleki kimlikleri ile devlet brokrasisinde konumlanırlar.

Dolayısıyla, AKP hkmeti dneminde gerekleřen sosyal ve politik deęiřiklikler yoluyla uygun kadınlıklar kurulmaktadır. Bu deęiřiklikler zellikle DİB ile Aile, alıřma ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlıęı'nın kurumsal dnřm ve AKP ve KADEM'in sylemlerinde ve projelerinde toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin tanımlanması aısından nemlidir. Bu geliřmeler ıřıęında sylenebilir ki kadınlar iin vaizlik mesleęi yksek sosyal stats ve ayrıcalıklı konumu ile fitrat kavramına gre řekillenen cinsiyet rejimine uygunluęu ile rnek bir meslek olarak yeniden yaratılmıştır. Bu nedenle, literatrde kadınların dini alanda otoritesinin artması olarak incelenmesine raęmen (Hassan, 2012), geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinden kopuřu yansıtmamaktadır. Aksine, AKP hkmeti dneminde, fitrat kavramına yapılan İslami gndermelerle řekillenen cinsiyet normlarının yayılması iin profesyonellik yoluyla kadınların glendirilmesi ve seferber edilmesine rnek olarak

yeniden tasarlanan bir meslek olarak gözükmetedir. Bu nedenle, fitrat kadınların vaizlik mesleğinde önemli bir yere sahiptir. Çünkü bir yandan sosyal statüye sahip kentli, eğitilmiş, dindar ve örtülü kadınların mesleki alanlara dahil edilmesi ile güçlenmesinin bir örneğini teşkil ederken, diğer yandan kadının birincil görevini annelik, en temel alanını da aile olarak İslami referanslar ve kavramlar üzerinden tanımlayarak kadınların geleneksel rollerinin vurgulanmasında önemli bir araca dönüşür.

Yeniden düzenlenen vaizlik mesleği, kadınların hiyerarşik olarak vaizlik gibi yüksek pozisyonlarda istihdam edilmesi yoluyla din alanında artan otoritesini göstermesine rağmen, sayısal veriler, DİB'deki kadınların artışının çoğunlukla taşra örgütünde, özellikle de Kur'an kursu öğreticiliği kadrolarında olduğunu göstermektedir. DİB merkez teşkilatında üst düzey yöneticilik pozisyonlarında da görevlendirilmelerine rağmen, asıl artış il teşkilatındadır. Çoğunlukla sahada hizmet vermek, yani fitrat kavramının yaygınlaştırılmasına hizmet etmek ile görevlendirilirler. Bu, dini otoritedeki bir artıştan ziyade, çoğunlukla dini hizmetler sunmak için istihdam edildiğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca, DİB'in İslami doğru bilgi olarak yansıtılan İslam yorumuna uygun dini hizmetler de sunmaktadırlar. İlahiyat Fakültelerinde oluşturulmuş eğitim geçmişleri nedeniyle yapabilecekleri halde, kurumsal kimliklerinin sağladığı artan otoriteleri ile orijinal kaynaklara ilişkin kendi yorumlarını sunmazlar.

Fıtrat kavramına göre şekillenen cinsiyet rejimi içerisinde inşa edilen uygun kadınlık rollerini incelerken, öncelikle kadın vaizlerin fitrat kavramsallaştırmaları tartışıldı. Kadınların ifadelerine bakıldığında, fitrat kavramı ve kavramın kökeni üzerine, İslami dikte veya geleneklerden kaynaklanıp kaynaklanmadığına dair değişen perspektiflere rağmen, fitratın kadın ve erkeklerin rollerinin farklılaşmasını ima ettiği açıktır. Bazı kadın vaizler kadınların, fitrat kavramı üzerinden yapılan İslami göndermeler ile



meşrulaştırılan geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ve normlarına uygun davranmaları gerektiğini belirttiler.

İkinci olarak, DİB'deki kadınların anlatılarına dayanarak toplumsal cinsiyet adaleti kavramsallaştırmaları tartışılmıştır. Kavrama bakış açılarının AKP ve KADEM'in cinsiyet adaletiyle ilgili söylemlerini yansıttığı açıktı. S.A. Yılmaz'ın makalesinde yer alan fikirler doğrultusunda adaletin eşitlik de sağlayan daha geniş bir kavram olduğu kadınlar tarafından belirtiliyor. Bir kadın, S.A. Yılmaz'ın feminizmin batı merkezli çağrışımları ve feminist cinsiyet eşitliği talebinin batı merkezli olduğu ve toplum için zararlı olduğu konusunda görüşlerini yansıttı. Cinsiyet adaleti fikri, fitrat kavramının İslami yorumuna atıfta bulunarak kadınların “doğal” özellikleri üzerinden tanımlanmıştır. Bu nedenle, vaizlerin anlatılarında kurulan kadınlık inşasının, AKP'nin hem fitrat hem de toplumsal cinsiyet adaleti kavramları ile meşrulaştırdığı ve doğallaştırdığı kadının birincil görevleri olarak addedilen ev-içi sorumluluklarını vurgulayan cinsiyet ideolojisiyle uyumlu olduğu açıktır.

Çalışmanın ana bulgusu, vaizlik mesleğinin toplumsal cinsiyet rejiminin fitrat kavramına özel atıflar ile inşa edilen geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve hiyerarşileri tarafından belirlenen cinsiyet kimliği tarafından şekillenmesidir. Hem mesleki faaliyetleri hem de kadınlık konusundaki anlatılarından yola çıkarak, belirli İslami referanslarla mobilize edilen fitrat kavramının uygun kadınlığın ne olduğunu tanımlamada önemli bir dinamik olduğu söylenebilir. Bu önerme kadınların mesleki faaliyetlerine yansır, çünkü mesleğin sınırları kadınların fitratına uygun olarak yapabilecekleri tarafından belirlenir. Örneğin, aileye, çocuklara, özürlülere ve yaşlılara bakma çalışmaları kadının fitratında vardır, buna uygundur. Öte yandan, bu önerme, kadın vaizlerin kadınlık, fitrat ve cinsiyet adaleti hakkındaki fikirlerine de yansımaktadır. Kadın vaizler, kadınların ve erkeklerin aynı olmadıklarını, ancak fitratlarının farklı olduğunu iddia ettikleri için, kadın ve erkeğe farklı sorumluluklar ve görevler yüklerler. Kadınların görevinin çok önemli bir kurum olan ailesine bakmak

olduğunu, çünkü İslam'ın anlamının en iyi aile hayatında anlaşıldığını iddia ettiler. Burada, vaizlik mesleğine gömülü cinsiyet rejiminin hem kadın vaizlerin mesleki faaliyetlerine hem de söylemlerine yansıyan fitrat kavramı tarafından şekillendiği söylenebilir

Ayrıca, bu çalışmada, kadınlar için vaizlik mesleğinin AKP hükümeti altında örtülü, modern ve kentsel kadınlar için uygun bir meslek olarak yeniden oluşturulduğu ileri sürülmektedir. Vaizlik mesleği İlahiyat Fakültelerinden mezun olan kadınlar için uygun bir meslek haline geldi. Bulgular, İlahiyat Fakültelerinin kadın mezunlarının sayıca arttığını ve 2002-2003 döneminden bu yana erkek mezunlardan daha fazla olduğunu göstermektedir. Görüşmelerde bazı kadınlar 28 Şubat 1997 ile başlayan süreçle beraber kız öğrencilerin hem İmam-Hatip liselerini hem de İlahiyat Fakültelerini erkek öğrencilerden daha fazla tercih ettiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bu dönemde gerçekleşen dönüşümün bu kadar cinsiyetçi bir etkisinin gerekçesi literatürde cevapsız kalmış ve daha fazla araştırmaya ihtiyaç duymaktadır. Çünkü 28 Şubat sonrası, mezunların kariyer beklentileri için din eğitiminin ilgili dezavantajına rağmen, kadınların neden bu dezavantajlı konumda olmayı tercih ettikleri feminist bir bakış açısından ilginç bir sorudur. Ancak bu cinsiyetçi etki, hem görüşülen kişilerin anlatılarına hem de kadın ve erkek öğrencilerin yüzdesi hakkındaki sayısal verilere yansıyan araştırmanın önemli bir bulgusudur. Din eğitiminin dışlaştırılması, hem DİB saflarında hem de kadınların kariyer beklentilerinde kadınlar için böyle bir mesleğin inşası üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahiptir.

Ayrıca, vaizlik mesleği, kadınların geleneksel bakım ve şefkat rolleri göz önüne alındığında, kadın fitratına uygundur. Çalışmaları, Aile ve Dini Rehberlik Bürolarında ve çocuk evleri, huzurevleri, kadın sığınma evleri vb. sosyal kurumlar da dahil olmak üzere çeşitli devlet kurumlarında dini/ manevi rehberlik sağlamak olarak tanımlandığından, psikolojik danışmanlık sağlamadıklarını ve herhangi bir bozukluğu tedavi etmediklerini belirttiler. Ciddi bir durumla karşılaşırlarsa, Aile, Çalışma ve

Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı'na bağılı psikiyatrist, psikolog veya danışmanlara gerekli yönlendirmeleri yaptıklarını ifade ettiler. Bununla birlikte, meslek, İslami referanslarla kadınların fitratından gelen şefkat ve bakım ile hizmet etmek için yeniden tasarlandı. Özellikle sosyal kurumları ziyaret eden vaizler, insanları dinsel olarak aydınlatma rolü ile birlikte sosyal hizmet uzmanı gibi çalışır. Sosyal kurumlarda kalan insanlara şefkat ve özen göstermelidir. Bu çalışma direktifi kadınların geleneksel olarak tanımlanmış rollerine uygundur. Şefkat ve bakım, kadının fitratında bulunan kadınların temel özellikleri olarak tanımlanır.

Bu bağlamda, kadınların işgücüne katılımının ev-iç sorumluluklarından ve bu sorumlulukların düzenlemelerinden etkilendiğı ileri sürülmektedir. İkinci bölümde, AKP döneminde, kadın ve aile politikalarının neoliberal ve muhafazakar politikaların belirli bir kombinasyonu ile şekillendiğı iddia edildi. Bu politikalar ev içi sorumlulukların yükünü, çocukların ve yaşlıların bakımını kadınlara yüklerken, aynı zamanda ev işlerine zaman yaratacak şekilde işgücüne esnek katılımını da talep etmektedir. Bununla birlikte, kadın vaizlerin iş yükleri esnek olarak tasarlanmıştır. Bu esneklik ziyaret ettikleri kurumların ziyaret saatlerine göre belirlenir. Dolayısıyla, aile-iş dengesini ayarlayabildikleri için, çocukları ve aileleriyle zaman geçirebileceklerdir. Ev-iç sorumluluklarını yerine getirirken, aynı zamanda iyi bir üniversite eğitimi ile profesyonel bir kariyere sahip olabilirler. Bu bağlamda, vaizlik mesleğinin yeniden yaratılması, fitrat üzerine söylemin kristalleşme noktasına benzemektedir. Vaizler, fitrat kavramının yaygınlaştırılmasına hizmet ederken, çalışmalarını ve aile yaşamlarını sahip oldukları esnek çalışma saatleri ve yüksek sosyal statü ile dengeleyerek de onunla çelişmezler.

Önceki argümanla ilgili olarak, kadınların anlatılarında, kadınların ailesine karşı sorumluluklarının kadınların istihdamının durumunu belirlemesi gerektiğı yansıtılmıştır. Kadın vaizlerin belirttiğine göre, istihdam ve parasını kazandıktan sonra, bir kadın artık kocasına dayanmak zorunda olmadığını düşünmeye başlarsa,

kadının çalışması iyi değildir. Çalışmanın ailesi için de yararlı olduğunu düşünüyorsa, o zaman çalışmalıdır. Vaizlerin açıklamalarına göre, kadının birincil görevi eviyle, çocuğuyla ve kocasıyla ilgilenmektir. Çalışmak bir kadının kendi kendine yarattığı bir sorumluluktur. Çalışırsa ve bu ailesi için bir sorun yaratırsa, çalışmamalıdır. Bu argüman esas olarak, kadınların ve erkeklerin rollerini İslami referanslara sahip geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ve erkekler ile kadınlar arasında bir denge gerektiren cinsiyet adaleti açısından tanımlayan fitrat kavramı üzerine inşa edilmiştir. Bu bağlamda, fitrat'a göre kadınların rolleri ve sorumlulukları, doğasına uygun olmalıdır. İstihdam, kadınların kadınlığını kaybetmesine yol açacaktır. Bu, vaizlik mesleğinin cinsiyet rejiminin önemli bir yönünü gösterir.

Son olarak, dini/ manevi danışmanlık sağlama çalışmaları günlük yaşamlarında sorun yaşayan kadınları dinlemeyi içerir. Kadın vaizler, insanların özel yaşamlarında karşılaştıkları sorunlara çözümler geliştirmeye çalışırlar. Sadece olmasa da, çoğunlukla kadınlara ulaşmayı hedeflerler. Bu bağlamda, çözüm sağlamak, fitratın İslami referanslarıyla, kocaları, akrabaları veya kendileriyle sorunları olan kadınlara doğru yolu göstermekle görevlendirilmişlerdir. Bunu yaparken, kadın vaizlerin aynı zamanda fitrat ve cinsiyet adaleti kavramını yaymak ve seferber etmekle görevlendirildikleri de söylenebilir. Çünkü Aile ve Rehberlik Bürolarındaki manevi danışmanlık oturumlarında, belirli İslami referanslara dayanarak kadının yakın ilişkileri ile ilgili sorularını yanıtlayıp, özel hayatını şekillendiriyorlar. Bu bağlamda, kadınların özel hayatlarını fitratın kavramsallaştırılmasına göre düzenlemelerine yardımcı olurlar.

Sonuç olarak, R.T. Erdoğan'ın yönlendirmeleriyle, kadınların hiyerarşik olarak daha yüksek bir konuma ve yüksek bir sosyal statüye sahip istihdam alanlarına dahil edilmesi üzerinden güçlendirilmesine rağmen, vaizlik mesleğinin toplumsal cinsiyet rejimi fitrat üzerinden tanımlanır ve doğallaştırılır. Bu bağlamda DİB, özellikle 2010'dan sonra birbirini takip eden AKP hükümetleri altında cinsiyet, din ve devlet

arasında bir bağlantı sağlamak için önemli bir kurum haline geldi. Bu bağlamda DİB tarafından istihdam edilen kadın vaizler, AKP'nin toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojilerinin şekillendirdiği toplumsal cinsiyet rejimini, fitrat ve cinsiyet adaleti kavramlarını özel İslami referanslarla yaymak ve seferber için önemli aktörler haline geldi.

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