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ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Construction of Femininity and Masculinity in the Publications of Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs

Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınlarında Kadınlık ve Erkeklik İnşası

Esra KESKİN KORUMAZ<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (TPRA) is a state institution which is in charge of providing religious services in the country. The TPRA aims to create a moral, religious society through various services, including its monthly publications. This study focuses on the articles given place in the periodical *Aile* and aims to explore how these writings construct certain ideals of femininity and masculinity. The researcher conducted qualitative methodology for data gathering and analysis. In this context, the issues of *Aile* published between the years of 2013-2017 were examined and the articles selected were analyzed in accordance with discourse analysis. The results of the study indicate that the ideal woman is highly described within the limits of family and motherhood is seen as the essence of female identity. Since the TPRA has become one of the most powerful institutions in Turkey with its growing budget and appeal to a wide range of audience, this study helps us to figure out how a religious public institution determine and shape the prevalent gender discourse, at least among pious people.

### Keywords

Discourse, Deconstruction, Femininity, Gender, Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs, Women, Masculinity, Motherhood, Religious Discourse

### Öz

Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (DİB), dini hizmetlerin yerine getirilmesinden sorumlu bir devlet kurumudur. Ahlaklı ve inanca bir toplum oluşturmayı amaçlayan DİB, bu amaçla aylık dergiler yayınlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, bu dergilerden en öne çıkan *Aile* dergisinde yer alan yazılara odaklanmakta ve bu yazıların nasıl ideal kadın ve erkek kimlikleri inşa ettiğini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Veriler nitel araştırma yöntemiyle toplanmış ve çözümlenmiştir. Bu bağlamda, *Aile* dergisinin 2013-2017 yılları arasındaki yayınları incelenmiş ve söylem analizi yöntemiyle tahlil edilmiştir. Araştırmanın sonuçlarına göre, bu yayınlarda ideal kadın imgesinin daha çok aile sınırları içerisinde resmedildiği ve anneliğin, kadın kimliğinin özü olarak değerlendirildiği gözlemlenmiştir. Son yıllarda artan bütçesi ve geniş yelpazede bir okuyucuya hitap etmesiyle DİB, Türkiye'deki en güçlü kuruluşlardan biridir ve bu çalışma, dini bir devlet kurumunun mevcut toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini nasıl oluşturduğu, şekillendirdiği ve devam ettirdiğini anlamamıza yardımcı olacaktır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Annelik, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Dini Söylem, Erkeklik, Kadın, Kadınlık, Söylem, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Yapı Söküm

<sup>1</sup> **Corresponding author:** Esra Keskin Korumaz, (Instructor), Yıldız Technical University, Modern Languages, İstanbul, Turkey.  
E-mail: [esra.keskin09@gmail.com](mailto:esra.keskin09@gmail.com) ORCID: 0000-0002-0326-2124

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the woman question has been a contested terrain as it is the site of political, economic, social and ideological constructions competing and/or sometimes collaborating with each other. Unlike the West, societies in the Middle East and North Africa view the family as the basic unit of society, rather than the atomic individual. In these patriarchal societies, women are not seen as independent individuals, but they are thought to represent the honor, morality and even chastity of their family and society (Yount & Rashad, 2008). Patriarchal norms, religious beliefs and moral codes play a central role in shaping the definition and limits of women as dutiful mothers and wives in the society. Therefore, it is not uncommon to see constructions of an ideal image of woman and femininity within the limits of family.

It can be argued that Turkey is culturally shaped by these patriarchal norms that portray women as the primary caretaker of the family, belonging to the private/domestic sphere and put emphasis on the modesty of women even though there have been great changes in the position of women in legal, political and economic terms since the proclamation of the Republic. Hence, Kandiyoti (1987) famously claims Turkish women are emancipated but unliberated. Among these ideological constructions, Islamic norms and the ideal woman depicted by the Qur'an come to the fore as one of the most influential ones for Turkish society. However, it should be noted that there are various interpretations and varying opinions about the ideal womanhood in Islam as its interpretation is never a neutral process and it is quite intertwined with the political and social agenda of the time and that society. We should also keep in mind that most of these interpretations are done by male scholars over the years and they end up being androcentric (Badran, 2009). That's why, it began to be challenged by Muslim women in many parts of the world in recent years.

Noticing how fragile these religious constructions could be of ideal womanhood, this research focuses on the case of Turkey and explores the publications of Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (TPRA) so as to find out how this religious discourse contributes to the construction of appropriate feminine and masculine identities. The writings that were published between the years of 2013-2017 in the periodical *Aile* were selected and examined through discourse analysis in this study. With this research, it is aimed to delineate these constructed femininities through a religious framework and to show that how a certain type of woman is highlighted in the publications of Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs. The position of men vis- a- vis women and their relationship with women will be also elaborated. So as to do that, the significance of this institution will be explained first and then a number of examples will be cited from these publications and their underlying implications will be articulated.

## 2. TURKISH PRESIDENCY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS AND PUBLICATIONS

Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs, which will be called as TPRA shortly in this paper in order not to interrupt the flow of the reading, is a state institution which is in charge of conducting religious matters and providing religious services to Muslim people in Turkey. As for the jurisdiction of the TPRA, it is possible to claim that it is not only a bureaucratic institution but it also envisions providing religiousness that is based on morality. As officially stated on the website of the institution, the TPRA carries out religious affairs concerning the prayers, faith and morality. Furthermore, it is concerned with informing authentic religious knowledge and administrating worship places. Meeting the needs of Muslim citizens in Turkey and balancing the religious liberties and demands of society can also be counted among the major purposes of the TPRA.

The TPRA is a public institution and part of the state organization which causes controversy among scholars since some of them believe that if the state interferes with religious matters, it may be in contradiction with secularism. However, Bardakoğlu (2009), who presided the institution between the years of 2003 and 2010, argues that the TPRA has a vital position at this point since there is a need to balance liberties and demands in the society. According to Bardakoğlu, the TPRA both protects religious liberties and has a control on religious demands coming from the society in order not to disturb social order, thereby not disrupting the principle of secularism in the country.

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

As for the TPRA, it can be said that it has become a matter of discussion in the recent years with its increasingly expanding budget and its controversial fatwas with regard to the role of women, domestic violence and female sexuality. For instance; in February, 2020 it was reported that religion and family offices belonging to the TPRA were giving unacceptable advices to the women who are exposed to domestic violence. These officials advise these women to be patient and to solve the problems within their families and apply to the police or official institutions as the last resort,

which created great unrest among the public back then (Karakas, 2020). As can be seen, the position of the TPRA has been controversial in the country in terms of its liaison with the state and its peculiar notions of women and family.

What is significant for this study is the gender discourse of the TPRA since it comes among the most powerful institutions and helps reiterate the stereotypes and practices concerning gender in the society. As for this issue, the previous president claims that it adopts a policy that aims to be an active agent in solving women's problems by raising awareness and sensitivity in the society. Furthermore, it desires to enlighten people against religious misunderstandings or misinterpretations by negotiating with various institutions and organizations in order to strip religion off its bad connotations (Bardakoğlu, 2009). Although the scholars and experts working in the TPRA defend that it is an independent and scholarly free institution, there are some questions concerning its autonomy. Another dispute would be related to its objectivity in choosing the materials and sources in order to inform and disseminate the religious knowledge. For some, the gender discourse of the TPRA is also questionable since it mostly reflects male perspective and does not consider alternative approaches to gender in Islam open-mindedly.

In addition to its religious services, the TPRA publishes a number of periodicals in order to reach a wider range of audience in and out of Turkey. *Aylık Dergi*, *Aile*, *Diyanet Avrupa* can be given as examples of these publications which have been published regularly since the early 2000s. For this study, the periodical named as *Aile* carries the upmost importance since it is the main source for this study as it is constructing ideal images of woman and man with a great focus on family and it reflects the ideological stance of the institution to gendered identities. Although it started to be published as an appendix of the periodical named as '*Aylık Dergi*' in 2013, it is still among the most popular periodicals of the TPRA.

As can be inferred from the name of the periodical, *Aile* deals with issues that are common to familial life such as the relationship between husband and wife, the gendered division of labor at home, traditional roles in the family, childrearing and its concomitant problems, the roles of elderlies in the family such as father-in-law and mother-in-law. In addition to these, the periodical also pays attention to certain kind of diseases or health issues that may carry significance for the parents, interviews with artists and celebrities with a religious background and the decoration of houses. Although these concepts seem to attract the attention of both genders, the language and discourse used in these short articles mostly appeal to women, especially in the parts where raising healthy and religious children are described and where house decoration and cooking stuff are explicated thoroughly. Therefore, we can reach the conclusion that although this periodical seems to dwell upon the family life for women and men,

its main purpose is to articulate appropriate ways of leading a religious family for which women are considered to be in charge. Like other ideologies such as nationalism, orientalism and colonialism, religious framework also pictures women as the symbol of progress and an appropriate social order.

Rather than going through all the discussions in these issues, this paper aims to look for the parts where certain ideals of femininities and masculinities are constructed through this religious framework and discourse. It would be proper to claim that most of the examples to be given in the following paragraphs are about the construction of ideal Muslim womanhood and its underlying implications whereas the examples concerning the ideal manhood and male identity will be limited due to the little space spared for types of masculinities in the periodical itself. Although the topics related to male roles in the periodical is limited to fatherhood and reconciliation between their mothers and wives, women are portrayed in a wider spectrum including female roles such as being mothers, wives, housewives, the problematic working women, mothers-in-law, exemplary people in history etc. However, this should not be taken as emancipatory for women since it mostly defines 'women' in their familial contexts within the boundaries of their home.

### **3. MUSLIM WOMEN AS WIVES AND MOTHERS**

We can feel the essentialist tone of these publications at first sight in terms of motherhood as women are mostly depicted as 'mothers' and motherhood is stipulated as the first condition of being a woman. Indeed, this fact does not come as a shock since 'motherhood' and its social construction has been at the core of feminist discussions over the years and they challenge the notion that biology is destiny for women. Although prominent feminists sometimes disagree with each other on the role of motherhood on women, they strive to explain that the conceptualization of motherhood is not free from power relations, political actors and social norms that can change from time to time, thereby leaving no space for a universal concept of motherhood that applies to all women around the world. In her far-famed work, Rich (1976) defines this situation by separating motherhood as experience and motherhood as institution by drawing our attention to how motherhood can be institutionalized through various ideological operations.

Looking through these discussions, de Beauvoir can be cited as the most prominent feminist to criticize the institution of motherhood as she claims that little girls are brought up by repeated statements that they are born to be mothers and for child bearing. Therefore, all those pains and disadvantages of menstruation, illnesses and giving birth will be compensated by bringing a new child into the world. In her groundbreaking book titled as '*The Second Sex*', De Beauvoir (1972) maintains that the social norms and upbringing styles have a huge impact on women to become mothers rather than

their individual decisions. With the translation of this prominent book, second wave feminism in the United States began to centralize their attention on the concept of motherhood and they argue that maternal experience has always been constructed and defined through patriarchal culture. Therefore, they make attempts to define the notion of motherhood on their own terms and issues such as abortion, reproductions rights, birth control etc. come to the fore. With these new concepts, feminists believe that women could be emancipated from the pressure of motherhood which prevents women from participating in productive sphere.

As for motherhood, it is a must to give place to the arguments of radical feminists who provide a harsh critique of motherhood and put forward counter arguments. In her book titled as 'Feminist Thought', Tong (2013) indicates that for radical-libertarian feminists, motherhood avoids women from becoming full persons as their reproductive capacities and mother roles are of oppressive nature and that's why, these feminists are against the natural production of humans. They seek to provide an androgynous society where reproduction technologies help people reproduce without embracing the roles of mothers and fathers. For instance; Firestone (1970) strongly claims that the subordination of women will not change unless we get rid of natural childbirth and motherhood. When it is eliminated, women can participate more in the public sphere and become powerful individuals for her.

Unlike them, radical cultural feminists view 'motherhood' as an empowering concept since women get their biggest power from bringing a new being into the world. For these feminists, it gives all women great power and that's why, women should embrace their motherhood, femininity and everything that is associated with it. To their mind, the reproductive power is so notable that men envy this power and this is one of the biggest causes of women oppression and subordination in their family (Tong, 2013). As can be seen, there have been different ideas put forward by feminists over the years. However, it is possible to say that motherhood has become something to be more celebrated and delightful in the recent years.

In the recent years, especially with the groundbreaking work of Butler, titled as '*Gender Trouble*', motherhood has become to be seen as a more fluid concept and it is thought that there is more space for female agency right now. Butler (1990) claims that not only gender, but sex is also a social construction since we all agree on the definition and categorization of sex in the society. For her, this construction starts in the very beginning when we ascribe one of the sexes onto a baby at its birth. We say 'it is a boy or it is a girl' and we begin to construct its sexuality from that moment on. Therefore, sex is socially constructed and it is fortified through the reiteration of socially dominant norms and values. Therefore, gender is argued to be performative, rather than being an essentialist entity.

Departing from this point, we can claim that motherhood is not an essentialist category, instead it is more of a performative nature, thereby opening up some space for new definitions, deviations and challenges. Likewise, Chandler (1998) highlights that ‘To be a mother is to enact mothering’ (Chandler, 1998, p. 273). What she means by this sentence is motherhood should not be regarded as a fixed and stable identity, rather it can be challenged, reshaped and performed in various ways. Looking at recent works on motherhood, we can see that motherhood is considered as a practice or performance, rather than an essential identity. With regard to these changes, Jeremiah (2006) concludes that we should use the term ‘mothering’ instead of ‘motherhood’ to denote its fluidity and changing nature.

Apart from the discussions among feminists, motherhood lies at the core of various ideological constructions and practices. In many cases, women have been defined as the mothers of their nation, society, religion etc. which comes along with too many responsibilities and impositions on women. Among these ideologies, nationalism comes to the fore since it places women at the center of their nationalistic goals and agenda in various countries and periods. For instance; Peterson (1998) talks about nationalism and how it becomes gendered through its implementations on women. ‘A battle of cradle’ and ‘a battle of nursery’ come to the fore as two conceptual tools of gendered nationalism which aim to control the sexual reproduction of women and their identities and loyalties. With this gendered nationalism, it becomes possible to regulate the conditions, number and ancestors of children where women are only seen as the bearers of sons that will fight for their countries and daughters that will be caretakers of their motherland. By becoming mothers, women will fulfill their nationalistic duties and it can be conferred that women are considered to be the tools of nationalism rather than actively shaping the nationalist agenda.

As for Turkish nationalism, it can be argued that women became the symbols of modernization and nation-building process that started with the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. In addition to the legal, political and economic reforms that aimed to elevate the status of Turkish women, they also became the target of a number of reforms with regard to their clothing, life style and public visibility. However, these steps were taken by the new state instead of women’s struggles, therefore, some scholars name it ‘state feminism’ (Tekeli, 1986) and believe that these reforms aimed to Westernize the country, not to emancipate Turkish women per se (Arat, 1994). It is also pointed out that although women were encouraged to get a better education and follow professional careers, there were great attention paid to the morality of these new Turkish women as reformers desired to distinguish chaste Turkish women from Western women with a higher sexual freedom (Kandiyoti, 1991). Besides, women were depicted as ‘comrade or dutiful mothers’ who would raise the next generations in a scientific and more civilized way. The future of the nation was put on the shoulders



of the mothers of the nation. As can be seen, women came to symbolize the modern and civilized face of the new nation and they continued to be depicted as mother and mostly belonging to the domestic sphere again.

Like nationalism that positions women as the mothers of their nation and renders them responsible for bringing up patriot and dutiful generations, religions also conceptualize motherhood as the essence of womanhood and views starting a family as the first condition of a moral and religious society. In her article titled as '*Slave Girls, Temptresses and Comrades: Images of Women in the Turkish Novel*', Kandiyoti (1988) mentions how women are regarded as the source of mischief (fitne) in Islamic circles which would lead to the fall of order in a given society. Therefore, she argues, Islam desires to control the sexuality of women since when a man is attracted to a woman, he rebels against the will of God. Hence, stipulating motherhood at the core of the identities of women provides a legitimate source to control and limit female sexuality and her individuality. This theoretical framework should be kept in mind while analyzing these religious publications and their implications on female identities in a deep sense.

Turkey, extending between Europe and the Middle East, stands on a unique position in terms of cultural and political norms that shape traditional gender roles. Even though Turkey has undergone a great transformation with the establishment of the Republic and women were granted numerous legal rights, it would not be wrong to argue that Turkish culture maintains a patriarchal one with regard to gender roles and identities. The notion of family for Turkish people should be evaluated bearing this lineage in mind.

Notable scholars state that the traditional gender roles are based on inequalities between women and men which lead to the subordination of women in different fields of social life in Turkey (Arat & Altınay, 2009); (Dedeoglu & Elveren, 2012). For these scholars, determining the exact norms and values that give shape to gender roles in Turkish society requires concerted efforts since various factors such as class, ethnic, religious and geographical differences intersect each other. However, it is still possible to have a general picture of these gender relations. Even though Turkish women enjoy legal freedom and equality in the domains of higher education and jobs in the public life, it can also be argued that they are subject to a set of traditional rules, norms and codes in their lives. Especially, the concept of honor, the emphasis on virginity and the issue of veiling can be counted among these patriarchal constructions that enable the family and the society to interfere with the actions and body of women (Abdo & Mojab, 2004).

Thornton (2001) underlines that Western states have taken a number of steps such as legislation, courts, policing functions, educational and employment opportunities etc. so as to diminish the power and control of family over their members. However,



Joseph (2000) points out a contrast between the Western world and the Middle East by claiming that family rather than the individual is the basis of society in the Middle East. If an individual is a member of a family, he or she is qualified for citizenship in many Arab countries and the relationship between citizens and states are built upon kin contracts, which emphasizes the significance of family in the course of social, political and economic life.

In such an environment, Joseph uses the term ‘connective self’ rather than self as an individual and highlights that kin contract comes along with its own norms and values. For instance; we can observe the existence of patriarchal connectivity where women and juniors accept the authority of elders and men in their lives whereas men and elders have certain responsibilities towards women and children. This system leads to the formation of gendered division of labor and traditional roles for women and men in return. While men are the breadwinners and in charge of protecting women and children from the outside world, women become the primary care takers of their families and they are confined to the private sphere of their homes. Furthermore, it is taken for granted that all women should desire to be a mother one day. In this respect, Shalkamy (1997) argues that marriage is a life-step and it should be seen as a career-move for these women since they can get access to children, a husband and a different position in another house through marriage. It also means being readmitted to a network of mothers and grandmothers, which empowers married women and elevates their status in society. In line with these arguments, the analysis of the TPRA publications shows us that women are pictured in traditional roles such as taking care of their children, doing housework, having relations with their mothers-in-law and being mothers as an essential part of human nature. Therefore, it is possible to say that the periodical *Aile* constructs the ideal image of Muslim women and men through these patriarchal norms and values.

In addition to the prevalent gender norms in the Middle East, *Aile* makes use of Islamic discourse in order to construct ideal femininity and masculinity. Numerous verses and hadiths are cited in most of the issues so as to explain the relationship between a woman a man, thereby, the ideal roles for each. The Qur’an seems to be the primary source for the description of an ideal, reasonable Muslim woman and the determination of her role, power and status in society. However, we should note that the interpretation of these verses and hadiths are not free from any opposition or alternative perspectives even though the writers in *Aile* do not leave any space for any kind of uncertainty about their interpretations.

As for the depiction of women and men in the Qur’an, it can be said that most discussions are related to the creation of humankind, the intellectual capacity of women, the rights of husbands over their wives, marriage and divorce, and the hierarchical

relationship between women and men. I believe the creation of humankind depicted in the Qur'an carries significance for understanding the hierarchical relationship between women and men in Muslim societies. Hassan (1999) maintains that the general assumption that Eve was created from the ribs of Adam leads to undermining the position of women. With this interpretation, we come to think that women are derivative creatures, Eve is the source of evil in this world and the existence of women is instrumental. Hassan reminds us the fact that the Qur'an has been interpreted by male scholars throughout history. Therefore, it should be revisited and reinterpreted through a female perspective to get rid of such misogynist assumptions shaping the religious discourse.

In this regard, a prominent Turkish theologian, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk (2000) disputes the idea of Eve's creation from the ribs of Adam. According to Öztürk, there is no explicit statement that says Eve was created from the ribs of Adam in the Qur'an and he adds that this common belief may originate from the statements placed in the Bible instead. Therefore, it is not possible to say that Eve was created from Adam, thereby having a secondary status. Öztürk believes that the word '*nafs*' used in the verse describing the creation of Adam and Eve denotes the common origin of all human beings. Likewise, Durmuşoğlu (2007) underlines that the word '*nafs*' is neither solely feminine nor solely masculine in Arabic which refers to the origin and essence of humankind and shows that the creation of humankind is not based on masculine terms. Therefore, we should understand this verse as putting emphasis on the single origin of all human beings that emerged from a single family that consists of one man and one woman.

Another concern is the equality between women and men in the Qur'an and for this discussion, Surah 4: An-Nisa: 34 is cited most. It can be translated as:

Men are the managers (*qawwamun*) of the affairs of women because Allah has made the one superior to the other and because men spread of their wealth on women. Virtuous women are, therefore, obedient: they guard their rights carefully in their absence under the care and watch of Allah. As for those women whose defiance you have cause to fear, admonish them and keep them apart from your beds and beat (*daraba*) them. Then, if they submit to you, do not look for excuses to punish them: note it well that there is Allah above you, Who is Supreme and Great. (Shebab, 1986, p. 117).

Although the word '*qawwamun*' is translated as 'managers' here, there have been some alternative ways of interpreting the same word such as 'protectors', 'masters' or 'in charge of'. This kind of interpretation legitimizes the unequal relationship between women and men through a religious framework. However, some other scholars, especially Islamic feminists in the recent years, argue that it can be translated as 'breadwinners' and this seems quite natural when we consider the context of that period (Hassan, 1999). Likewise, a prominent figure in Islamic feminism, Wadud (1999)

interprets this word as ‘breadwinner’ and underlines that this verse aims to ease the lives of women. Considering the ills and difficulties of pregnancy and childrearing, she believes that the Qur’an conceptualizes a social life where women do not have to financially provide for their families and men take care of these issues. For these scholars, this verse is revealed for the benefit of women and to make their lives easier. However, even these arguments essentially assume that motherhood is a natural part of womanhood and depict Muslim women within the domestic sphere again. Despite these discussions, it is clear that most Muslim scholars cite this verse as the legitimate reason for disallowing women from working outside in different parts of the world. We can feel the same sense in the publications of the TPRA even though this discouragement for working women is not clearly stated.

It is also a common belief that Islam grants some rights to the husband over his wife in marriage and family life, including some priorities in divorce. As the husband is seen as the head of the family and its guardian, women are considered to be under the protection of their husbands, which leads to the superiority of men in family relationships in Islamic tradition. The verse I cited above is also related to the marriage life as it gives men the permission to punish their wives in case of a dispute or disagreement. The word in Arabic ‘*daraba*’ and how it is interpreted carry the utmost significance here. While some scholars translate this word as ‘strike or ‘whip’ by indicating physical violence, some others like Wadud or Hassan translate it as ‘holding in confinement’ rather than beating the wife (Hassan, 1999), (Wadud, 1999). These scholars draw our attention to the fact that husbands are advised to use alternative ways to solve the conflicts in marriage without applying for divorce and the last resort would be ‘holding women confined in the house’ as a psychological punishment. They believe this can be applied only when women reject to be mothers as it is significant to provide the continuity of the next generations in Islam. However, all these arguments do not question why the husbands have this right over their wives and not vice versa.

As for the word ‘*daraba*’, Öztürk (2000) suggests that it can be interpreted in various ways. He puts forward that the same word can mean ‘moving the woman out of the house’ or ‘pushing the woman to move away from her neighborhood’ or ‘beating’. Öztürk adds that these three solutions can be used in different cases, but we should keep in mind that the first two solutions seem to be more reasonable and effective in terms of resolving the conflict, human psychology and logic of law. If we make use of violence in violence between spouses, it will become a kind of enforcement that is beyond the scope of this verse.

Likewise, Eliaçık (2007) interprets this word as separating the living spaces rather than beating the wife since he highlights the life of the Prophet where he first preferred to talk with his wife in case of a dispute, later separated the bed and the last resort,

he chose to live separately for a while. Therefore, we cannot see any case or incident that the Prophet made use of violence or to beat his wife. In a similar way, Yavuz (1999) interpret this verse as referring to separating the bed or the house in serious disagreements between spouses. He also believes that if a woman disagrees or rebels against her husband, it cannot be considered a crime, thereby, this cannot be given punishment, otherwise it would be ‘*zulm*’ (cruelty) for women. As can be seen, there have been numerous scholars that show us that this verse can be interpreted in many ways, which opens up space for new perspectives and definitions for gender equality in Islam. However, translating this verse in a single way without being open to new definitions reveals to us the dangers of an androcentric view of Islam.

Looking at the main tenets of Islamic *fiqh*, we can easily observe that it is highly androcentric and in service of patriarchal norms and values. Although this male domination and perspective in the interpretation of the Qur’an is being challenged in recent years, it is not easy to say that all subjective and misogynist constructions are underlined and deconstructed yet (Barlas, 2002). As a consequence, the ideal images of women and men constructed by these interpretations maintain to be highly patriarchal and to portray women as of inferior status. These depictions are built upon the essentialist view that all women should be mothers, conduct their lives in domestic sphere, take care of their families and have responsibilities against their husbands. On the other hand, men are seen as the guardians of their families, breadwinners and authorities to regulate the family life, including the behaviors of their wives. The same perspective about gender differences and roles can be observed in the publications of the TPRA that will be elaborated in the upcoming paragraphs.

#### 4. MOTHERHOOD AND FAMILY IN THE PERIODICAL ‘*AİLE*’

As written above, one can argue that the major subject that is highly debated and emphasized in these articles is the significance of family, thereby motherhood which is considered as the foundation of society and a proper religious life. Visiting the pages of *Aile*, one can come across various articles dedicated to the importance of having a family and how to maintain healthy relations in it. For instance, in the January issue of *Aile*, 2013, family is defined as the building block of the society and it is described as a shelter for human beings. In this article and many others, starting a family is seen as a part of human nature and the word ‘*fitrat*’ is repeatedly used for this. For these writers, it is unquestionable that a human being may not desire to share his/her life with another person and stay single, since this would be resisting against his or her natural instincts.

In his article titled as ‘*Aile Bir Kaledir Aslında*’ (Family is A Castle, Indeed), Ekrem Keleş (2013) defines marriage as a comfort and safety zone. He also points our attention to the Arabic words ‘*muhsinin*’ or ‘*muhsanat*’ which come from the same origins

with the word ‘castle’ in Arabic. Therefore, he infers that ‘married person’ refers to someone who is in a castle and protected in Arabic which implicitly conveys the nature of marriage for human beings. Departing from the analogy of castle, he adds that marriage also should be private (*mahrem*), protective and enduring like a castle. For him, family is a defense mechanism against the dangers of the outdoor world which protects the members of a family through its compassion, care and God’s mercy. At this point, he quotes a Turkish saying which can be translated as ‘There is no softer cushion than the lap of a mother in the world’. With this quotation, he provides us an ideal picture of a family and while doing that he gives the primary role to mothers. For him, the emotional and compassionate character of women and mothers lies at the core of family structure, thereby society.

In the same issue, Faruk Görgülü (2013) touches upon the importance of family and sees it as the core of human existence. For the maintenance of family life, Görgülü assigns different characteristics and roles to men and women. Indeed, this attitude is evident throughout all issues where different gender roles are prescribed for women and men and it is thought that they complement each other thanks to their distinguishing roles and missions. For instance; women are described as the backbones of their families who mediate another person to come to the world, form and protect the family, have great sense of mercy, compassion and kindness. On the other side, the writer describes men as the head of family, shouldering the big burden of their family, dedicating themselves to their families, financing their family and building confidence in their children as independent individuals. With this example, we can conclude that there is a sharp distinction between the roles of mothers and fathers in a family where women are held responsible for giving birth and providing an emotionally safe environment to their children whereas men are seen as the connection of the family with the outside world. Needless to say, this distinction reinforces the traditional assumption that women are restricted to private sphere by taking care of their children while men are the breadwinners of the family, which is a recurring theme in this periodical, too.

Unlike the examples given above, it is possible to read some articles that desire to deconstruct the traditional roles assigned to women and men. They support the idea that both parents should have the same responsibility for raising their children and they should respect each other as they are equal in dignity and capacity. For example; Çiğdem Demirsoy (2013) dwells upon traditional gender roles we acquire from the very early days of childhood. In her article, the emphasis is upon the heavy burden that men carry on their shoulders because of these gendered identities. She argues that men are taught not to cry and show their emotions, the ideal manhood is depicted as being serious, hardworking, tough individuals who are liable for financing their families and protecting them. For the writer, these constructions of ideal manhood should be seen as a token of a heavy burden on men in society and it creates some pressure on

men. At face value, this article may seem to deconstruct widely accepted norms and values with regard to gender roles in the family. However, we should also keep in mind that there is no single article that describes the female roles as restrictive or no writer puts emphasis on the heavy burden on mothers throughout all issues. Instead, women are depicted as happily conducting family matters and raising their children out of their mercy and love which is taken for granted as a natural instinct for women.

As for raising children and giving them moral education, there are many questionable expressions used in these articles. While most of them emphasize the distinction between mothers as caretakers at home and fathers as breadwinners, they also assign different roles to women and men in parenting. In his article titled as '*Kuran Perspektifinden Baba Figürleri*' (Father Models from the Perspective of Qur'an), İsmail Erşahin (2017) elaborates on father models prescribed in Islam and I believe that this article is of the utmost importance since it frankly constructs the ideal fatherhood by using the most legitimate religious source, Qur'an. During the article, the writer touches upon a set of concepts relevant to ideal fatherhood. He defines the father as the central figure of the family thanks to his participation in the public sphere as a breadwinner and protecting the family from the dangerous outside world.

While raising a child, Erşahin (2017) assigns a major role to fathers especially in teenage and adult years unlike the early childhood where mostly mothers are responsible for the development of the child. This statement also implies that mothers are charged with taking care of bodily needs of children in the early years whereas fathers are taking control in shaping the psychological and moral development of their children in the later years. That's why, this article seems to position men with their intellectual skills vis-a-vis women with their emotional attitudes towards parenting.

Another example concerning differences in parenting could be given from the March issue of *Aile* where Faruk Görgülü (2013) argues that children are influenced by their parents in their early childhood. Therefore, it is of striking importance for the parents to set good examples at home. To be able to prove his point, he gives an example from a poem where a child associates the revolving of the world with the father coming back from the work in the evenings. However, in these descriptions, it is always the fathers coming from work and children are waiting for their fathers. Needless to say, mothers are always present at home.

As for the working women, it can be said that they are highly invisible or depicted in a more disadvantageous position in an increasingly modern and capitalist world. Writers mostly have a negative approach to the modern world as they view modernity coming along with the dissolution of the family and undermining its position in society. Even when the working women come into the picture, they are portrayed as striving people who desire to meet the financial needs of their family while working under

difficult conditions. As they still have to take care of their home and children, they are put into a more challenging situation compared to other women not working outside. With these depictions, a sense of pity is hinted at working women and these women are not conceptualized as independent individuals who seek personal satisfaction in their jobs. The fact that some women work outside is legitimized through their sacrifices for the sake of their families.

In parallel to this attitude, Halide Özüdoğru Erdoğan (2016) complains about the image of the perfect mother in her article titled as ‘*Çalışan Kadın İkilemi*’ (The Dilemma of Working Women). Although the article seems to be empathizing with working women and their problems in the family at face value, it does not strive for altering the system that puts a burden on the shoulders of women. Rather than challenging the roles of fathers or division of labor in the family, she looks for the ways that can enable women to work less. She suggests that government can enforce new laws that require women to work less or in flexible hours since she believes that working less or working from home can help women to do their irreplaceable duties at home and to contribute to their finance at the same time. Hence, it seems clear that the article does not strip women off traditional gender roles or division of labor. First of all, women are mothers with a package of duties and responsibilities that cannot be conducted by others and secondly, they have to maintain their traditional roles even if they work outside and earn their living. As it can be deduced, this description is far away from emancipating women but legitimizes gender discrimination in a way since no one pictures fathers doing housework at home or working from home in order to spend more time with their children.

Likewise, Özden Zehra Dönmez (May, 2016) clearly expresses that motherhood is the destiny of women by claiming that when a woman becomes a mother, her age, education and profession do not matter anymore, she is a mother until she dies. Being a sensitive mother means making sacrifices for the sake of your family and giving upon many things. In here, we witness that women are destined to be mothers and they are supposed to put their children before their interests and desires. Like nationalist discourse that picture women as the mothers of the nation and responsible for raising modern, healthy and scientific children, religious ideology also depicts women as selfless mothers and dependent upon their families. At this point, we can observe an intersection between the nationalist and religious discourse in terms of gendering identities. Throughout these depictions, it seems clear that women who choose not to marry or be mothers stay invisible as they deviate from the dominant gender norms. In most of the articles published in *Aile*, women are conceptualized as mothers and they are held responsible for raising a religious and moral generation that is in tune with the prescriptions of the Qur’an and the Sunnah.



The article of Özgül Piyade (2014) can be explored as another example of the essentialist view on motherhood since it deals with the relationship between married women and their mothers-in-law. Once again, women are depicted through their positions within their families. In this article, we can observe that the authority of the mother-in-law is acknowledged and she is entitled to interfere with the relationship between spouses for the good of their family. Here, we generally talk about the husband's mother in charge as it is common to see that in patriarchal societies where patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence is prevalent, women tend to invest more on their sons, rather than their daughters. As these women rely on their children for their security in the older ages, they become more attached to their sons and expect to be respected by their daughters-in-law in the later years (Yount & Rashad, 2008). We can argue that this situation is still applicable to most of the mothers-in-law in Turkey as patriarchal norms are still dominant, especially with regard to family relationships.

This article is built upon the argument that mothers-in-law have a right to interfere in the spousal relationship with the purpose of mediation and reconciliation. They can give advice to their daughters-in-law and guide them on the way to be a good wife and mother. Against such a hierarchical relationship between two women, the role of man is depicted as providing the balance between his mother and wife as an intermediary and negotiator. On the other side, the article concludes that being a mother-in-law or a daughter-in-law does not differentiate from each other that much as being a mother is the essence of both.

Besides these, almost in each issue, plenty of space is given to the description of healthy families that have no communication problems and set good examples for others in society. To be able to maintain healthy families, these articles touch upon how to choose suitable partners for marriage and what kind of criteria are needed to be applied in this process. In one of the articles that exhibit communication problems that may occur between husband and wife, Ayşe Yılmaz (2017) gives examples of appropriate and inappropriate patterns of communication between spouses. However, her examples are loaded with gender stereotypes. For instance; she cites a conversation between a husband and a wife where the husband gets angry because his wife has not ironed his clothes and the wife gets sulky and offended because of his anger. Then, she avoids sending him off to work and this time the husband resents this behavior and so on. In here, she suggests that instead of complaining and resenting, the wife should ask for the understanding of her husband by expressing that she could not iron his clothes because she had to take care of the children. Upon this, the husband should empathize with his wife and offer that he would iron his clothes while she prepares the breakfast. By this way, a good type of communication between spouses is exhibited in the article.

At first sight, this article may seem to have a positive attitude towards marriage and family. However, it is evident that the writer makes a sharp distinction between the division of labor in family where women are depicted as housewives and mothers and men have a superior position over their wives since they work outside and have the control of financial means to support the family. When the husband tries to understand his wife and forgives her for her inadequacy, he becomes the angel in the family and gains the position of being subject unlike his wife who is definitely the object of his judgement and behavior.

Another article that restricts women into the private sphere and charges them with housework is found in May, 2017 issue of *Aile*. In the article, Hatice Kübra Görmez (2017) casts light on problematic issues that create conflicts between spouses and cites examples of improper conducts for women and men. For example, if a woman refuses to breastfeed her child and to do housework, she is stigmatized as not treating her family with loyalty and compassion. On the other hand, if a man desires to take a second wife, it is again not a noble thing to do. This example clarifies the boundaries of the female and male world maintained by religious framework. On the one side, doing housework and looking after children convey the meaning of female life. On the other side, men do not carry on such a burden and treated as independent individuals without any attachment. Along with these rigid boundaries in terms of private and public sphere, it is also hinted that men are able to take a second wife although it is not a proper thing to do. This chance or possibility is never uttered for a woman in any kind of writing.

Looking through all these traditional roles attributed to women, one can argue that women are pictured with angelic characteristics as they are good mothers, understanding wives, responsible daughters and sisters. They are the foundation of society where relations are flowing smoothly and moral generations are growing thanks to them. Women are described as patient, understanding, friendly and moral characters. From the early days of their lives on, they are raised as ‘perfect girls’ and they are happy to lead their lives within the boundaries of their family.

## **5. MUSLIM WOMEN AND MODERN LIFE**

In addition to the debates on the traditional roles of women and men, *Aile* also attempts to respond to problematic issues and hot debates coming along with modern world and newly emerged needs of society. As new concerns about the daily life, modern division of labor, social media and technology arise and become visible, *Aile* questions our new way of life and its implications on our understanding of religion. To prevent families from dissolving and the negative influences of modern world on raising children, it gives place to numerous articles that deal with these issues and seek to give advice to parents and young generation.

One of these recent issues is the concept of surrogate mother and its bad impact on family relations. In her article titled as '*Nesil Emniyeti*' (Assurance of Generations), Ülfet Görgülü (2017) acknowledges that the modern world has brought up new concepts such as sperm and egg donation, surrogate and biological mother, single parent etc. For her, Islam does not approve the practice of surrogate motherhood so as to protect the psychological and physical health of persons, individuals and generations. As this practice and new technology can weaken family bonds and damage the consanguinity, Islam is clearly against this kind of practice. These concepts are claimed to perish the honor of society and family by ignoring the natural instincts of human beings, therefore they should be forbidden in our country and anywhere where Islam prevails.

In addition to the religious perspective, the concept of Artificial Reproductive Technology (ART) has caused hot debates among feminists, too. In her article named as '*The Growing Feminist Debate over the New Reproductive Technologies*', Donchin (1989) touches upon the indications of ART for women. According to the article, feminists view ART as a way of devaluing motherhood and creating new hierarchies among women because there occurs a sort of disparity between women who donate egg/ surrogate and who receive these services. Egg donors and surrogate mothers generally have financial problems and they trade their bodies in return for money. Unfortunately, this leads to the racial and economic exploitation of some women for the sake of other women's benefits.

Besides, ART turns the maternal body into a commodity like others that are sold and bought in the capitalist market. Owing to its limitation and control on the acts of surrogate mothers, the female body becomes a site of intervention and gets reified. This control is reinforced by legal regulations as the surrogate mothers or egg donors have no right on their offspring. This allows women's labor to be used and controlled by others. Furthermore, it deepens stereotypes that women are baby-machines. Commercial surrogacy reduces the dignity of women and their body integrity and the fact that egg and commercial surrogacy are largely unregulated whereas adoption is highly regulated can be counted as a point to prove that it devalues female and motherhood (Donchin, 1989). In the publications of the TPRA, these new technologies are highly objected to and condemned as causing social disorder. The main concern for them is obviously not female emancipation on their bodies, however, they feel insecure about the assurance of generations and moral order in society.

Another concern for the bad spirit of the modern world is related to feminism and its underlying indications for the female identities. In her article titled as '*Biz Kadınlar*' (Women, Us), Zekiye Demir (2015) illustrates that women have multiple roles and identities in the modern world. We are mothers, wives, daughters and sisters in society, all of which come with a package of roles assigned us. As mothers, we are

expected to look after children by giving them moral education that will protect them in the world and hereafter. As wives, we are supposed to be the intimate friends of our husbands and help them in their life. As daughters, we should treat our parents well without complaining and as sisters, we need to share everything we have like the womb of our mothers.

Because of these multiple roles placed upon women, the writer indicates that women have been targeted by various ideologies throughout history. In here, feminism comes in and it is defined as an ideology that imposes its own ideas and judgements on women. According to the article, some of these feminists celebrate our motherhood whereas others curse it. These feminists are looking for gender equality and women emancipation but they fail to see that endorsing ‘equality’ will not be enough to solve the problems of women and to describe the position of women in society. For the writer, the main purpose should be that women should be treated with justice rather than equality. However, she does not elaborate on how she distinguishes between justice and equality any further. Besides, one can sense the antagonist attitude towards feminism in her article as feminism is thought to be victimizing all women in society by putting emphasis on ‘equality’.

One can say that these arguments are closely intertwined with the hot debates going on in the Muslim world where scholars argue about the use of the term ‘feminism’ and its underlying implications for Islam and Muslim women. Even the female scholars who make efforts to deconstruct prevalent religious knowledge and contribute to the emancipation of Muslim women through adopting a female perspective and reinterpreting the holt scripts and texts in Islam sometimes refrain from using the word ‘feminist’ for themselves. Since feminism is a value-laden concept for them that is associated with Western ideology and colonialism, it is considered to be a notorious subject. Western feminism is considered to be an attack on the authenticity of Muslim culture and some Muslim scholars working for gender justice refrain from identifying themselves as feminists (Ahmad, 2015).

Although her writings and ideas are regarded as the building block of the movement, for instance, Asma Barlas insistently rejects to be labeled as an Islamic feminist. One of the reasons for rejecting this label is her condemnation of ethnocentric practices of feminism as she believes that feminism fails to represent women of color like her. To differentiate herself from feminists, she calls herself a believing woman who “derives her understanding of equality and of patriarchy from the Qur’an, not from any feminist text” (Badran, 2009). She adds that ‘feminism’ does not allow us to theorize about gender equality from any other alternative paradigms. The tendency to call anyone speaking about sexual equality or women’s liberation as feminist is a token of the foreclosing practices of feminism. This negative stance against feminism is also evident in the

publications of the TPRA which is also keen on clarifying the boundaries between the Islamic world and West. However, we should keep in mind that apart from using the term 'feminism', the writers in TPRA publications refrain from building their arguments on the basis of 'equality' as well. For them, 'complementarity' should be the focus of these discussions, rather than the equality.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Looking through these articles, it can be concluded that the periodical *Aile* thrives to shape certain ideals of womanhood and manhood through a religious discourse. This study contributes to understanding how a state institution can have an impact upon articulating and maintaining traditional gender roles and norms in Turkey. As the name itself offers, *Aile* skillfully pictures an ideal environment for a Muslim family where each spouse has a set of roles and responsibilities. It seems obvious that women and men are considered to be charged with distinct qualities and missions within the context of their families. Although the periodical seems to deal with issues coming along with modernity and tries to meet the needs of Muslims in that sense, it fails to adopt alternative and progressive perspectives when it comes to gender roles. By doing this, it perpetuates traditional distinctions regarding gender identities and reiterates the dichotomous world where each gender is described within binary oppositions.

The most striking theme in these writings is that women are essentially described as good wives, mothers and caretakers restricted to the private sphere whereas men are defined as the breadwinners of their families and having independent lives that are visible in the public sphere. This reoccurring theme legitimizes the superiority of men in their families since they provide the financial support of the family. However, *Aile* partly fails to realize the changing conditions in the modern world where women are also participating in business life and there is no statement about how these new conditions would alter the hierarchical relationship between the spouses.

Another point to mention here is that these writers and scholars apply to the religious sources in order to strengthen their arguments. For instance; Elif Arslan (2014) cites a number of Qur'anic verses related to family and the relationship between spouses where husbands and wives are conceptualized as the light of their lives, the garment of each other, the source of joy and peace. Therefore, Qur'anic verses and hadiths play a major role in legitimizing their arguments and I believe that this provides notable power to the publications of the TPRA which distinguishes it from other types of institutions and this should be kept in mind while analyzing the gender discourse of the TPRA publications.

Last but not least, we should note that there are some certain images and hidden messages evident in these publications. For instance, there is no single article about

veiling or the dress of women but all the female photos and images given place in the periodical are uniformed and leave no space for different female identities. The reason for this is that all women are depicted as veiled and wearing modest clothes that are very loose and in dark colors. Even the little girls are sometimes pictured with headscarves and it is not possible to come across any image of a woman without veil. This is also another shortcoming for the periodical since it monopolizes a certain image of Muslim women without opening up space for differences and individual identities.

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