

**UNDERSTANDING PEACE PERCEPTIONS OF ISLAMIC ACTORS
CONCERNING THE PEACE PROCESS IN TURKEY AND THEIR
NORMATIVE PROPOSALS FOR ACHIEVING PEACE**

by
MERVE KAYAN

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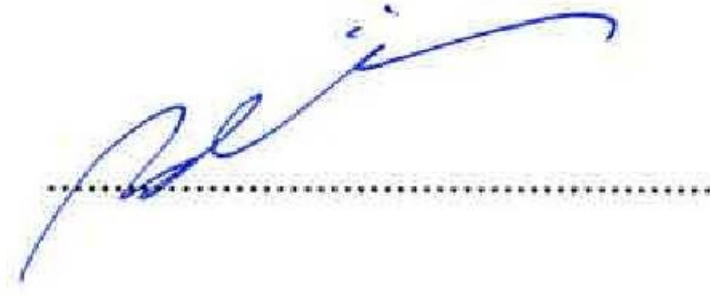
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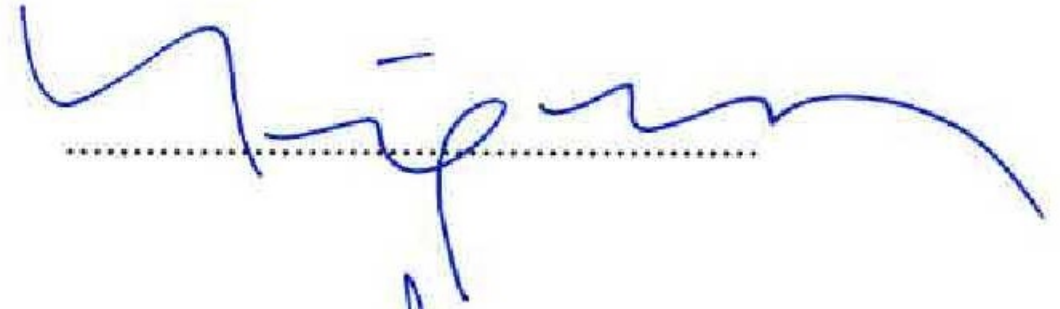
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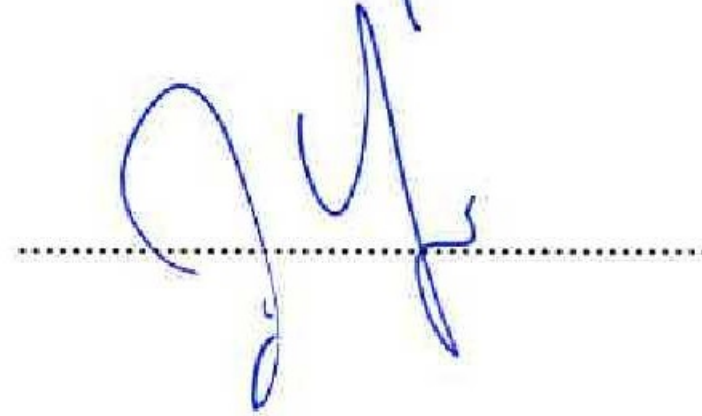
Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik
(Thesis Supervisor)



Prof. Mesut Yeğen



Asst. Prof. Oya Yeğen



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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING PEACE PERCEPTIONS OF ISLAMIC ACTORS CONCERNING THE PEACE PROCESS IN TURKEY AND THEIR NORMATIVE PROPOSALS FOR ACHIEVING PEACE

MERVE KAYAN

CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND RESOLUTION M.A. THESIS, JULY 2019

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik

Keywords: religious norms, religious actors, peace process, perception of peace,
conflict resolution

The literature on religious norms and actors' positive contribution to peace has been growing in the field of conflict resolution. While some discussions concerning 'religion' have been regarded its role as a sparking factor for the emergence and the escalation of conflicts, it has been accepted by another branch of scholars as a facilitating instrument for creating a peaceful environment. Those, who side with the positive contribution of religious norms and actors to peace, highlight the multiplicity of religious values in the pursuit of peace. To examine the potential role of religious norms and actors for peace in Turkey's Kurdish issue, this study investigates peace understanding of religious actors in Turkey and their normative recommendations for peace in a conflictual environment. By considering that religious actors are not homogenous in terms of their ideological stance, this thesis also examines the effect of religious actors' ideological stance in their understanding of peace and religious norms. Turkey's peace process (2013-20115) was utilized as a case study in exploring their perception of peace. The findings show that despite ideological differences of the religious actors, certain Islamic norms were commonly emphasized by them to promote 'peace.' Although women religious actors as contributors to peace may not be adequately recognized, the inclusive understanding of women participants implies the need for both further examination of their role in conflict resolution. Besides, what the characteristics of religious actors, who might contribute to peace, should be constitutes another discussion presented in this thesis.

ÖZET

İSLAMİ AKTÖRLERİN TÜRKİYE'DEKİ BARIŞ SÜRECİNE İLİŞKİN OLARAK
BARIŞ ALGILARINI VE BARIŞA ULAŞMAK İÇİN ÖNERDİKLERİ NORMATİF
DEĞERLERİ ANLAMAK

MERVE KAYAN

UYUŞMAZLIK ANALİZİ VE ÇÖZÜMÜ YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, TEMMUZ 2019

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Ayşe Betül Çelik

Anahtar Kelimeler: dini normlar, dini aktörler, barış süreci, barış algısı, uyuşmazlıkların
çözümü

Uyuşmazlık Analizi ve Çözümü alanında dini normların ve aktörlerin barışa pozitif katkısı üzerine yapılan literatür çalışmaları artış gösteriyor. Bir yandan çatışmaların ortaya çıkışında ve tırmanışa geçmesinde dini bir faktör olarak kabul eden literatürün yanısıra, diğer grup araştırmacılar dini, barışçıl bir çevrenin yaratılmasında kolaylaştırıcı bir etki olarak ele alıyor. Bu araştırmacılar, barışa katkıda bulunabilecek dini değerlerin çokluğuna vurgu yapıyor. Dini aktörlerin ve normların Türkiye'nin Kürt meselesi bağlamında barışa olumlu katkıda bulunma potansiyellerini araştırmak üzere, bu tez çalışması dini aktörlerin çatışmalı bir ortamda barış anlayışlarını ve barışa ulaşmak için önerdikleri normative değerleri araştırmaktadır. Dini aktörlerin, ideolojik tutum bağlamında homojen olmadıkları göz önünde bulundurularak, bu tez çalışması ideolojik tutumun dini aktörlerin barışa dair dini normları yorumlamaları üzerindeki etkisini de araştırmaktadır. Türkiye'deki barış süreci (2013-2015), dini aktörlerin barış algılarını ve onların ideolojik tutumlarının dinin barışa dair değerlerini yorumlamalarında etkisini anlamak amacıyla vaka çalışması olarak ele alınmıştır. Bulgulara göre, ideolojik tutum farklılıklarına rağmen dini aktörlerin barışa dair önerdikleri ortak dini değerlerin mevcut olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Kadın dini aktörlerin varlığı her ne kadar yeterince tanınmasa da, kadın katılımcıların kapsayıcı barış algıları onların çatışmaların çözümünde oynayabilecekleri roller üzerine yapılacak başka çalışmalara ihtiyaç olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Ayrıca, barışa katkıda bulunabilecek dini aktörlerin özelliklerinin neler olması gerektiği konusundaki tartışma tezde öne sürülen bir diğer tartışmayı oluşturmaktadır.

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To those who seek relentlessly justice

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP: Justice and Development Party

HDP: Peace and Democracy Party

DIK: Democratic Islam Congress

PRA: Presidency of Religious Affairs

PKK: Kurdistan Workers' Party

1. INTRODUCTION

“(...) do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do.”

(Al-Ma'idah 5:8)

While conflicts are spreading the seeds of *hatred* all around the world, the holy source of Muslims, which is Quran, puts forward a crucial principle for the believers of Islam to implement. The Quran does not deny the possibility of humans' having feelings of hatred, however, it reminds them to act *justly* regardless of their negative feelings towards a group of people. Current studies of peace and nonviolence in Islam work on this potential of the religion for facilitating mutual understanding of conflicting parties towards each other and the principle of justice in a conflictual society. While acknowledging the principles of *conditional* and *just war* in Islam, the scholars of peace and nonviolence prefer to focus on the wealth of Islamic sources for resolutions of conflicts. How can religion (Islam) as an abstract concept be utilized for resolutions of conflicts? This question addresses the norms and the actors of Islam as potential contributors for achieving peace. However, although a case of a non-religious conflict might include the members of a same religion as conflicting parties, there would be some difficulties to employ religious norms and actors as the players of the conflict resolution. In this thesis study, the role of religious norms and actors for achieving peace in a conflictual society is subjected to the examination. By taking the Peace Process (2013-2015), which was initiated to take certain steps to resolve the Kurdish issue, in Turkey as a case study, this study will examine the peace perceptions of 'religious actors' and their normative proposals for achieving peace. How religious actors perceive peace and interpret religious norms regarding peace might determine their potential to contribute to peace. Therefore,

it is important to shed the light on their peace perceptions and their understanding of religious norms in terms of peace.

The literature on the role of religion in conflict resolution field shows that religion might be a potential tool to contribute to resolutions of conflicts either in the case that religious norms are misused, which might lead people to realize this misutilization, or in the case that religion is not the factor which identifies a conflict. Since Turkey's Kurdish issue is not a religiously motivated conflict, it can be argued that the deployment of the religious norms to contribute to the resolution of the issue might be useful. However, by considering the effect of the conflictual environment on the religious norms and actors in Turkey's case it is crucial to understand how religious actors perceive these norms and how these norms are deployed by both religious actors and political authorities.

Facilitating 'religion' as a common ground between diverse ethnicities is not a new approach since certain governments in Turkey put forward Islam "as a tool to suppress ethnic divisions for years" (Türkmen, 2019: 1). However, there has been apparently no positive result obtained from deploying 'religion' as an instrument for either suppressing ethnic divisions or resolving the conflict in Turkey. What lies behind this failure of deploying 'religion' as a conflict resolution tool is worth to examine since it might enlighten the potential problems in utilizing it as a source for peace or it might depict whether "Is there a place for religion in conflict resolution?" in Turkey or not as Goldberg and Blancke (2011) strikingly asked.

'Religion' as a conflict resolution tool in Turkey was mostly framed from the perspective of the unifying role of Islamic brotherhood between diverse ethnicities which share same religion. This emphasis on 'Islamic brotherhood' caused the repercussions from the different segments of the society in Turkey since some of Kurdish people conceived it as a 'pretext' not to give the demands of Kurds. Therefore, since 'Islamic brotherhood' ideal could not play a positive role for contributing to peace, what other Islamic norms can be facilitated for peace in the resolution of Kurdish conflict was questioned in this thesis study. Besides; by considering the potential of religious actors' contribution to peace, how religious actors in Turkey can contribute to peace was also subjected to the examination. Furthermore, this research aimed to explore the effect of ideological stance on the understanding of religious actors in terms of peace. For this purpose, by assuming that the ideological stance of a religious actor could be an obstacle to the unification of

religious actors for peace, the interviews were conducted with ideologically differentiated group of participants. It comes out that there are certain religious norms which some of them commonly emphasized for achieving peace despite their different ideological stances.

In the next sections, a literature review on the role of religious norms and actors in conflict resolution (Chapter 2), the background of the Kurdish issue and the peace process (2013-2015) of Turkey (Chapter 3), the methodology (Chapter 4), the data analysis (Chapter 5), and concluding remarks (Chapter 6) will be presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature on how religious norms and actors can contribute to resolution of conflicts for societies in which ethnically divided, politically polarized but religiously homogenous parties conflict with each other. It starts with religion's position in such a conflictual society. Later, first by touching upon the possibilities concerning the negative role of religion, it elaborates and emphasizes more on religion's positive role as a peace tool for the resolution of conflicts. In line with its positive role, how religious actors and norms can be effective in achieving peace is discussed. Lastly, religion's relation with politics and with identity is examined.

2.1. Religious Norms and Actors in a Conflictual Society

Religious norms and actors will be exposed to some changes by a conflictual environment, which lead to certain opportunities and constraints for its peace potential (Harpviken& Røislien, 2008). If conflicting groups have different normative systems, their openness to dialogue will seriously be limited as a result of the conflict since "Even fairly open normative systems may be transformed into dogmatic ones when their fundamental values are challenged" (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 359). However, it can be also an advantage, for example, as in the case of Afghanistan, where certain "Islamic concepts such as jihad have lost much of their traditional significance, as people realize how this vocabulary has been misused by successive rulers. In contrast, if religious normative foundations are not used to legitimize violence, they may be tremendously important for formulating alternatives" (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 360). Furthermore, it is considered that an armed conflict leads to creation of boundaries between diverse

identities (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 360). In such conflicts, religiously affiliated groups might see members of outside groups who don't have the same understanding with them as potential enemies. However, it is argued that "If religious identities, on the other hand, do not coincide with the identities defining the conflict, religion is in an ideal position to cultivate contact between people who otherwise are under pressure to see each other as enemies" (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 360). Therefore, religion might be a potential tool for resolutions of conflicts either in the case that religious norms are misused or in the case that religion is not the factor which identifies a conflict. Since Turkey's Kurdish issue is not a religiously motivated conflict, it can be argued that the deployment of religious norms for the resolution of the issue might be useful. However, it is important to understand how religious actors perceive these norms and how these norms are deployed by those actors and authorities by taking into consideration the effect of the conflictual environment on the religious norms and actors in Turkey's case.

2.2. Religion's Role in Conflict Resolution

Religion is conceptualized from a sociological perspective "as a set of beliefs, symbols and practices oriented towards and demarcating the sacred" (Brewer et al. 2010: 1022). Sociological conceptualization allows world religions to describe what is sacred for them and such usage of the term "religion" includes all faiths in the world (Brewer et al. 2010: 1022).

Religion can be defined depending on a "substantive" approach in religious studies (Harpviken&Røislien 2008: 352-353) with its three aspects: "its normative aspect, its relationship to identity, and its organizational function" (Harpviken&Røislien 2008: 351). As a normative system, religion shapes people's lives by saying "how things should be" and it gives meaning to people by explaining "why things are the way they are" (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 353). With the "cognitive implications of religion" people choose to accept and internalize some norms and reject others which are different from those of their own society (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 353). Such norms religion has might be dogmatic or open in character and this varies between different religions and different branches of same religion as well. Concerning religion's relation to identity, it

is argued that an identity, when it is shaped by religion, might be remarkably firm since it has the power to determine “where you belong and where to proceed” (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 354).

Religion may be accepted as an instrument of “bonding social capital” which unites regressive religious and ethnic groups with feelings of solidarity, as Putnam (2000) argued, and such function of religion might spread negative precepts towards peace as “dark side of social capital” by Putzel (1997) which creates social bonds among those regressive groups (Putzel 1997, Putnam 2000, as cited in Brewer et al.2010: 1023-24). Hence, some argue that religious actors might be affective on anti-peace promotion (Brewer et al. 2010: 1024).

Potential dangers in utilizing religion for conflict resolution may be that researchers “overlook its violent possibilities” and “overemphasize religion’s role and not see it as a part of complex array” (Gopin 1997: 19). Furthermore, putting religion’s potential for peace forward does not mean that its violent tendencies perish (Gopin 1997: 20). Southern (2009: 88) warns about perceiving religion naively as a peace source might be misleading by depending on the arguments of psychologists of religion which claim religion has the potential of “paradoxical coexistence of religious egalitarian intentions with prejudiced attitudes” as Gordon Allport (1966: 447) argued that “there is something about religion that makes for prejudice, and something about it that unmakes prejudice,” which depicts religion’s dual nature in terms of being both a tool for resolutions of conflicts and a triggering factor for the emergence of conflicts at the same time.

Furthermore, religious identity may have a potential to create a division between people as us versus them, however, this might depend on inclusive or exclusive character of one’s religion (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 355). As an identity source, since religion attaches people certain identities, it might lead to emergence of conflicts. As it could be seen in the the post-Cold War era, the world witnessed such conflicts which have clashes rest on ethnic and religious identities (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 358). Being exclusive of a religious identity might prepare a ground for isolation of different identity groups from each other (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 358).

Under certain circumstances, religious values, leaders and organizations can be positively effective in conflict resolution field. This idea can be seen in the growing attention of academic literature and active groups to religious peace activities in the US and Europe.

How religion might play a role in such activities differs according to diverse opinions of scholars (Silvestri& Mayall, 2015). The scholars, who defend religion as a conflict resolution tool, commonly argue that religiously motivated peace actors should try to highlight values of religion regarding “reconciliation or peaceful coexistence” (Blancke& Goldberg 2011: 384). The literature has been growingly confirmed that for a permanent peace to happen, it is necessary to recognize “religio-cultural values” of the parties in the conflict (Abu-Nimer& Kadayifci-Orellana 2008: 549). First of all, since religion might be an inevitable aspect of some people’s identities and narratives related to nations, it may be unignorable in the case of resolving religious conflicts as well as nonreligious issues and recognizing their religious features may help to define the parties in a more precise way (Abu-Nimer& Kadayifci-Orellana 2008: 550, Sandal 2017: 8). Lederach (1997: 93, 153) considers culture and religion as useful sources of “conflict resolution mechanisms,” which are able to envision “change” and to promote “a holistic approach” for societies. Likewise, Johnston and Cox (2003, 15-18) argue that faith-based peace activities help creating “healthy relationships” with adversaries and supports healing process of the conflicting parties. Gopin (1997) envisions two important reasons in examining the role of religion for conflict resolution methodology. One of the reasons is that since holy texts include sources for peace which are affected by “prosocial values” in them, by exploring past experiences it is possible to distinguish on what kind of methods religion could be effective as a way of conflict resolution (Gopin 1997: 2). The other reason is that taking the centrality of religion on many people’s lives into consideration might lead to understand “motives for coexistence” (Gopin 1997: 2).

Religion is functional on people’s interpretation of reality as Gopin (1997: 2) argued. Thus, in a conflict situation which either might be religion-based or not, an intervention method should be aware of the “spiritual language of frustration and anger” of conflictual parties (Gopin 1997: 3). Which sacred motives are effective on people’s choice for peace is worth to examine to contribute to theoretical understanding of conflict resolution (Gopin 1997: 3). Gopin (1997: 4) puts forward that sacred texts might give motives to religious leaders in terms of advocating peace. Besides, it is necessary to recognize “human spirituality and how people can relate to the outside world without experiencing alienation,” since it can be said that “secular and materialist political views” fall short of responding the needs of people (Sandal 2017: 3).

Haynes (2009: 60) criticizes associating religion only with conflict by saying that such argumentation “oversimplifies causal interconnections between religion and conflict” by neglecting other significant variables, and at the same time it undervalues “attempts emerging from various religious traditions to help resolve conflicts and build peace.” When religions succeed in resolving conflicts, their role can be counted as a part of accomplishing “human development” (Haynes 2009: 60).

What difference does religion make for peace? Its difference can be originated from three qualities. It provides “theology or hermeneutics of peace,” it renders religious actors detached and trustworthy, and it can act as an ameliorative for “religious dimensions of violence” (Little 2007: 438-42).

Strengths of religion as a peace tool can be considered as most people’s belonging to a religion, its “mobilization power” and supportiveness for “reconciliation and forgiveness,” its possessing of certain “soft power sources to influence the peace process: reward power, expert power, legitimate power, referent (relationship) power, and informational power,” and its ability to “being in the field” (Alger 2002: 103). In the same vein, Haynes (2009: 61) explains affirmative contributions of faith-based peace activities as “(1) ‘emotional and spiritual support to war-affected communities’, (2) effective mobilization for ‘their communities and others for peace’, (3) mediation ‘between conflicting parties’, and (4) a conduit in pursuit of ‘reconciliation, dialogue, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration” (Haynes 2009: 61).

In order to respond to the conflicts of modern-day, four assumptions are identified from the literature regarding the role of Islam in “social and political changes” (Abu-Nimer& Kadayifci-Orellana 2008: 550). One of these assumptions is that the scholars need to “reexamine” scripts and related Islamic sources on the issues of “use of weaponry and violence.” Secondly, Muslim religious leaders might play a role to teach their constituencies nonviolent way of resistance. Another assumption is that as most scholars in this field agree, “nonviolence and conflict resolution are integral part of Islamic theologies, culture, and history” (Abu-Nimer& Kadayifci-Orellana 2008: 550). Last assumption is that potential changes towards Muslim communities must come from within their culture, not from outside and external actors.

2.3. Role of Religious Actors in Conflict Resolution

Religious actors have begun to be perceived as “a critical constituency to be mobilized for peace” (Alger 2002: 98). It is possible to see that religious actors work mostly in places where “most horrific conflicts” happen (Alger 2002: 98). It can be argued that religious actors and communities “are ‘capable of’ rather than ‘committed to’ promoting tolerance toward outsiders, including the religious or ethnic ‘other’” (Appleby 2000: 281). In the post-Cold War context with the growing interaction among cultures, “religious leadership” is exposed to certain transformations which increasingly stand by non-violence and protection of human rights (Appleby 2000: 281).

Certain scholars consider that religious actors have some advantages in their activities such as “authority, trust, professionalism and also cultural and practical/experiential closeness to the people involved” (Silvestri& Mayall 2015: 34-35). As opposed to secular actors, religious organizations provide inexpensive staff and since their volunteers have strong commitment to peace activities, their work can be faster (Silvestri& Mayall 2015: 35). Contributions of religious actors in creating trustable relationships between conflicting groups are regarded as positive even if the case does not have a religious dimension (Aroua 2010, Silvestri& Mayall 2015: 35). However, it is important to note that whether their contribution might be positive or not might depend on the specific characteristics of the case and of the religious actors.

The factors which determine preferences of religious leaders regarding certain religious interpretations are constituted by their “experiences, spiritual-moral formation and educational background, and the character and internal dynamics of his religious community and, on the other, by the constraints and opportunities presented by the external conditions of the society in which he or she lives” (Appleby 2000: 283). Besides, there are decisive elements such as “the presence or absence of armed conflict in the region, state policies toward religion and religious or ethnic minorities, religious participation in the political economy, the strength of voluntary associations, the availability and quality of general as well as religious education, social mobility, migration and the status of refugees, and the like” (Appleby 2000: 283). Therefore, it is necessary to consider perceptions of religious actors towards peace by looking at how they are affected by their own qualifications as well as the external conditions around

them. For instance, “established religions, tied to the state and linked to the majority population's sense of nationalism” are less likely to oppose “the regime or to exclusive forms of ethno-nationalism” (Brewer et al. 2010: 1030). On the contrary, minority status might be an advantage for some cases, even though it might be disadvantaged position for religious actors in terms of accessing resources. The reason why their position is advantageous is that “they have less to lose and most to gain from involvement with peacemaking” (Brewer et al. 2010: 1030). It is argued that minorities are capable to challenge established understanding of the conflict intellectually and they have a strong tendency to empathize the feelings of groups which are exposed to violence by dominant group (Brewer et al. 2010: 1031). However, these minority groups are restricted in their activities in market and political spaces except those who are supported by international networks of their own. On the other hand, actors of majority groups can be effective on peace processes in terms of their ability to enter political spaces and have more access to resources.

The degree of autonomy of religious actors from government control is another important factor in determining their potential contribution for peace since most effective peace works of religious actors occur when they have enough degree of autonomy from the control of government (Appleby 2000: 306).

Religious actors have a social role by holding certain “political, ideological, ethnic affinities” toward the conflict and this is also an important factor, which cannot be ignored, “that affected their perspectives, credibility with other parties, and overall effectiveness” (Appleby 2000: 222). According to Appleby (2000), contributions of religious actors to peace occur in three ways: First, their potential to act as a “*social critic*” allows them to call government officials and other authorities to “account for unjust and abusive policies” (Alger 2002: 99). When there is a contradiction between an oppressive regime and its people who are searching for freedoms, it is highly possible that violence can occur. However, existence of non-violent figures can be effective on ceasing violence from escalation (Appleby 2000: 214). Second, they are able to pursue good offices and act as mediators among conflicting parties. Thanks to “their reputation for integrity and their long-term commitment to society,” they can be effective contributors for peace (Alger 2002: 99). Furthermore, since ‘leader’ figure has very important place in many societies and people are easily affected by the choice of those leaders, religious leaders’

peaceful stand can be highly impressive on people's attitude towards violence (Gopin, 1997).

2.4. Religious Norms in Conflict Resolution

As Gopin (2000: 10) expresses it, "World religions have a reservoir of pro-social values of profound subtlety and effectiveness that, if utilized well, could form the basis of an alternative to violence in coping with conflict or coping with devastating injury." Similarly, Reychler (1997: 37), as one of the scholars who defend religion's potential for peace, emphasizes "an untapped and under-used integrative power potential" of religions. Creating "a culture of civic tolerance in societies weakened by long-standing ethnic, religious or political strife" requires "a process of evoking from within local religious traditions the conceptual and theological-ethical resources relevant to the culture-specific task of fostering peaceable relationships within and across divided communities" (Appleby 2000: 243-44).

Certain scholars consider religious ethics as a potential source for peace activities (Appleby 2000, Thomas 2005, Sandal 2017). All faiths have values which can be utilized as important reservoirs for contribution to peace. Gopin (2000) claims that monotheistic religions can be remedies for conflict resolution since they carry potential power for peace. He criticizes culturally and religiously ignorant approach of conflict resolution and sees a need to scrutinize religious sources in terms of peace and conflict (Gopin 2000).

However, it is significant to emphasize that religious values might be interpreted in different ways by diverse religious actors. As opposed to the utilization of the concept of social justice by Al Qaeda to show their attacks legitimate, Abu Nimer (2003) asserts that social justice might be useful to struggle with structural violence, thus it can be part of a conflict resolution process. Sachedina (2000: 20) and Said et. al (2001) respectively highlight the value of "cultural and religious pluralism" and "justice, harmony and absence of war" in Islam. Besides, it is argued that religious actors contribute to the formation of peaceful discourses against violence (Silvestri&Mayall 2015: 35). As another useful aspect of religious norms, Gopin (1997: 8) argues that some theories

emphasize the significance of “personal transformation for the resolution of deep conflicts.” Gopin (1997: 8) explains that “For example, a unilateral gesture of forgiveness is encouraged in many traditions, and much has been written over the centuries on this one self-evident but extremely complex gesture. A related but very different value is the requirement to confess to past wrongs, repent and apologize to the victim.” At this point, religion’s spiritual values such as forgiveness and repentance may be advantageous in achieving such personal transformation.

Sachedina (2009) puts forward “functional secularity” in the Islamic tradition, which allows people live together in a public space with certain rights such as freedom of religion and women’s rights regardless of their religion and this might be adopted by Muslims according to his assertion. Suggestion of Sachedina (2009) is that by altering “secularist, universalistic” base of universal human rights it is possible to include religious dimension which embraces both religious and non-religious members of societies (as cited in Little 2010: 304). Such aspect of religion enables people to recognize “rights for all” regardless of ethnicity, religion or ideology. In the same vein, regarding the debate on Islamic “rights talk,” Abdolkarim Soroush is an advocate of human rights and he argues that “religiously imposed ideology is a distortion of religious values” (Appleby 2000: 261). Islam is regarded “as a religion is unchanging and eternal,” however “religious knowledge (ma’rifat-i dini) —a branch of human knowledge-- is always in flux, conditioned by history and adaptive to the scientific understanding of the time” according to Soroush (as cited in Appleby 2000: 261). Therefore, Soroush argues that Islam might be seen as compatible with democracy. Since in democratic Muslim societies, the rights cannot be only limited to religious rights, the main role of a government should be to protect “the rights of man” and “sanctity of religion” (Appleby 2000: 261). However, the most important part is that by fulfilling this duty governments must not depend on certain religious ideology, rather they must prioritize human rights that belongs to Muslims as well as non-Muslims (Appleby 2000: 261).

The *internal pluralism* of religions leads religious actors to selectively formulate “theologies and moral precepts that accommodate universal human rights norms and enhance the building of local cultures of peace” (Appleby 2000: 276-77). Appleby (2000: 276-77) emphasizes that internal pluralism within religions is a crucial factor for religions’ peace understanding. The function of “internal pluralism” is defined by Appleby (2000: 31) as such: “the internal pluralism of any religious tradition—the

multiplicity of its teachings, images of the divine, moral injunctions, and so on—bestows on the religious leader the power of choice.” Such feature of religions allows religious actors to utilize the religious norms which might be useful to contribute to achieving peace.

In order to realize this contribution, there is a necessity to transform “first-order religious language—discourse, inherently exclusivist, that draws on the primary communal symbols, doctrines, religio-national myths, and particularistic historical understanding of the religious group” to “second-order rights-and-obligations language” which recognizes comprehensive human rights discourse by “a fluent translator who can comprehend the sensibilities of the believers while weighing their conduct against universal norms” in order to become powerful tool for religious actors (Appleby 2000: 280). Likewise, determining “inclusive public theologies which focus on possibilities of cooperation and agreement, recognizing that different faith groups can come together for a common purpose and that differences can be resolved or tolerated” can support peace promotion (Sandal 2017: 8). This effort to emphasize “constructive dimensions of normative religious values” can be effective on creating a common ground for “moral relationships between parties in conflict” (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 362).

The most fundamental source of Muslims, which is Qur’an, commands them to “resolve their conflicts peacefully” (Abu-Nimer& Kadayifci&Orellana 2008: 560). To ground this claim, it is put forward such verses as the Quranic verse 49: 9, which reads: “If two parties among the believers fall into a fight, [...] make peace between them with justice, and be fair, for Allah loves those who are fair (and just)” (Abu-Nimer& Kadayifci&Orellana 2008: 579). According to Qur’an, peace is associated with a lot of concepts and these are “the fundamental unity of all humankind and all life (Tawhid), compassion and mercy (Rahmah and Rahim), the original constitution of human beings, which is deemed good and innocent (Fitrah), justice (Adl), forgiveness (Afu), social responsibility and vicegerency (Khilafah), the pursuit of love, kindness, benevolence, wisdom, and knowledge, service, social empowerment ,universality, and the dignity of human life, the sacredness of human life, equality, the quest for peace and harmony, creativity and innovation, individual responsibility and accountability, patience, collaboration, and solidarity, inclusion and participation, and diversity and unity, among others” (Abu-Nimer& Kadayifci&Orellana 2008: 560). By looking at these values, it is possible to conclude that Qur’an orders Muslims to live in a peaceful way within themselves and

with non-Muslims, too (Abu-Nimer& Kadayifci&Orellana 2008: 560). Regarding living peacefully with non-Muslims, Abu-Nimer (2000-2001: 221) touches upon the “Current Studies of Peace and Nonviolence in Islam,” namely “(1) studies of war and jihad, (2) studies of war and peace, (3) studies of nonviolence and peacebuilding” and he (2000-2001: 227) argues that:

“Scholars and writers in ‘nonviolence’ studies groups have acknowledged the existence and legitimacy of limited violence in Islamic scripture. Nevertheless, they view and emphasize the great potential for nonviolence as a philosophy in Islam. They identify values and principles that make such a claim possible, such as: Islam's basic belief in the unity of humankind, the supreme love of the Creator, the obligation of mercy, and Muslims' duty of subjection of their passions and accountability for all actions.”

This shows that the scholars, who put the approach of non-violence and peacebuilding in Islam to the center, choose to prioritize the culture of living together with non-Muslims, too. Necessary sources of conflict resolution depend on Prophet Muhammad’s sayings, hadith, and his and his Four Caliphs’ practices (Rehman 2011: 61-62). “Justice and equity” are other two important elements in conflict resolution processes (Rehman 2011: 62). One example from the verses is that “those who wrong their fellows are ideally brought into concordance so peace could be made between the wrongdoer and the wronged” (Rehman 2011: 62). Original verse is as follows: “And if two factions among the believers should fight, then make settlement between the two. But if one of them oppresses the other, then fight against the one that oppresses until it returns to the ordinance of Allah. And if it returns, then make settlement between them in justice and act justly. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly” (Qur'an, 49: 9) (The Noble Quran n.d.). By the same token, “peace is the rule and war is the exception.” (Rehman 2011: 64), is taken by Sayyid Qutb, Islam and Universal Peace, explains that war is conditionally allowed in Islam. It should be mainly defensive and can be waged “against oppressors, despots and those who violate principles of religious freedom and injustice” (Rehman 2011: 64). “Race, exploitation or pomp and show” cannot be the reason of war (Rehman 2011: 64). It is possible to conclude that war is seemed irrelevant with Islamic values when one investigates Qur’an and “the political practice of Muhammad” in a detailed way (Rehman 2011: 304). Qur’anic precepts command the Prophet to act in a friendly manner towards those who oppose him and in “the Makki period,” this non-violent response was a method to affect “social changes” (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 305). These

mainly reflect the understanding of Islam toward conflicts. While it predominantly favors those who are oppressed, it categorically rejects unjust treatments.

As a solution to clashes derived from differences, Islam draws attention that the essence of achieving peace is “relationship” among people and differences of any kind must lead to build relationships among people not to distance one group itself from other group of people (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 318).

Islamic law’s regulation on the use of force and its treatment of rebels after the conflict ends can also illustrate Islamic perception regarding conflictual situations among people and their state. The law mandates that in the case of a group of Muslims’ choice of resort to armed rebellion or to splinter from the authority of the state, sending a group of representatives to rebellions in order to “listen their complaints or demands” is an obligation of the head of a state. These complaints could include unjust treatments by the state towards them or their opposition to government’s certain policies (Al- Dawoody 2015: 283). If the rebels continue to use force even after their grievances are resolved, the solution should keep those rebels advised of “dangerous consequences of their resort to the use of force” (Al- Dawoody 2015: 284). In the case of inefficiency of this way, another recommendation is calling rebels for public debate and leaving the judgment to the public (Al- Dawoody 2015: 284). The author states that “if all the above steps of resolving the conflict peacefully through discussions and negotiations and the democratic method of returning to the people fail, then the state has no right to use force except after the rebels/secessionists initiate it, according to the majority of the Muslim jurists” (Al- Dawoody 2015: 284). This approach of Islam to conflicts can exemplify its preponderant choice for peaceful ways and religious actors’ promotion of such approach can enhance probabilities for achieving peace. Nevertheless, in a real conflictual situation before utilizing religious sources, it is necessary to act in an inductive way by analyzing the conflict and learning the needs of parties, which is a more proper way of conflict resolution methodology (Gopin 1997: 14).

2.5. Peace Concept in Islam

Perception of peace by religious actors might be varied depending on the social and political conditions of the society in which they live and other identities the religious actors possess. There are two types of peace according to Johan Galtung (1969): positive and negative peace. While the former requires “the achievement of fairness, justice and social redistribution,” the latter only refers to “absence of violence” (Brewer et al. 2010: 1022). About conceptualizing “peace,” Islam carries a huge quality on its own name which derives from salam/silm (peace) (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci&Orellana 2008: 560). One of the Islamic peace understanding is that “a positive state of safety or security that includes being at peace with oneself, with fellow human beings, nature, and God” (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci&Orellana 2008: 560). Some other concepts concerning peace in Islam are “justice, human development, wholeness, salvation, perfection, and harmony” (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci&Orellana 2008: 560). Positive peace is associated with “justice,” which means in Arabic “straight” and “equitable,” that locates in a very important place for realizing positive peace in Islam (Kalın 2005: 333). Since another meaning of justice refers to being safe from all potential dangers, peace can take place when justice exists (Kalın 2005: 333). Thus, it is important to note that the literature on Islamic understanding of peace predominantly emphasizes “justice” as *sine qua non* for peace.

There are certain Islamic approaches to peace which “include (peace through) political power (siyāsāt al-quwwah), the power of law and institutions (islāh and tajdid), the power of communication (sulh), the power of human spirit (lā'unf), and the power of love (tasawwuf)” (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 305). Majid Khadduri (1909-2007) and Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406 CE) propose “political power approach” which defends the necessity of state’s legitimacy and authority over people to guarantee protecting “social order” (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 305). However, since this approach leads to “negative peace,” it lacks an approach in creating “positive peace” for conflicts (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 306). “The Islāh and Tajdid approach” focuses on “ethical and spiritual teachings of the Qur’an and the Hadith” which requires a social order with a lack of “direct violence” as well as existence of certain values such as “justice, equality, human dignity, fairness, equilibrium, cultural coexistence, stability, and ecological stability” (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 306). “The power of communication approach” depends on methods from the Arab culture, which are later accepted by Qur’an and these include “sulh, mediation (*wast*) and arbitration (*tahkim*)” (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 307). These methods aim to realize “a restorative conception for

losses, care to issues of social esteem, rejection of vengeance for the sake of the whole, and forgiveness” (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 307). “The power of love” approach mainly defends nonviolence which is not passivity but actively supporting nonviolence and criticizing violent actions (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 307). “Just ends with just means” idea is the key concept for sustainable peace in this approach (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 307). “The power of human spirit” and this approach to peace highlight the need for a transformation in humans’ hearts and minds to achieve inner peace and this achievement views peace as a requirement for harmony of all people (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 307). It might be argued that while the religious actors, who are close to the government, might be likely to prefer prioritizing “protection of social order” at any price, those who are exposed to unequal and violent treatments may tend to emphasize “peace through the power of law and institutions, the power of communication, the power of human spirit, and the power of love” (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 305).

These approaches depict multiplicity of peace understanding in Islamic tradition. Which one of them is embraced by religious actors is crucial because their guidance of people concerning peace will be driven by their perception of peace.

2.6. How Can Religious Actors Contribute to Peace Processes?

Religious actors might engage in “political spaces in peace processes” as they manage mobilization against violent measures of governments and rebels and ask for “peace accords” by initiating negotiation attempts between conflicting parties. This aspect of religious actors points out the positive sides of religious engagement in political spaces due to its peace potential for resolving political conflicts. For some cases, it might be necessary to keep secret their engagement in political space because of a possibility of state repression towards some religious actors as in the case of “apartheid South Africa and Northern Ireland” (Brewer et al. 2010: 1029). Besides, even in the examples of nonreligious conflicts in Colombia, Uganda, and El Salvador, religious actors’ role was effective in a constructive way thanks to “their knowledge of local customs and expertise in theological approaches to conflict” (Sandal 2017: 9).

Religious actors might have an impact on shaping their followers' attitude toward certain events since they are makers of a social capital which links people (Sandal 2017: 151). Therefore, their possible effect cannot be ignored. As functions of religious actors in conflict environments, Appleby (2000: 212) determines three types of religious actors' participation to conflict resolution: "crisis mobilization, saturation, and interventionist." While crisis mobilization is a type which emerges at the times of crisis and in this type, "religious participation in conflict resolution is spontaneous and primarily unanticipated, emerging out of existing active involvement," saturation is seen as the closest type to a comprehensive peace activity since it encompasses many aspects of managing a conflict such as initiating dialogues with other denominations and supporting "social, economic, and educational initiatives" to create useful ground for cooperation (Alger 2002: 100). Although saturation is accepted as promising, it necessitates strong democratic culture. Hence, it rarely happens. Interventionist mode, thus, is seen as most suitable one by Appleby (2000) in which parties call for an external religious mediator, which can work collaboratively with local religious actors.

Peace activities of religious actors are classified by scholars such as Reyhler (1997) and Appleby (2000) as respectively "*traditional diplomatic efforts* (such as Papal Mediation)/ *track II peacemaking* (NGOs' efforts)/ *field diplomacy* (non-governmental teams' efforts) and "preventive diplomacy, education and training, election monitoring, conflict mediation, nonviolent protest, advocacy for structural reform, withdrawing or providing moral legitimacy" (Appleby 2000: 211). Among these, Track Two diplomacy is frequently offered for a peace design by religious actors thanks to its high degree of informality because such informal design is comprised of those who might have "less of a stake in the conflict and its outcome and may be better positioned to discuss innovative solutions" by keeping deeply intermingled position of religions with "sociocultural and identity-related" issues in mind (Harpviken & Røislien 2008: 361).

There are certain resources of religious actors, which can be utilized for peace, such as "moral legitimacy, neutrality, ability to advance other's political standing, and ability to reach the world (public opinion)" (Reyhler 1997: 30; Alger 2002: 106). According to Weingardt (2008), some features of "religious-based actors" can be considered as resources for a successful peace promotion such as "professional expertise, or conflict-specific knowledge," "credibility, or perception of the actors as neutral and fair by the parties in conflict," and "closeness to the conflict, namely emotional, personal, and/or

human proximity of the actors to the conflict parties and/or the conflict” (as cited in Silvestri& Mayall 2015: 37-38). Weingardt (2008) explains the reasons of religious actors’ having “credit of trust” as easy justification of peace promotion in religious thinking, deep understanding of them concerning origins of conflict and their tendency to prefer overall interest rather than their personal interests (as cited in Silvestri& Mayall 2015: 38). It is pointed out that profound respect for religion (religious people and places are seen as holy) allows its utilization in peace processes (Silvestri& Mayall 2015: 38). Johnston (2005) regards faith-based peace activities as crucial since those activities approach people’s issues to solve them in their own indigenous ways.

In order to illustrate the significance of religious-based efforts for peace, the comparison between Yugoslavia and Poland in terms of the results of religious nationalism is worth to consider since it renders to observe the gap filled by the contribution of religious actors in times of crisis. Both countries’ nationalists make use of religious norms to divide people by otherizing “former countrymen.” However, while in Former Yugoslavia this resulted in violence and “civic intolerance,” in Poland, although communist members of the society were seen as “traitors,” victory of the religiously inspired nationalists ended up with “democratic elections” and nonviolent transition of power. This difference is derived from the efforts of religious actors in Poland to turn “mass religious rituals and local programs of religious education and spiritual formation to the service of nonviolent labor actions and other forms of political protest” (Appleby 2000: 231). On the other hand, in the Yugoslavia case, “ultranationalists exploited a religiously illiterate populace and religious institutions weakened by Josip Broz Tito’s program of forced secularization” (Appleby 2000: 231). This example can depict the powerful nature of religious peace initiatives in turning antagonistic rhetoric of politicians on ethnic divisions to cooperative actions for peace.

Investigating the characteristics of Muslim peace-building actors also reveals intertwined feature of religion with ethnicity in the societies of Africa and Balkans as well (Abu Nimer& Kadayifci 2008: 562). It is clarified that although the conflicts in these areas are not derived from religion itself, religious values are utilized to blame and humiliate other parties of the conflict. Hence, Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci (2008) see the solution again in the same field of the religion. In addition, the respectable position of Muslim actors in religious societies is highlighted contrary to secular organizations (Abu Nimer& Kadayifci-Orellana 2008: 562). It might be argued that Muslim religious organizations

might be more reliable and effective in resolving conflicts of societies which give much value to religion.

Abu-Nimer & Kadayifci-Orellana (2008: 569-572) classify the contribution of Muslim peace actors as “altering behavior, attitudes, negative stereotypes, and mind frames, and rehumanizing the other,” healing of trauma and injuries, contributing to more effective dissemination of ideas such as democracy, human rights, justice, development, and peacemaking, their ability to draft committed people from a wide pool because of their broad community base, challenging traditional structures, mediating between conflicting parties, encouraging reconciliation, interfaith dialogue, disarmament, demilitarization, and reintegration, reaching out to the government, affecting policy changes, and reaching out to youth, connecting with Muslim communities and non-Muslim leaders for support and to convene large meetings.”

Muslim actors’ role in achieving peace is exemplified by their attempts to persuade the conflicting parties “to meet or even sign agreements” in which the conflict might be between the government and rebels, and by their efforts for “restoration of a democratically elected government, disarmament, demobilization, and now reintegration of ex-combatants, and the setting up of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court” (Abu Nimer & Kadayifci-Orellana 2008: 571-72). Thus, it can be concluded that activities for peace implemented by religious actors can be very diverse.

2.7. Religion and its Relationship with Politics

Relationship of religion and religious actors with politics has always been problematic and complicated. Religion is linked with extremism either through involvement of religious groups into politics or by utilization of religion via secular groups to obtain certain political goals (Brewer et al. 2010: 1020). According to social movement theory, religion is accepted as a “sentiment pool” that leads “governments, ethno-religious groups, and warlords to believe God is on their side in war” (Brewer et al. 2010: 1020). First of all, regarding the relation of religious actors with “party politics,” Sandal (2017: 153) argues that those actors should abstain from “party politics” to preserve their

potential for peace since it might harm their “credibility” and turn them to “office holders” with certain interests for themselves. Besides their relations with party politics, they may be obliged to associate themselves with the state politics as it can be seen in certain examples regarding the compliance of churches, which are representatives of “the faith of the dominant class or ethno-national group and constitute a majority or national church,” to their states due to the fear of oppression from their state (Brewer et al. 2010: 1020).

Politics might come into the play for instance, in a possible mediation scenario when conflicting parties and a broker share a common religious identity. For such case, “the form and the structure of religion” is indicative for the result of the mediation. Since religion is a shared aspect of the parties, other issues, which “follow internal fault lines, such as colliding understandings of the normative system or organizational authority” might surpass the religious framework (Harpviken & Røislien 2008: 368-369). For instance, attempts to find a common ground for the Taliban and the so-called the Northern Alliance were built on “their common religious tradition, which is Sunni Islam” as a tool for conflict resolution since these two groups view themselves different from each other in terms of their political ideology and with regard to ethnicity. The Taliban’s deep-seated structure in the religious networks prevent it to discern religious leaders from Taliban policy, whereas the ulama within Northern Alliance did not have “similar power positions” (Harpviken, 1997). Thus, “eventually, the brokering potential of the commission was compromised by the differing degrees to which religious actors held political power within the two parties” (Harpviken & Røislien 2008: 369). From this example, it is possible to see that ethnically and politically heterogeneous, but religiously homogenous groups could have certain problems in utilizing religion as a peace tool. Therefore, it can be argued that there is a need for liberalizing religious actors from its deeply associated ties with ethnicity and politics.

In relation to the individual aspect of religion, religious identity might be influenced by political ideology in an individual level (Harpviken & Røislien 2008: 363). If religious identity becomes politicized and overlap with other identities, imagining peace between conflicting parties would be harder since “the exclusionary process of ‘othering’ may find fertile soil” (Harpviken & Røislien 2008: 363). Therefore, Harpviken & Røislien (2008) draws attention to the importance of being aware of identity aspect of the conflict since this eventually affects the course of relations between conflicting parties. In the example

of Albania, although there is a high political tension in the country and there are wide range of religions, thanks to the awareness of religious and secular actors of religious differences, conflict rarely happens (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 364). Thus, it can be argued that the reason why conflict happens cannot be explained by existence of ethnic, political or religious differences, but it might depend on a failure in managing those diversities.

2.8. Religion and Identity Puzzle

Sociocultural and political factors might be decisive in determining order of priority in terms of identity a person has. To illustrate, while Hamas' Muslim members mostly identify themselves with "Palestinian" identity, Sri Lanka's Muslim Tamils mostly emphasize being "Muslim" as their primary identity. Whereas the former's choice of identity is functional on their unity with Christian Palestinians, the latter's choice leads a separation between them and other Tamils (Harpviken& Røislien 2008: 355). Thus, which identity people feel belonging differs in accordance with the conditions of the society in which they live.

According to *distance* and *belonging* conceptualization of Volf (1996), who defends that if one finds a balanced position between distancing from her/his culture and belonging to it, that balanced stance renders that member of a society properly aware of pros and cons of her/his culture. Furthermore, such balance enables people to consider that "religion must be de-ethnicized so that ethnicity can be de-sacralize" (Volf 1996: 49). This does not mean the total dismissal of ethnic identity but refers to the abolishment of superiority claims of one ethnoreligious composition over others.

In Premdas' work (1994) "on the role of churches in ethnic conflicts in the Third World," by looking at the churches' responses to "ethnic hostility," he concludes that "during conflict clergy can become trapped within the claims of their own ethnic or cultural community" (Premdas 1994, as cited in Southern 2009: 84-85). Thus, ethnic claims might undermine conciliative power of religion itself (Southern 2009: 84). However, as a response to destructive aspect of ethnic claims, it is possible to pursue non-conflictual relations according to the scholars, who differentiate two concepts as "healthy allegiance"

and “tribal allegiance” in terms of relations in a society which has different ethnic compositions. (Southern 2009: 85). They explain that while the former leads religious leaders to accept and respect the existence of “the Other,” the latter only emphasizes the importance of their own groups and ignores “problems and needs” of the Other (Southern 2009: 85). The reason of such “tribal allegiance” might be clarified by Donald Horowitz’s arguments, which state that “in deeply divided societies, strong ethnic allegiances permeate organisations, activities, and roles to which they are formally unrelated. The permeative character of ethnic affiliations, by infusing so many sectors of social life, inputs a pervasive quality to ethnic conflict and raises sharply the stakes of ethnic politics” (Horowitz 1985: 7-8). Nevertheless, this pervasive character of ethnic conflicts can be framed in a different way by utilizing religious sources. For example, the verse 13 of chapter 49 of the Qur’an states that: “We [God] have created you [human beings] into [different] peoples and tribes so that you may [all] get to know [understand and cooperate with] each other, the most honorable among you in the sight of God are the pious [righteous] ones.” These verses prove that despite of differences “(ethnic, religious, or otherwise),” there must be an “understanding and cooperation among various peoples” and morality of a person can be determined by her/his conduct “rather than by his or her membership in a particular ethnic or religious group” (Appleby 2000: 258).

To conclude, embracing ethnic identity does not necessarily lead to the exclusionary attitudes. It is important to recognize the existence of the ethnic diversity in the Islamic tradition as well. Thus, the religious actors, who are able to differentiate ‘embracing their ethnic identity’ from ‘glorifying it’, might be potential contributors for resolutions of conflicts.

3. BACKGROUND OF THE KURDISH ISSUE AND THE PEACE PROCESS (2013-2015) OF TURKEY

This chapter will present the short historical background of the Kurdish issue and the Peace Process (2013-2015) in Turkey. Although the peace process started in the summer of 2011, it has mostly been socialized in the second part of the process (2013-2015). After introducing the key events of the issue, the chapter will mostly focus on the role of the religion (Islam) in this period. By explaining certain debates and developments, the chapter will cover how Islamic discourses and initiatives were utilized by different actors.

3.1. The Emergence and the Escalation of the Kurdish Issue

By looking at the nation-building process of Turkey, it is possible to argue that the Republic's formula was not compatible with the multiethnic composition of the country. Kurdish population's situation under the Republic was unfortunate due to the "continuous oppression, inequality, and denial of basic human rights" (Gunter, 1988; Yeğen 1999; Loizides, 2010; Glöpker-Kesebir and Somer, 2015; Merdjanova 2018: 143). After the politically pluralist conditions of the 1960s, which were the outcomes of the 1961 Constitution as a guarantor of such pluralism and freedom of thought, the struggles of Kurds started via the effect of "the regional anticolonial movements, on the one hand, and of the growing Turkish leftist movements, on the other hand" (Merdjanova, 2018: 143). The Turkish Worker's Party was the starting point for many Kurdish leftist activists' political careers. Afterward in 1978, with the purpose of having a free Kurdish state, Kurdistan Workers' Party was established by Abdullah Öcalan and his fellows. The Kurdish movement (KM) has both an armed wing known as the PKK and has civic

organizations as political parties and cultural organizations. Its separatist tendency changed in the 1990s to a new goal of democratic autonomy within Turkey.

In the early 1990s, the first negotiation attempt with the PKK was initiated by the Turkish government (Hakyemez 2017: 3). With the persuasion of Öcalan by Turgut Özal for announcing “a unilateral cease-fire,” Özal undertook an important attempt in 1992 (Hakyemez 2017: 3). However, the death of Özal in 1993 turned a potential negotiation to “the dirty war,” which was conducted by paramilitary forces within the Turkish Army, the village guards, and the members of the “Special Teams” in the region of mostly Kurdish citizens live (Bozarslan, 2001). When the National Security Council decided on guaranteeing the exemption from the prosecution of the PKK militants who were not involved in killings, the interruption of 1993 cease-fire was resulted from those militants’ attack on thirty-three unarmed soldiers (Bozarslan, 2001, Çiçek 2018).

The capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan by Turkey in 1999 was taken as an immense triumph in the country, along with the development of Öcalan’s “decision to suspend the separatist war” (Marcus 2007: 75). However, on the contrary to the expectations of people, which saw the capture of Öcalan as the end of the problem, the PKK, as an active agent of mobilization for the armed struggle for a certain amount of time, had neither dissolved nor lost its influence overall (Marcus 2007: 75). With the delays to deal with the Kurds’ demands, the Kurdish issue continued to survive.

3.2. EU Process (1999- 2009)

The EU’s initial tool to call Turkey and the candidate states for amelioration of the issues, which it paid attention to such as “human rights abuses, the cultural rights of minorities and the removal of the state of emergency in eastern and southeastern Anatolia” was the Copenhagen Criteria (Çelik and Rumelili, 2006). Other than these criteria, the EU had certain leverages on Turkey to push it for the expected reformations on the country’s structural problems. As an example, before the 1995 EU-Turkey Customs Union Agreement (CUA), there were particular demands from the European Parliament to be implemented by Turkey. These were “to progress toward solving its Kurdish problem,

along with such other issues such as changing the 1982 constitution, and Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law, as well as improving the situation of the MPs from the pro-Kurdish Democracy Party (DEP), and human rights practices” (Çelik and Rumelili, 2006:209). Although Turkey undertook certain changes in the articles of the constitution, it left the situation of the MPs untouched. Lack of the implementation of the European Parliament’s demands by Turkey led to the conditional ratification of the CUA, which meant that the financial support could be suspended in a situation of human rights’ violation (Çelik and Rumelili, 2006). In fact, since only the candidate states are subject to the Copenhagen Criteria, the pressures made by the EU regarding “minority rights, torture, the role of the military in politics, and the Cyprus issue” became more effective after the acceptance of Turkey’s candidacy at the Helsinki Summit in 1999 (Çelik and Rumelili, 2006).

Hence after 1999, Turkey’s motivation to join the European Union (EU) was seen a driving factor both for the Kurdish issue and Turkey’s democratization process. Important reforms of the period of 2002-2004 were interpreted as the markers of attempts for the EU accession. However certain changes in the EU institutions and the global developments steered the Kurdish struggle to the domestic area. One of these changes was “the sudden expansion of the Council of Europe” with the joining of formerly communist Central and Eastern European countries, which increased the amount of the court cases. Besides, “the post-September 11th global legal and political order” decreased the European support for an armed struggle as of the PKK, the Kurdish movement and the Turkish government had to settle the issue on their own (Kurban 2013: 3). To this end, in 2009 the Turkish government initiated “the democratic opening” to alter “the basic institutional structure of the post-1980 regime through enlarging the understanding of citizenship which would lead to re-defining political community, strengthening association and grassroots participation, and engaging in a relative decentralization of the state with local levels of government carefully integrated to the national centre” (Ulusoy, 2010:83-84).

3.3. Negotiations between 2009-2011 and 2011- 2013

The initiation of ‘democratic opening’ was considered as a crucial step towards presenting Kurds their long-denied demands such as “greater cultural rights for Kurds (excluding teaching in Kurdish), some form of local autonomy, and incentives to demobilize and reintegrate the PKK fighters into society” (Çelik 2015: 56). However, the outcome, which merely facilitated “a Kurdish channel in the state-owned TV broadcasting network, changes in laws dealing with rehabilitating minors involved in ‘terrorist acts’ and allowing the use of Kurdish in prisons,” fell short of the mark since these steps constituted only some parts of the expectations of Kurds (Çelik 2015: 56).

The talks, were started between the representatives of the Turkish government and the PKK in Oslo in 2009, came to an end with the leak of an audio recording in 2011, creating displeasure among the society since the majority of the people were against the idea of the state’s negotiating with the ‘terrorists.’ Besides the killing of 13 Turkish soldiers by the PKK and the declaration of “democratic autonomy within Turkey’s territorial integrity” by the Democratic Society Congress (*Demokratik Toplum Kongresi* - DTK) were the other outstanding incidents which seemingly brought to an end to the talks of PKK and the state (Çelik 2015: 58).

These were not the only reasons that interrupted the talks. The design of the talks by the government was planned to include “several civil society and political actors dealing with the Kurdish issue,” however the sole actor of the project became the government itself in time (Çelik, 2015: 58). Another failure took place in bringing opposition parties, which are CHP (Republican People’s Party) and MHP (Nationalist Action Party), together for a dialogue by the government and the refusal of it to contact with the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) on the ground that it didn’t regard the PKK a terrorist organization, blurred the Kurdish Opening’s trajectory. One breaking point was the “Habur Border Crossing” of the 34 PKK members, called as ‘peace group’ by Kurds, in October 2009. Their favorable reception by a great number of Kurds resulted in a backlash by the Turkish public alongside with “the quick release of the PKK members by the Turkish courts” (Çelik, 2015: 59). Thus, the discontent among the public led the government to take a different step by sentencing 17 of these PKK members to prison.

Another crisis regarding the Oslo process was that an attack by the PKK resulted in killings of seven soldiers in Reşadiye, Tokat in 2009 (Yeğen, 2015: 7). On the other hand, the concern of the government regarding losing the credibility in the eyes of the Turkish

nationalists resulted in “the closure of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party and the arrest of many Kurdish politicians later on” (Çelik, 2015: 58-59).

While these reciprocal attacks were happening, a potential draft for the agreement between the PKK and the Turkish state didn't come out for the resolution of the conflict (Yeğen, 2015). A proposal by Öcalan regarding such an agreement was revealed in “his case before the European Court of Human Rights in 2011” (Yeğen, 2015: 7). That proposal included “a permanent ceasefire” by the PKK, forming “a truth and reconciliation commission,” the withdrawal of the PKK, and the introduction of a democratic constitution (Yeğen, 2015: 7). However, as a response to the government's rejection to declare or response to these proposals, the PKK ended the ceasefire on 1 June 2010, but this decision continued until a new call by Öcalan to restart ceasefire in August 2010 (Yeğen, 2015).

Following this ceasefire, Öcalan proposed another draft based on a democratic solution, and the protocols of this draft were agreed by the PKK and the state officials after the negotiations (Yeğen, 2015). Since the PKK leaders considered that the state wouldn't implement the protocols which they agreed, they decided to end the ceasefire. On 14 June 2011, in Silvan, 13 soldiers were killed by the PKK, which was brought the end of the process. After these developments, reciprocal attacks were intensified, and the clashes between the PKK and the Turkish Army were reached its peak in 2012 since 1999 (Yeğen, 2015).

3.4. The Peace Process (The Solution or The Reconciliation Process) between 2013 and 2015

This new phase towards the resolution of the Kurdish issue started in 2013. The hints of the process were given by then Prime Minister Erdoğan in a TV program, which revealed the talks between the state officials and Öcalan. The fact that the public was informed about the Imralı visit of the two BDP deputies depicted the transparency of this process. Despite the killings of “three well-known women in PKK circles,” this incident didn't

lead the PKK and the BDP to give up the process since they regarded this attack as a provocative action (Yeğen, 2015: 8).

Certain attempts were made both by the government and the PKK as the signs of their determination to resolve the issue. While the “defence in one’s mother tongue in the courts” was possible because of the law, which was enacted by the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* - Justice and Development Party) group in the parliament, the PKK released eight soldiers and civil servants in Iraqi Kurdistan (Yeğen, 2015: 9). On 21 March 2013, the proposal of Öcalan was declared to the public “at the Newroz celebration of Diyarbakır” (Yeğen, 2015: 9). In this message, he touched upon “the Islamic brotherhood of Kurds and Turks not only in Turkey but in the Middle East” among others such as “a ceasefire and the withdrawal of PKK militants to Iraqi Kurdistan” (Yeğen, 2015: 9). On the other hand, the government framed the phases of the process as such, “ceasefire and withdrawal of the PKK, democratisation, and disarmament and normalisation” (Yeğen, 2015: 9). Before the withdrawal, the PKK expected from the government to depict its goodwill in the process by undertaking certain initiatives. The establishment of the wise persons’ council and forming “a commission in parliament” to deliberate this process were the steps taken by the government (Yeğen, 2015).

Although the implementations of these formations fell short of the expectations of the PKK, it started its withdrawal on 8 May 2013. The Turkish Army didn’t proceed with its usual operations while the armed forces of the PKK were withdrawing. However, this withdrawal stopped in September 2013 since the PKK showed inadequate steps and the “new military installations” of the government as a reason for this decision (Yeğen, 2015: 9). Nevertheless, the PKK pursued the ceasefire and presented certain demands such as the suspension of “the construction of new dams and stations,” release of the KCK prisoners, and enactment of a law, which creates “legal grounds for the resolution of the process” (Yeğen, 2015: 9).

After the local elections of 2014, the law, which enables the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) to arrange meetings with the ‘terrorist organizations’, and the release of the KCK prisoners were two important steps which were taken by the government. Besides, a “framework law” as a “Law to End Terror and Strengthen Social Integration” finally constituted the legal ground for the process (Yeğen, 2015: 9).

The event which changed the course of these progresses towards the reconciliation was the eruption of the protest by the Kurdish people for the siege of Kobane in Syria by the ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) on 6-8 October. Another reason for the protest was the government's indifferent attitude towards the siege of Kobane. This event caused the loss of more than forty civilians as a result. Later, with the capture of Kobane by the ISIL, the Kurdish people spilled out into the streets due to the call of the PKK and HDP for protesting the position of the Turkish government on this issue. The devastating outcome of the clashes was the death of a lot of people. Öcalan's call ended the protests, however this event remained as a serious crisis (Yeğen, 2015).

It was indispensable to overcome this crisis since both sides, the PKK and the state, were aware of the fact that any clashes from now on could turn into a civil war. Thus, the allowance of the Turkish state for the transference of "peshmerga and heavy weapons to Kobane across the Turkish border" was a softening attempt by the state towards returning the peace process (Yeğen, 2015: 10).

As the release of the draft proposed by Öcalan for negotiations, in December 2014, showed, it signaled the possibility of reaching an agreement between the Turkish state and the PKK. However, two sides were insistent on their priorities to take the steps which fell to each one's share. While the state lay down the disarmament of the PKK as a condition, the PKK demanded firstly "a consensus (...) about the terms of the resolution and (...) the legal and constitutional changes presupposed by this consensus" (Yeğen, 2015: 10). This deadlock temporarily came to an end by the call of Öcalan for disarmament and the ten-article draft for negotiations. However, it became apparent that the PKK wouldn't disarm until the government takes certain steps on the ten-article draft of Öcalan. Thus, the government employed a "third eye" for the talks for guaranteeing the realization of disarmament (Yeğen, 2015: 11). However, this step was not long-lasting, as Yeğen (2015: 11) stated, "Such was the picture at the end of March 2015." In a short period, President Erdoğan announced "the agreement null and rejected the proposal of third-party mediation" (Hakyemez, 2017: 7). Although the ceasefire was continuing, from one perspective, it can be argued that the upcoming national elections of 2015 changed the course of the peace process. Hakyemez (2017) puts forward that "when the AKP lost majority power," which is necessary to form the government on their own, the peace process was dissolved. Although this development could seemingly terminate the process, there were more structural problems than only one factor to end

the process. Coşkun and Çiçek (2016: 15) argue that the dynamics which led the process to an end were “the usage of time, extreme uncertainty, and failure to comply with commitments.” Regarding the usage of time, the authors highlight that since there was not an exact schedule for the steps which were expected to be taken, such ambiguity was not helpful to obtain the public pressure to the parties of the conflict (Coşkun and Çiçek, 2016). Besides, “the parties put short-term policy objectives above the process,” as it can be seen in June, 7 elections (Coşkun and Çiçek, 2015). While the AKP focused on nationalist discourses, the HDP preferred to appeal “popular opposition against Erdoğan” (Coşkun and Çiçek, 2015). The extreme uncertainty was about the vagueness of the aims by the parties’ expectations process. In other words, while the government generally approached the process as “a democratization path,” Öcalan’s ten articles were not useful to “address urgent needs” (Coşkun and Çiçek, 2015). Last deficiency of the process was the “failure to comply to commitments.” The apparent example to this problem was the issue of withdrawal of the PKK forces. While the PKK expected from the government to issue necessary legislation before they withdraw, the government put forward that there was a planned date for the PKK’s withdrawal. As a result, both of them accused each other of not complying with the promises they made (Coşkun and Çiçek, 2016).

3.5. The Examination on the Role of Islam in the Kurdish Issue

The openings initiated by the AKP government created an impression that Islamic ideology of the party seems effective in handling the ethnic conflict of the country as opposed to secular and Kemalist ideology which asserts “Turkish superiority” over other ethnicities (Glöpker-Kesebir and Somer, 2015). The Islamist circles frequently blamed secularism because of its triggering effect to remove Islamic “brotherhood” among different ethnic groups and to lead the rise of “Kurdish nationalism” as a response to “Turkish nationalism” (Glöpker-Kesebir and Somer, 2015). Aside claims by Islamists, many scholars hesitate about the usefulness of Islam as a mean to resolve ethnic conflicts. For instance, it is argued that there are different views of Kurdish Islamists than those of Turkish Islamists in viewing Islam as a solution formula. While Kurds are emphasizing “distinctiveness” of their ethnic identity, Turkish Islamists focus on the “integrity” of

whole society based on a shared “brotherhood” (Glöpker-Kesebir and Somer, 2015: 9). By depending on other scholarly works, it might be drawn attention to possible dangers of utilizing Islam as a medium for the conflict. As some Kurdish Islamist groups noticed, Islam is used as a suppression mechanism by dominant Turkish Muslim elites and its usage leads to “ethnicization of Islamic politics” (Glöpker-Kesebir and Somer, 2015: 9). Another concern is that even if Islam can be regarded as an antidote for ethnic conflicts, it has a damaging effect on the rights of women or the rights of other religions, for instance (Glöpker-Kesebir and Somer, 2015: 9). One of the concerns concerning Islamist peace claims is put by Sakallıoğlu (1998), which criticizes Islamist thinking since it creates a perception that sole responsible of Kurdish conflict was modernization and secularization attempts and by claiming in this way, it fails to notice the importance of institutional inequalities and unbalanced power sharing on the formation of the conflict.

Despite these criticisms, in order to scrutinize the role of Islam in the Kurdish issue and specifically in the peace process it might be enlightening to touch upon certain developments posed by different Islamist circles in Turkey. As mentioned above, (Alger 2002) Islamic norms and actors became crucial instruments to resolve the Kurdish issue under the AKP government although the emphasis on the Islamic brotherhood of Kurds and Turks was also made by certain politicians before (Türkmen, 2019: 6). However, the direct effect of Islamic norms and actors on the peace process could not be observed since the talks between the PKK and the Turkish state were conducted secretly (Türkmen, 2019: 5). Nevertheless, there were some instances of the role of Islamic norms and actors in the Kurdish issue.

First of all, the AKP government tried to change secular discourses by proposing that Islam is a common ground between Kurds and Turks since it displayed secularism as “a major driving force of Kurdish nationalism and separatism” (Yavuz, 2009, as cited in Merdjanova 2018: 144). Hence, the government aimed to replace those secular discourses with religious ones like “Islamic brotherhood” (Merdjanova 2018: 144). The symposium, which was arranged by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* - PRA) in Diyarbakır in 2010, to debate over the demands of the local religious actors, was one of the signals of attaching religion to the role for peace (Merdjanova 2018: 148). In the 2011 election rally in Diyarbakır, then Prime Minister Erdoğan emphasized the common bond between Turks and Kurds since they are “all the descendants of the great soldiers of great leader Selahaddin Eyyubi [a Kurdish Muslim who established the

Ayyubid dynasty] who conquered Palestine and Jerusalem” (Sarıgil& Fazlıoğlu 2013: 560). The then PM Erdoğan by saying that he is “against both Turkish and Kurdish nationalism,” he highlighted Islam as a supranational identity for both.

Another initiative by the PRA for rendering Islam as a common ground was to launch a program which aimed to employ 1,000 *meles*¹ as state-appointed imams in December 2011 (Türkmen, 2019). Besides since the PRA was entitled with more active duty by the government on the issue of “the fight against terrorism” to promote “the Diyanet’s message of support for traditional religious values, more than 140,000 of these religious officials throughout the country are engaged in outreach to their respective congregations, according to the State Department’s 2014 terrorism report” (Zeldin, 2015: 7, Çiçek 2013: 159, as cited in Türkmen, 2019).

In February 2013 in the meeting with the public opinion leaders and the representatives of civil society organizations in Mardin, PM Erdoğan, as a response to the demand of Kurdish sermons, explained that:

“What is important is what is said, not the language that is used. Sermons already had Arabic language and until today, they were told in Turkish. If some people say that we benefit much more when the sermons are in Kurdish, then the clergymen must meet this demand.” (T24 2013)

As can be seen in the quote, there were certain efforts by the government to meet the demands of Kurdish people concerning the language of the sermons. This effort had resulted in allowing to give sermons in Kurdish. However, Merdjanova’s field research reveals a participant’s explanations regarding the language of the sermons as follows: “Diyanet made possible delivering of the hutbes in the local mosques in Kurdish, Arab and Zazaki. A week ago, it launched a Kurdish translation of the Qur’an,” however this fell short of satisfying the expectations, according to this participant, since this development came too late (Merdjanova 2018: 148).

Other than those attempts towards facilitating religious norms and actors in the resolution of the Kurdish issue by the government and the PRA, there were certain steps by the BDP,

¹ “Mele is a religious concept as much as a social term in Muslim-Arab cultures that refers to a person who is a leading figure in society, highly respected in Muslim communities. Today, mele is an Arabic word used by Kurds in Turkey to refer to mullahs.” (World Bulletin 2011)

(*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi- Peace and Democracy Party*) which is known with its closeness to KM. *Civilian Friday Prayers* were the most prominent example as one of the BDP initiated civil disobedience campaigns. “As a major challenge to Turkish-Islamic understanding and the state’s control over religion” (Sarigil& Fazlıoğlu 2013: 557) and “as civil disobedience acts by pro-Kurdish movement imams who demanded the right to give Friday sermons in Kurdish” (Türkmen, 2019), the BDP arranged the collective prayers at the public squares. A commemoration ceremony for the execution of Sheik Said² on 29 June 2011 (Sarigil& Fazlıoğlu 2013: 557) and the celebration of the birth of Prophet Muhammad in April 2014 in Diyarbakır (Türkmen, 2019) were among the attempts of the BDP as its part of their novel orientation towards Islam.

There were also certain changes in the PKK’ relationship with Islam. The ideological line of the PKK, when it was established, was derived from “the revolutionary left” (Sarigil& Fazlıoğlu 2013: 556). Its main goal was to create “a united Kurdistan based on Marxist-Leninist principles” (Sarigil& Fazlıoğlu 2013: 556). However, the PKK, in the early 1990s, became distanced from these ideas and approached ethno-nationalist ideals (Yavuz, 2001, as cited in Sarigil& Fazlıoğlu 2013: 556). In the literature, this ‘shift’ was interpreted as a development which went parallel to softening of the PKK’s “attitude toward religion” (Bruinessen 2000, Houston 2001: 185, White 2000: 48, Sarigil& Fazlıoğlu 2013: 556). The factors which prepared the ground for the approach of PKK to Islam were considered as “the demise of Marxism as a political force,” “the emergence of Kurdish Islamist group Hizbullah” and “the Kurdish Movement’s (KM) transformation from a small leftist armed group into a nation-wide movement” (Merdjanova 2018: 145).

This rapprochement of the PKK towards religion had several outputs. Establishment of “the Islamic Party of Kurdistan (Partiya Islami Kurdistan),” attempts to create bonds with *meles* for the Kurdish nationalist cause, defending “religious rights and freedoms” were among those outputs of the rapprochement (Sarigil& Fazlıoğlu 2013: 556). Although, after the capture of Öcalan in 1999, the PKK’s engagement with Islam was stopped for a while since Öcalan aimed to convince the Kemalists for seeing Kurds as the guarantee for secularism as a trial tactic, the rapprochement was continued by the organization of Civilian Friday Prayers, the commemoration of Sheik Said and collaborating with “pro-

² “Sheikh Said of Piran was a Sunni religious leader and freedom fighter of the Zaza Kurdish ethnicity from the town of Bismil, who led a rebellion against Turkish rule in 1925. Sheikh Said was a widely respected religious figure in Southeastern Turkey, and a prominent member of the mystic school of Sufism.” (Washington Kurdish Institute n.d.)

Islamic Kurdish actors” (Merdjanova 2018: 145). Öcalan’s referral to the term “Islamic brotherhood” in one of his letters to the Kurds on March 21, 2013 was another indicator that the KM continued to conserve their relations to Islam (Merdjanova 2018: 144). The Democratic Islam Congress (*Demokratik Islam Kongresi - DIK*), was also an outcome of “the Kurdish movement’s rapprochement toward Islam” and it was initiated by the Democratic Society Congress, which is a foundation gathers “non-governmental organizations close to the Kurdish movement” in May 2014 in Diyarbakır (Türkmen, 2019: 7). Öcalan’s suggestion was that the congress, as opposed to groups misusing religion such as al-Qaeda and al-Nusra, might be designed to the model of Prophet Muhammad’s *shura* (Türkmen, 2019). These were some signals of the KM’s rapprochement to Islamic norms.

As can be seen in these developments, Islamic norms and actors had a place in the agendas of both the government and the KM. However, their (the government’s and the KM’s) resort to religion as a way to include those religious norms and actors to the process revealed the differences in their perception and understanding of religious norms. Therefore, to examine why the same methods and the concepts of Islam could not succeed to bring these actors to a common ground in the Kurdish issue is important to understand the factors which might hinder the effectiveness of Islamic norms and actors to contribute to the resolution of the issue.

4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology used in the study to answer the research question of this thesis *“How do ideologically divided religious opinion leaders, and actors perceive peace in a conflict environment? What do they propose to be promoted for peace? What norms do they propose for this to happen?”*. To answer this question, I conducted field research in Diyarbakır and İstanbul. The interviews held in Diyarbakır took place between January 11th and January 16th in 2019. The last two interviews held in İstanbul on January 30th and on February 14th in 2019. In total, I interviewed twelve people for this research and there were three informants to reach them. The participants were categorized as religious actors with diverse occupations. I have mainly utilized Scott Appleby’s (2000: 9) “religious actors” definition, which involves “people who have been formed by a religious community and who are acting with the intent to uphold, extend, or defend its values and precepts.” My research context contains participants who have been formed via either formal or informal religious education and whose opinions are valued by their community.

In the literature, the scope of ‘religious actors’ is identified in different ways. For instance, Sandal (2011) touches upon the versatility of religious actors as such:

“(…) citizens generally defer to the authority of experts both in circumstances involving technical dimensions and in 'all sorts of common decisions'.³² Thus, religious actors become 'heralds', 'advocates', 'observers', 'educators' and 'institution builders' in the political scene in addition to being citizens, public leaders and activists.³³ In short, faith leaders, for the most part, have ‘a well-established and pervasive influence in the community, a reputation as a force for change based on a respected set of values, unique leverage for reconciling conflicting parties, including an ability to rehumanize relationships and the capability to mobilize community, national and international support for peace process’” (Sandal, 2011: 936).

This shows that the common points which the religious actors generally share are their religious knowledge and their influence on certain segments of the society. In line with this conceptualization, another definition of the term ‘religious actors’ is as follows:

“(...) the phrase ‘religious actors’ as encompassing, on the individual level, religious authorities and intellectuals, and on the societal level, institutions and associations. On the individual level, religious authorities are those who have acquired the theological qualifications that prevail in a given religion or denomination. This usually involves several years of theological training with the subsequent licence to interpret the religious sources and to express normative and behavioural recommendations on the basis of these sources” (Künkler and Leininger, 2009: 1062).

These actors are accepted on the individual level as the people who have the competence to interpret religious norms and to offer certain propositions by depending on their religious education. They might also undertake diverse roles in effecting the political issues of their societies since “their professional training, prestige and reputation for expertise (...) in an area such as religion, that is so highly valued by society and consequently by elite decision-makers provide faith leaders with access to the political system and legitimise or authorise the politicians' activities” (Sandal, 2011: 936).

In my research, the religious actors consisted of four *meles* (two of these four were also retired from the PRA), two retired imams, two members of DIK (*Demokratik İslam Kongresi*), two human rights activists known with their religious identity, one educator (and a columnist) who had a formal religious education, and one self-employed lawyer (and a columnist) who had an informal religious education. Ten out of twelve were ethnically Kurds and other two were ethnically Turks. Nine participants were men and other three participants were women.

In line with my research question, I aimed to create a sample which includes ideologically diverse religious actors. I categorized their ideological positions by looking at their distrust towards the certain actors (namely, the AKP government and the KM) of the peace process. When I asked the participants their opinions regarding the last peace process experience in Turkey, more than half of them explicitly expressed their distrust towards certain actors of the process to explain the failure of it. More importantly, their distrust framed the answer they gave for the question on the peace process. While three of them (Nr. 1, 10, 11) have a distrust of the Kurdish political movement, four of them

(Nr. 5, 9, 12, 13) emphasized their distrust towards the AKP government. Another three (Nr. 2, 7, 15) expressed that they have distrust towards both concerning their role in the process. The remaining two participants (Nr. 6 and Nr. 14) were put into category of ‘neutral’ since they explained their opinions without touching upon the actors of the process.

To elaborate on the answers in which the participants shared their distrust towards the actors of the process, below are some quotes from the interviews. As a participant who had the distrust towards the KM, one of the *meles*, who was also a retired imam, stated his opinions as follows:

“I’ve tried to express that with the peace process, a very positive and affirmative basis was formed via the state’s attempts. They (KM) have missed a historical opportunity if they wanted it [the peace process] to become successful. (...) They (KM) do not care about peace or solution at all.” (Nr. 1)

Another participant, who was a retired imam, working at the private sector, expressed his distrust towards the KM as such:

“When I looked at the past, I understood that the Kurdish political movement never thought about resolving the issue with the AKP government, with the conservative Muslim community.” (Nr. 10)

In addition to these opinions, this participant explained that the ideological difference between the Kurdish political movement and the AKP government rendered the dialogue much harder. His further thoughts on this cleavage are as follows:

“It is much easier to talk to and trust a party which is close to you ideologically. You [KM] cannot make peace by demonizing Tayyip Erdoğan himself and his words while conducting a peace process and bestowing a hand on the person who you will make peace with.” (Nr. 10)

One of the other participants, who saw the peace process as positive, also shared distrust feelings with those above towards the PKK and he expressed his opinions as follows:

“Right after the AKP government came to power, it searched for ways to resolve the issue by equity and justice. I involved in this process, as well. (...) In 2005, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared that the Kurdish issue is first of all his issue. This initiative was the most valuable attempt in Turkish Republic history. (...) However, the PKK at that time placed a condition which could never be beneficial for Kurds. (...) I never doubted the sincerity of Erdoğan and his team, but the same sincerity was absent in the PKK, the HDP, and the leftist clique who embraces Kurdish issue. Is there any exception among them? Of course, it is. On March 21 Newroz, since Öcalan mentioned the Islamic brotherhood, I’ve witnessed those who blasphemed against Öcalan [since Öcalan touched upon ‘Islamic’ brotherhood of Kurds and Turks].” (Nr. 11)

Furthermore, two of these participants (Nr. 1 and Nr. 10) drew attention to Kurds’ alienation from Islam as a part of their distrust towards the KM since they held the KM responsible for this alienation. One of them, who was a retired imam, expressed his opinions as such:

“My personal opinion was that Islam could be a common ground as a peace tool for the issue. However, such ground doesn’t exist anymore since there is a secular society created by the Kurdish political movement. When you can look at the articles of the actors of this segment, it is possible to see that they have commonalities with seculars more than conservatives. (...) These transformed the Kurdish society into secular people. Thus, we can now mention a secular Kurdish society.” (Nr. 10)

In parallel with these thoughts, the other participant (Nr. 1), who was a *mele*, touched upon the same transformation of the Kurdish people from being a religious society to a secular one by highlighting the votes of Kurds to the political party of the Kurdish movement. According to him:

“The Kurdish society, which was not alienated from the religion by the laicism and Kemalism approximately in 80-90 years, was estranged from the religion by ‘Apoism’ in 8-9 years. They damaged our culture. (...) Kurds couldn’t give concessions from their religion and honor before. But they destroyed our two red-lines.” (Nr. 1)

This *mele* expressed his resentments on this alienation of Kurds since he interpreted irreligiosity dangerous to people’s inner peace. It is important to keep in mind that since

these participants look at the issue from the perspective of their religious identity, one of the reasons of their distrust towards the Kurdish political movement is its alienation of the Kurdish society from the religion. The same *mele* further added that:

“People, who are carrying out Kurdish politics today, were educated with the secular system. They didn't get their education from religious high schools or madrasahs. If they obtained this religious education, they wouldn't be in the mountains today. They wouldn't have the ideology which they have today.”
(Nr. 1)

He believed that Islamic education prevents people from resorting to violence. Thus, their distrust towards the Kurdish political movement might originate from associating the movement with its non-religious stance.

Those (Nr. 5, 9, 12, 13), who have distrust towards the AKP government, perceive the government's intentions on the peace process as insincere. One of them, who was a *mele* and a retired imam, expressed his thoughts on the process as such:

“I understood later that this process was made to spill what Kurds have in their minds out. Since Kurds have such loyalty and sincerity, when they say hello to someone, they tell everything concerning themselves. At that period, Kurds had certain accomplishments in Iraq and Syria. Thus, they [the government] thought how they can learn what Kurds have in their mind.” (Nr. 5)

The other participant (Nr. 9), who was a member of DIK, touched upon her distrust toward the government by explaining the reasons for the end of the process as the war politics of the AKP government. She also criticized the informality of the process since the sincerity of it must depend on formalizing the procedure according to her opinions.

These participants who had the distrust towards the government couldn't find the peace process as sincere because of the certain moves such as the denial of “Dolmabahçe Agreement” by the President Erdoğan or the repetition of June 7 elections, which was interpreted by one of these participants (Nr. 5) as the fear of losing the power by the current government. The perceptions of these participants on the peace process are seemingly affected by their political interpretations of the events. Thus, after the end of

the process, they expressed that they thought of it not as an initiative to resolve the Kurdish issue but as the political leverage of the government.

Two participants (Nr. 2 and Nr. 7) have a lack of trust towards both the PKK and the AKP government to some extent since these participants stated that both (the AKP government and the PKK) did not fulfill certain duties, which led to the failure of the process. These participants chose to criticize the process more on with its structural lacks rather than referring to their political interpretations. Thus, the effect of the political stance of them on their perceptions of the peace process is relatively limited than those who have a direct lack of confidence towards only one actor of the process. Overall, while three participants had a distrust towards the KM, other four had a distrust towards the current government because of their attitudes during the peace process. Three of them had a distrust towards both actors and other two participants' stance were identified as 'neutral'.

To reach out the potential participants, I had initial contacts from Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik, who has worked for a long time on the topic of the Kurdish issue and has wide networks of people in the field. I have applied *snowball sampling*, which is one of the non-probability sampling types, in reaching out to the participants. Since trust-building is highly crucial for such a sensitive topic, especially when the conflict is continuing, applying *snowball sampling* renders it possible to obtain the acceptance of the participants to the research. Thus, when this aspect of my research is considered, it is proper to say that *snowball sampling* is a useful sampling method to apply.

On the other hand, as a non-probability sampling method, snowball sampling also has disadvantaged aspects. As Johnson (2014: 2) stated, “nonrandom nature of respondent selection” is one of these disadvantages of this method since it cannot create a representative sample. However, the aim in this qualitative research is not to obtain a representative sample, rather, its aim is to be able to obtain detailed information from the participants by conducting one-to-one interviews.

In the field, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve people and there were three informants. As a qualitative method, semi-structured interview allows me to prepare the flexible and unstructured open-ended interviews. In addition, it enables to learn about the personal experiences and thoughts of the respondents instead of general information regarding actions and ideas of the people. Semi-structured interviews could not provide me to reach a generalizable data regarding my sample, however, it makes

possible to obtain detailed information concerning opinions of the interviewees. Interview questions of the research are divided into four categories, which are general identification of the participants, their definitions of peace, the questions regarding the Kurdish issue and the peace process, and their perceptions of religion (both in general and Islam). First of all, the participants' birth of place, age, occupation, ethnic identity, educational background and religious identity were asked to clarify their self-identification. In the second place, how they define peace and a peaceful environment in general were addressed in order to determine what peace mean to them. After general questions, more sensitive questions were ensued for the proper order of a semi-structured interview. Therefore, third category of the interview was related to their opinions on the Kurdish issue and Turkey's peace process experience. The reason why I asked the questions concerning the peace process was to learn what kind of involvement they had in that process and whether they had an active stance or not in the process. The last category aimed to explore their perceptions regarding what religion's dividing and unifying features could be according to their personal opinions.

The fact that the participants were mostly (ten out of twelve) ethnic Kurds constitutes one of the limitations of my research. Inability to include more 'ethnically Turk religious actors' prevented me to form a sample which contains ethnically equal number of participants. Some of my attempts to reach out potential Turkish participants remained inconclusive. For instance, one of these potential participants was a well-known figure. His assistants expressed that they should know who other participants of this research were, since it is important to be informed about 'with whom his name will be made mention of'. This may signal a lack of trust towards other religious actors and a lack of flexibility among the Turkish religious actors to talk about the issue. Another example of my inconclusive attempt was that after several e-mails back and forth, the person accepted my offer to send the interview questions to him via an e-mail. However, he did not send his answers to me. Likewise, although other initial contacts, which Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik shared with me, agreed to search for 'Turkish religious actors' to participate my research, I could not receive any answers from them, either. This inability to reach ethnically Turk religious actors might signify one of the evident features of a conflictual environment, which creates an atmosphere for certain topics as being hard-to-talk since the armed conflict continues and the peace process ended in the declared political agenda of Turkey. Nevertheless, although presenting a direct correlation between the conflictual

environment and inconclusive attempts for interviewing would be misleading, discontinuation of the peace process might be intrinsically effective on decreasing eagerness to accept talking on the process itself. The reasons why ethnically Turkish religious actors refused to participate the research might be diverse. One of the reasons may be that these actors are acting in accordance with the current political agenda of Turkey, which does not regard 'the peace process' as a solution to the issue any longer. Another reason might be that since the Kurdish issue is a minority question in Turkey, for Turkish religious actors as the people from the majority group of the population, the issue might not be on the first rank.

There were certain difficulties which I encountered during the interviews. Although the initial contacts introduced me to the participants either in person or by phone calls, some participants had certain hesitations regarding who I am, who are beyond this research or what the aim of the research is. While conducting interviews, those, who publicly announce their opinions on the questions I had asked, were ready to give me the permission for tape recording. However, two participants requested me to take notes of what they were saying. One of these two, at the middle of the interview, gave me the permission to record the rest of the interview. Since they were not informed about the questions before the interview, the participant's choice was not related the level of sensitivity of the questions. Overall, the issue of trust to some extent and a lack of the permission by two participants to tape-recording were the difficulties during the interviews.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter will highlight the peace perceptions of the religious actors who participated in this research. The main aim is to explore how they perceive peace in a conflictual environment since the existence of an ongoing conflict might have both negative and positive effects on the potential of religious norms and actors to contribute to resolution of conflicts. Religious norms might become instruments to justify conflicts since “in a situation of prolonged conflict, the meaning of war may ultimately be integrated into the religious framework” (Harpviken and Røislien, 2008: 360). In other words, the references from religious sources might be put forward by conflicting parties as a justification mechanism (Harpviken and Røislien, 2008: 360), or as wars intensify, people might search for religious resources to justify their positions. Otherwise, such norms might become a fruitful source for achieving peace (Harpviken and Røislien, 2008). Therefore, investigating the peace understanding of the religious actors in a conflictual environment might be enlightening for determining the possibility of those norms’ and actors’ contribution to peace for Turkey’s Kurdish issue.

5.1. Religion’s Role in Conflict Resolution

As argued in the literature (Gopin, 1997; Appleby, 2000; Haynes, 2009; Abu-Nimer& Kadayifci-Orellana, 2008; Little, 2007; Alger, 2002), religious norms and actors can play a positive role in the resolution of the conflicts. How these actors and norms can contribute to peace processes might depend on how religious actors perceive religious norms and how they interpret them. Therefore, this research investigates the peace

perceptions of the religious actors by utilizing the Peace Process (2013-2015) in Turkey as a case study.

First of all, the analysis will concentrate on how religious actors regard religion in general, and whether they see religious actors and norms in specific as a source of peace or not. Besides, how they perceive the essential characteristics of social and political environment necessary for peace will be elaborated. Furthermore, although the religious (Islamic) actors have mainly the same religious sources, which are the Quran and the hadith³, there might be certain ideological cleavages among the religious actors regarding their interpretations of these sources. To what extent the differences in their interpretations of the religious sources might influence their ideological orientations was also questioned. Hence, how participants explain the reasons for the cleavages among the religious actors will be examined.

It is important to note that since religious norms and actors can be effective on a wide range of peace works, I referred to the term 'peace' in its general sense. Specifically, Johan Galtung (1969) identified 'negative peace' concept as the "absence of direct violence." In the case of the Kurdish issue, 'peace,' first of all, means ending the armed conflict. Galtung (1969) also proposed 'positive peace', which means addressing the structural roots of conflicts. For the Kurdish issue, positive peace is used to deal with the structural dimensions of the issue as well.

5.2. Religion (Islam) as a Source for Peace?

The participants (eleven out of twelve) (Nr. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15) evaluated Islam overwhelmingly as a source for peace in its very essence. However, it is important to keep in mind that regarding Islam as a source of peace doesn't necessarily lead to categorizing its actors and norms as effective agents in resolving conflicts. For instance, while five of these participants (Nr. 1, 2, 5, 7, 13) saw the need to warn about the misuse of Islamic norms in their answers, three of the participants (Nr. 9, 10, 12) expressed that

³ A collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad, which, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunna), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Koran. (Google Dictionary)

they no longer consider Islam as an instrument for peace in Turkey's Kurdish issue due to different reasons which will be explained later in detail.

By referring to the Islamic norms as an instrument for resolving the conflicts, with references to the verses of the Quran, three participants (Nr. 2, 5, 15) mentioned making 'settlements' between the conflicting groups as a responsibility in Islam. The 'religious responsibility' refers to the duties which are derived from the religious sources (the Quran, the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad) and Muslims believe that they are obliged to carry out these duties. Six participants (Nr. 2, 5, 7, 11, 12, 15) put forward the "Golden Rule"⁴ of Islam as a conflict resolver in every aspect of life. Lastly, one of the participants (Nr. 14) emphasized Islam as a barrier to the intensification of the armed conflict in Turkey. According to this participant (Nr. 14), believing in the same religion prevents the public in Turkey to involve in a civil war which signifies a war between citizens of the same country.

Those who highlighted Islam as a source of peace, in essence, stated their points of view with different explanations. For instance, two participants (Nr. 1 and Nr. 12) touched upon *mercy* in Islam as a religious value, which might prevent the believers from resorting to violence since it bans the harming of all creatures. One of the *meles*, who emphasized this feature of Islam, explained his thoughts as such:

“Religion prohibits harming all living creatures even if animals and trees, thus, of course, it cannot allow damaging a human being.” (Nr. 1)

His references from Islam were in line with the references of another participant, who put forward her opinions as such:

“How does God, who doesn't approve that one Muslim isn't at peace with another Muslim, consent shedding the blood of one human being?” (Nr. 12)

⁴ The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "None of you will have faith till he wishes for his (Muslim) brother what he likes for himself." (Sahih al-Bukhari 13)

This reference from the religion depicts that these two participants were against direct violence. However, there are differences in the contexts in which they expressed their opinions. One of both (Nr. 12), who is a politician known with her religious identity, pointed out her definition of peace by exemplifying the public statement⁵ of Democratic Islam Congress⁶ (DIK) to call for ceasing clashes which took place in Sur, Diyarbakır between 2015 and 2016. As one of the signatories of the statement, she explained what the word peace means with references to Islamic discourses on peace, and by emphasizing the root of the word "Islam" as peace. However, she further added that despite this fact the Turkish authorities regarded this call as the propaganda for “the terrorist organization.” While this was the context in which this participant (Nr. 12) put forward the reference from the religious norms, another one (Nr. 1) only emphasized this norm as one of the merits of Islam regarding its role in preventing direct violence. Although these two participants have the different political orientation as shown in their *distrust towards* different actors of the peace process in the Appendix, they meet in the same reference of the religion, which necessitates Muslims’ being nonviolent. However, the political environment in Turkey might lead to different reactions to the same discourse by looking at who expresses such discourse and where it is declared.

On the other hand, Islam was not regarded as a peace tool for Turkey’s Kurdish issue by three participants with diverse reasons. While two participants (Nr. 9 and Nr. 12) stated that Islam could not be a tool for peace for the resolution of the Kurdish issue since considering Islam as a peace tool leads to exclude members of other beliefs or non-believers, another one (Nr. 10), who was a retired imam, working in the private sector, and holding a master’s degree in Kurdish language and culture, expressed that although he thought it could be a tool at first, his thoughts on this changed later. The reason why this participant did not regard Islam as a peace tool for the issue depicts a change in his opinions:

“My personal opinion was that Islam could be a common ground as a peace tool for the issue. However, such ground doesn’t exist anymore since there is a secular society created by the Kurdish political movement (KM). For

5 “The members of the Democratic Islam Congress arranged a march to protest the longevity of curfews and to draw attention to the necessity of taking the funerals in Sur. They issued a public statement, which included Islamic references to peace, during this march.” (Sözcü 2016)

6 This is an initiative called by the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan in 2014 to discuss the concepts in Islam to address the resolution of the conflicts in the Middle East. Öcalan made this call against the groups which betray Islam such as al-Qaeda and al-Nusra. The first congress was realized with the participations of more than 300 people who are Islamic scholars, academicians, writers, and experts. It still actively arranges meetings and panels.

instance, when you look at the opinion columns of the actors of this segment (KM), it is possible to see that they have commonalities with seculars more than conservatives. (...) These (KM) transformed the Kurdish society into secular people. Thus, we can now mention a secular Kurdish society.” (Nr. 10)

Although this participant (Nr. 10) believed in the unifying power of Islam between Kurds and Turks, he drew attention to the transformation of the Kurdish society, especially of the Kurdish youth, from a religious society to a secular one. Thus, according to his opinion, Islamic discourses, as a tool for resolving the conflict, could not be effective on the Kurdish society. The same observation was expressed by another participant, who is a *mele* and a retired imam, as such:

“The Kurdish society, which was not alienated from the religion by the laicism and Kemalism approximately in 80-90 years, was estranged from the religion by ‘Apoism’ in 8-9 years. They damaged our culture. (...) Kurds couldn’t give concessions from their faith and honor before. But they destroyed our two red-lines [honor and faith].” (Nr. 1)

The former (Nr. 10), who was also a retired imam and worked in the private sector, and the latter (Nr. 1), who is a *mele*, shared the same opinions on the transformation of the Kurdish society. However, there is a salient difference in their interpretations, even though both of them have distrust towards the KM. After stating his opinions on this change, the former participant (Nr. 10) further expressed his thoughts as such:

“And this transformation is not solely the fault of them (KM), but the people who monopolize Islam are also responsible for this change. When these people (conservative political elites) say Islam and brotherhood, what they mean with this is not clear. The brotherhood is a hierarchical thing. They mean that I am the big brother, and you are the younger brother. Since this signifies a hierarchy, such discourse is highly criticized in this region. Besides, the brothers (Kurds) were not granted the rights which they deserve.” (Nr. 10)

Besides the transformation in the Kurdish society, ‘Islamic brotherhood’ discourse did not only fail to unite Kurds and Turks around this discourse, but at the same time, it

further alienated the social base and the youth of the Kurdish society from Islam, according to this participant (Nr. 10). On the other hand, the latter participant (Nr. 1) was discontented about the fact that Kurds' religiosity was damaged. As quoted above, the other participant (Nr. 10) criticized both those (KM) who transformed the Kurdish society and those (the conservative political elites) who are also responsible for this transformation by utilizing religious norms such as Islamic brotherhood for not giving Kurds their rights. In other words, this participant (Nr. 10) saw both this transformation of the Kurdish society and the utilization of Islamic norms for the political aims as problematic. The difference between the interpretations of these participants might be derived from their level of closeness to the current government and the prioritization of their ethnic identity over the religious identity.

Despite his ideological closeness to the current government, the latter (Nr. 10) approached the issue from a more impartial perspective. His opinions reflect that 'Islamic brotherhood' as a norm enter into a vicious cycle since when it is utilized by the conservative political elites as a pretext to ignore the demands of Kurds, this norm might have a disheartening effect on Kurds from Islam, which render 'Islamic brotherhood' useless to deploy it in resolving conflicts.

Two participants (Nr. 9 and Nr. 12), who are the members of DIK, explanation differed in their explanations of the transformation of the Kurdish society. They commonly conveyed that since putting forward Islam as an instrument for peace leads to the exclusion of other faiths' members and non-believers, Islamic norms cannot provide comprehensive discourses for peace promotion. Their opinions were as follows:

"If you asked this question to me ten years ago, I would say 'Yes, the solution is definitely in Islam.' Why it is not a solution is because any faith is not adequate to provide peace for society. If you say, Islam, you will exclude other religions and faiths. I now believe that peace or equality are above beliefs." (Nr. 9)

Another one (Nr. 12) explained the reason why religion cannot be a peace tool as such:

"Today, those, who impose the war policy upon us, steal and confiscate the booty by claiming that they take the religion as their references. (...) I believe in the religion of Qur'an, they believe in another religion. (...) We cannot

come to a common ground, even in our references. Therefore those, who believe in a faith or not, don't have to be exposed to our references. (...) Religion is not a solution since it depends on interpretations.” (Nr. 12)

While the former participant (Nr. 9) no longer thought of ‘Islam’ as a solution for the Kurdish issue anymore since it may exclude other faiths or beliefs, the latter (Nr. 12) gave the disunity of interpretations of Islam among Muslims as an example to her opinions. These two participants were the members of the DIK which is known to be close to a political party, namely HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi* - Peoples' Democratic Party). Since HDP promotes inclusiveness regardless of such factors as religion, ethnicity, or other differences as its political strategy, its approach would not be compatible with putting forward Islam as an instrument for achieving peace. For instance, the participant (Nr. 12), who is a politician and the member of DIK, expressed her political preference by referring to her Islamic understanding as such:

“There is no such thing in the Quran as a war between the believers and the non-believers. (...) The Prophet did not struggle against non-believers. He struggled against an elitist, racist, classist, hegemonic understanding of the religion. (...) The infidel refers to the people who hide the truth. (...) Thus, when I learned these facts, I thought that the real struggle is not between the believers and the non-believers, but it is between the oppressors and the oppressed. Therefore, this realization led me to make a political choice.” (Nr. 12)

By considering dissimilar interpretations of Islam among Muslims, as the participant (Nr. 12) stated, it would be hard to unify even solely the Muslims around the same discourses. However, this point of view does not abolish the potential of the religion in contributing to the resolution of the conflicts. The reason why it could still be a tool for peace is included in the Quranic teachings which command Muslims to ‘make settlement between the two factions among the believers who fight with each other.’

Three participants (Nr. 2, 5, 15), who regard Islam as a source of peace, highlighted this duty between the conflicting groups as a religious responsibility. As mentioned before, *religious responsibility* refers to the duties which are derived from the religious sources (the Quran, the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad), and Muslims believe that they are

obliged to carry out these duties. These participants (Nr. 2, 5, 15) directly expressed the verses of the Quran to explain one of these duties as such:

“And if two factions among the believers should fight, then make settlement between the two. But if one of them oppresses the other, then fight against the one that oppresses until it returns to the ordinance of Allah. And if it returns, then make settlement between them in justice and act justly. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly. The believers are but brothers, so make a settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy.” (Al-Hujurat 49:9-10)⁷

According to this verse of the Quran, ending conflicts by a settlement between the conflicting groups of the believers is a duty which Muslims are responsible. The participants, who highlighted this duty, stated that while Islam ascribes such responsibility to Muslims, it is an indispensable fact that religious actors, as the representatives of Muslims, should be active in the resolution of the conflicts. As the literature (Abu Nimer & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2008) suggested, the role of Islamic actors goes beyond this duty. For instance, two of these participants (Nr. 2 and Nr. 5) were active religious actors in terms of supporting peace during the peace process. The former (Nr. 2) arranged ‘a dinner for peace’ as a symbolic event, which is carried out in the region after resolving local conflicts, to celebrate the withdrawal of the PKK’s armed forces. The latter (Nr. 5) was among the committee, which consisted of Chaldean, Armenian, Assyrian, Yezidi, Alevi, and Mele representatives, to visit Papa I. Francis to obtain his moral support⁸ for the peace process. Despite the lack of direct or indirect involvement in the process, the third one (Nr. 15), who is a retired imam, expressed the decrease in the influence of today’s imams on the people since they are disconnected from the public. He argued that, the contrary to today, while he was on duty as an imam, the situation was different:

“While we were imams, we have an influence on the people. (...) In the past, there was one imam in one neighborhood, but that imam had respect in the eyes of the people. (...) Today’s imams have no relation with the society.” (Nr. 15)

⁷ (The Noble Quran n.d.)

⁸ (BBC News 2014)

This participant (Nr. 15) exemplified the influence of imams on the people at the period while he was on duty as an imam. However, he criticized degenerations on the duty of imamate since imams were unaware of the issues of their society. As in line with these opinions of the participant (Nr. 15), another participant (Nr. 5), who is a *mele* and a retired imam, also touched upon the disconnectedness of imams from the society and the irrelevance of the khutbahs⁹ to the issues of the people who live in the region (Southeastern region of Turkey). He (Nr. 5) further added that:

“(…) Friday is the day when Muslims have weekly meetings. (…) For this meeting, every Muslim will go to the mosque in his neighborhood. And who is the responsible person from that neighborhood? According to Islam, this person is the imam. He will say that for instance, they have a problem in the Gaziler neighborhood and ‘Let us discuss our issues.’ However, a text, is coming from Ankara [*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* - The Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA)], is irrelevant from the issues in this region.”

While the former participant (Nr. 15) pointed out the changing relations of imams with their society towards a negative direction, the latter (Nr. 5) criticized the centrality of religious affairs. According to the participant (Nr. 5), because of such monopolization, imams fail to address the issues of the region in which they live.

In Turkey, “khutbahs, which are prepared by Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA) or Provincial Offices of Mufti, are given during the Jumu’ah and Eid prayers. Khutbahs aim at indoctrinating Muslims about political, social and the other issues that constitute the Muslims’ agenda besides the subjects like worship and morality” (Can 2017: 508). Can (2017) argues that by depending on the discourse analyses of eighty-seven khutbahs between 2013 and 2015 in Turkey, these khutbahs, were prepared by the PRA, raised awareness among the public regarding “living together” by directing ‘social capital’ towards the constructive dynamics, such as giving “religious references of living together” (Can 2017: 529). However, the participant (Nr. 5) did not consider that the content of khutbahs, sent from the PRA, complies with the needs and the issues of the public who live in the ‘region’. As an institution which works closely with the state

⁹ Khutbah (Arabic: خطبة *khutbah*, Turkish: hutbe) serves as the primary formal occasion for public preaching in the Islamic tradition. Such sermons occur regularly, as prescribed by the teachings of all legal schools. The Islamic tradition can be formally observed at the dhuhr (noon) congregation prayer on Friday. (Google Dictionary)

policies, the PRA's discourses might be likely to reflect the priorities of the incumbent governments. Therefore, even though it might be effective in promoting a culture of living together, it may fail to embrace those who are politically otherized. This kind of structural problems and the inefficiency of religious leaders are the barriers on reaching the society, which leads to a decrease in the potential of religious actors to promote and facilitate peace among the society.

As an Islamic norm, "Golden Rule"¹⁰, which is "the ethics of reciprocity in Islamic texts as Islam's version of the golden rule" (Parrott, 2018), was emphasized by six participants (Nr. 2, 5, 7, 11, 12, 15) in total as one of the important principles of Islam, which has the potential to facilitate feelings of empathy among the people. While answering the question of whether religion (Islam) is a source of peace or not, two out of these six participants (Nr. 2 and Nr. 11) put forward this principle as an Islamic rule which is helpful to lead people to understand each other's problems. One of them (Nr. 2), who is a *mele*, a businessman, and a local mediator, explained this rule as follows:

"As a Muslim whose cities, districts, and villages' names were changed, when I say my Muslim brother from Kayseri that if he wakes up in a morning, the names of his city, district, and the village would be changed, what he feels in that situation, we feel the same. Thus, I believe that if we empathize the experiences of others, we could resolve our issues more easily." (Nr. 2)

This participant (Nr. 2) used a phrase from Islamic terminology as "mukayese" in substitution for the word 'empathy.' Such phrase was also mentioned by another participant (Nr. 11), who is an educator, as "nefs-i kıyas," which also means 'empathy'. These six participants believe in the effectiveness of this principle, if it is applied, for a peaceful society. While five of those, who highlighted this principle, didn't specify who the 'others' you have to empathize with, only one participant (Nr. 7), who has an informal Islamic education, conveyed that one should wish for specifically her/his Muslim brother what she/he wish for herself/himself. Therefore, although six participants touched upon the Golden Rule as a crucial principle for the feelings of empathy, what the scope of this rule will be could change in their interpretations.

¹⁰ "None of you has faith until he loves for his brother or his neighbor what he loves for himself." [Sahih Muslim, Book 1, Number 72] (islam.ru 2013)

Among the participants, two of them (Nr. 6 and Nr. 11) were quite assured that the solution to the conflict in Turkey is in Islam since one of them (Nr. 6), who is a *mele*, explained this by saying that Islam has the law and if people act in accordance with Islamic norms, no one insult each other. However, he also noted that today nobody cares about the Islamic principles. Thus, the problems emerge since Islam is not applied. Another participant (Nr. 11) conveyed his opinions as follows:

“We, the people of this region, despite all pressures, all manipulations, and despite ‘scientific theories,’ are devout. Therefore, the people of this geography will pay attention to solutions which derive from their religion. (...) I believe that 90 percent of the solution to this issue will be possible with our Islamic values.” (Nr. 11)

The former participant, who was a *mele*, answered the questions neutrally, which means not referring to any political or social issue in his responses. Since he has a thirteen-years long madrasah education, he replied the questions from mainly the Islamic perspective. He stated that he completed primary school education from outside. Thus, all of his interpretations of the religion came from his madrasah education. The neutral position he held while he was responding to the questions, might depend on his unalloyed educational background. Another participant (Nr. 11) expressed his sincere beliefs regarding Islam as a source of peace for the resolution of the Kurdish issue. This participant (Nr. 11), who is an educator and columnist, had an Islamic education, and he also suffered from the 1980 coup’s oppressive measures. He mentioned that he wrote an article series in 2012 on the religious solutions to the Kurdish issue and his articles attracted the attention of certain people, who invited him as a speaker to talk about his opinions. In the article series, he touched upon the Islamic norms, which he stated while answering the interview questions. According to him (Nr. 11), Islam has abundant sources for the resolution of the Kurdish issue. It might be said that he centered his religious identity to the core since he put forward Islamic values as a remedy to almost all social problems. Besides, on the contrary to other participants, he continued to believe that there was a sufficient number of religious opinion leaders who could play a role in the resolution of the conflicts.

Lastly, one participant (Nr. 14) explained Islam's role in the Kurdish issue as a barrier to the intensification of the armed conflict. He stated that if the religion hadn’t existed as a

common ground, Kurds and Turks in Turkey could not maintain their relationships at this level. Thus, according to him, believing in the same religion was helpful to prevent the armed conflict from spreading among the society, however it was not adequately effective to contribute to the resolution of this conflict. Therefore, Islam's role in resolving conflicts could be seen as limited in this sense.

Most of the participants (eleven out of twelve) expressed that although they believed in Islamic norms' functions on creating a peaceful environment, they also noted that neither was it fully applied, nor rightfully implemented.

5.3. Perceptions of Peace in a Conflictual Environment

Alongside understanding of the participants' opinions on whether religion can be a source for peace or not, how they perceive peace in a conflictual environment is also crucial since such examination allows me to investigate whether their approaches to peace is shaped by the religious perspective or not. This examination might determine to what extent they see whether the religion is interwoven with peace.

Different perceptions of peace were put forward by the religious actors during the interviews. These perceptions were as follows: 1) *peace as the root of the word "Islam"* 2) *peace as a secure environment* 3) *peace as a democratic environment* 4) *peace as a misunderstood term*. This diversity of peace definitions might depend on the conditions of the social and the political environment in which the religious actors live and other identities the religious actors possess. Thus, it may be possible to observe the effect of particular political and social conditions, which might be shaped by the existence of the ongoing conflict, and the effect of different identities on the peace perception of the religious actors. While the definitions of some participants directly coincide with the Islamic literature on peace, others' definition of peace might be the results of a conflictual environment in Turkey.

As it can be seen in their definitions, while six out of twelve participants (Nr. 1, 2, 5, 11, 12, 13), associated peace with a religious reference, three participants (Nr. 7, 9, 10) referred to non-religious terms while defining peace.

5.3.1. Peace as the Root of the Word “Islam”

The five participants (Nr. 1, 2, 11, 12, 13) emphasized that the root of Islam etymologically means peace. This finding also concurs with the common emphasis by the literature, which relates Islam with peace, by referring to the root of the word “Islam” (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci, 2008). One of the *meles* (Nr. 1), who stated that the root of the word “Islam” has the same meaning with peace, narrates his peace understanding by firstly touching upon the universality of peace from his point of view as follows:

“As a Muslim, I think peace is a universal concept for humanity. The name of all religions is Islam in the sight of Allah, according to Qur'an (Ali ‘Imran 3:19)¹¹. The meaning of Islam is peace. It derives from the root of “*silm.*” Before humanity, there were other creatures on earth. Since they have shed blood, Allah sent the human being to the earth as responsible for justice and peace. Thus, Allah sent Islam as a peaceful religion, and we are the followers of Islam.” (Nr. 1)

The *mele*'s (Nr. 1) first emphasis was on the universality of peace, which reflects the inclusive nature of his interpretation of peace as an Islamic actor. In other words, his preference (Nr. 1) among the interpretations of Islamic norms has an inclusive feature. According to Appleby (2008: 31), “the internal pluralism of any religious tradition—the multiplicity of its teachings, images of the divine, moral injunctions, and so on” enables religious actors to choose convenient principles from the religion under the situation which they will address. Appleby's arguments on this issue are exactly as such:

“Religious traditions can adapt to their environments without eroding continuity with the sacred past because the past is capacious. The notion of “internal pluralism” suggests an array of laws, doctrines, moral norms, and “practices” (socially embedded beliefs) sacralized and sanctioned at various times by the community and its religious authorities. This storehouse of religiously approved options is available to religious leaders whenever new circumstances call for change in religious practice. Scientific developments, for example, may transform the believer's understanding of the world and

¹¹ “Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam. And those who were given the Scripture did not differ except after knowledge had come to them - out of jealous animosity between themselves. And whoever disbelieves in the verses of Allah, then indeed, Allah is swift in [taking] account.” (The Noble Quran, 2019)

shift the context for moral decision making, thereby providing justification for ransacking the religious past” (Appleby, 2008: 33).

Although religious norms might be instruments for the justification of the conflicts, this pluralism might also be accepted as a beneficial side of utilizing religious norms for promoting peace since it depicts that they are adaptable to the “globalized context” (Appleby, 2008: 260).

Besides the inclusivist nature of the participant’s (Nr. 1) interpretations of the religious understanding for peace and his framing of peace from the religious perspective, he equated a peaceful world with the lack of direct violence as well as with the existence of justice and peace. Thus, this participant’s peace perception includes both negative and positive peace.

Another participant (Nr. 11), who is an educator, other than emphasizing the root of Islam as peace, touched upon Al-Farabi’s philosophy on an ideal state which is called as “*Al-Madina Al-Fadila*” (The Virtuous City or the Perfect State)¹². Living in such ‘virtuous city’ was emphasized by the participant as a right and necessity for all people living on the earth and that the struggle for achieving this ideal is a sacred work. According to Al-Farabi, the reverse of such virtuous states would be vicious states in which “(the) constitution fails to provide the people with prosperity, and the rulers do not possess the qualities of virtuous rulers” (Bakhsh, 2013: 47). The proposition of Farabi to such vicious states is “education through philosophy” (Bakhsh, 2013: 47). Therefore, Farabi’s understanding shows that “reformation by political uprisings” and “every form of violence” could not be solutions to remove vicious states (Bakhsh, 2013: 47). Since the participant (Nr. 11) gave Farabi’s philosophy as an example to an ideal state, it is possible to observe the participant’s understanding on how such a ‘perfect’ state should be and how a peaceful society could be formed. According to this participant (Nr. 11), the way

¹² “In the city there is a ruler, a man who is ‘the most perfect in his specific qualification and has the best of everything which anybody else shares with him,’ and there are also other rulers who are lower in rank than him, but cooperation between the rulers and people and their conformity with the aim of the main ruler make the city virtuous (235). Farabi emphasizes that cooperation is a crucial principle with which human beings might obtain “happiness” and perfection. The city in which people cooperate to attain happiness is the virtuous city, and the society in which there is cooperation to acquire happiness is the virtuous society; and the nation in which all of its cities cooperate toward happiness is the virtuous nation. In the same way, the virtuous universal state will arise only when all nations cooperate for the purpose of reaching happiness (231). Justice is the base of the virtuous state, and it is defined as “proportionate equality, everybody fulfilling the task which he is able to fulfil thanks to his natural endowment and occupying the rank which he deserves according to his performance” (434). The disturbance of equality, Farabi believes, will lead to a vicious state. Although cooperation is vital to obtain happiness, and the virtuous state must be grounded on justice, it is the ruler of the virtuous state who plays the most important role” (Bakhsh, 2013: 45).

to abolish conflicts in a society and to obtain peace and ‘happiness’ should be taken place via “education through philosophy,” not by “uprisings” or “violence” (Bakhsh, 2013: 47).

In line with this participant’s (Nr. 11) opinions, the former *mele* (Nr. 1) also touched upon the philosophy of Al-Farabi on an ideal state by saying that such state could possibly be established only if the justice of Islam was carried out. Both of these participants (Nr. 1 and Nr. 11) had social sciences education alongside with the religious education. Their emphasis on such philosophical approach might depend on their educational background. At this point, it is important to touch upon that three participants (Nr. 11, Nr. 14, and Nr. 15) highlighted that a religious actor, who can get involved in peace processes, should be educated by Islamic studies as well as positive sciences. Although these three participants had a diverse occupational background (one is an educator, one is a lawyer and human rights activist, and one is a retired imam), they believed that to be an equipped actor in peace processes, a religious actor should have a broad vision to interpret the religious norms by acknowledging the current events of the region in which they live as well as the world events. It is possible to see that emphasizing the root of the word “Islam” as peace constitutes only one part of their peace perception. Thus, those, who emphasized peace as the root of the word “Islam,” started from this emphasis since they possibly wanted to articulate their belief in Islam as a source of peace.

Another participant (Nr. 13), who is a human rights activist known with her religious identity, identified the root of Islam with peace by emphasizing those below:

“Peace, just like Islam, is an environment which is free from intervention to one’s self and free from interferences of one to others. In this sense, it identifies with Islam. Islam, as a word, is originated from peace and salaam as well.” (Nr. 13)

This participant (Nr. 13) put forward that peace necessitates freedom from intervention, and Islam has this freedom in theory. However, in practice, she stated that prevalent Islamic values in Turkey are related to limiting freedom of ‘women.’ By this, she meant that religious values in Turkey are utilized to regulate women’s behavior. On the contrary to this reality in Turkey, she gave examples from the history of religions regarding the ‘equality of women and men.’ As a woman, her emphasis reflected pressures towards

women in Turkey under the name of Islam. Thus, her perspective concerning peace depends on both her gender identity and religious identity.

As can be seen from their points of view, the same concept, which is Islam's etymological root as peace, has been highlighted by these participants in different contexts. While these people had diverse occupations (two of them are *meles*, one is a politician, one is an educator, and one is a human rights activist), their religious identity is seemingly effective on defining peace by associating it with Islam.

5.3.2. Peace as a Secure Environment

Another definition of peace, which was pointed out by the participants (Nr. 10, 12) in the second place, was that peace signifies a secure environment. Likewise, in the literature one of the peace understandings of Islam is “a positive state of safety or security that includes being at peace with oneself, with fellow human beings, nature, and God.” (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci 2008: 560).

One of the participants (Nr. 10), who is a retired imam and works in the private sector, defined peace again by touching upon the necessity of feeling secure for peace as follows:

“Peace is an environment in which all people can live side by side with the sense of security by embracing all regardless of their religion, ethnicity, and race. I understand peace as everyone’s accepting each other.” (Nr. 10)

Alongside his emphasis on security, this participant put forward ‘acceptance’ as another requirement for peace. While he was explaining his opinions on the resolution of the Kurdish issue, he stated three requirements to be implemented. One of them is as follows:

“For example, a change in the definition of citizenship in the constitution is very important. It is necessary to say that everybody is not a Turk.” (Nr. 10)

Thus, 'acceptance' of his ethnic identity (Kurdish) is one of the necessities for peace in Turkey according to him. Regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, a peaceful environment could be formed when people accepted each other or each other's opinions. He did not give specifically religious references by expressing his definition of peace. His understanding concerning peace was more ethnicity and security-oriented rather than a religious one.

The emphasis on peace as a secure environment also came from another participant (Nr. 12) as her understanding of Qur'an:

“You can deserve to be heavenly as much as you turn a community's life into heaven. The measurement of being a Muslim is this. A society can be a peaceful society if there is no extortion from the labor, if no one needs social help, if people don't worry about their housing costs, or if nobody worries about their security. Qur'an wants this from us, a peaceful society, trust, and justice.” (Nr. 12)

This participant further added that she associates Islam not with the religious obligations such as salaah, fast, or hajj, but with the contribution to form a peaceful and just environment. Thus, struggling for peace was one of the *sine qua non*-actions for religious people according to her opinion. This approach of the participant depicts that considering Islam as a religion which consists of five pillars would be a narrow point of view. Her membership to a political party (HDP) and to a community (DIK), which criticize the prevalent religious understanding in Turkey might be an evidence of her stance.

Nevertheless, the existence of the ongoing conflict can be helpful to understand these participants' concerns regarding the desire for a secure environment. From their perspective, being secure is one of the most crucial conditions of a peaceful environment. This sense of security is not only related to being safe from the physical violence, but it is also related to feeling secure in terms of acceptance of one's own identity by others and ensuring the rights of all would be protected regardless of who they are. While the former participant (Nr. 10) defined peace by non-religious terms, the latter (Nr. 12) expressed her definition of peace by heavily criticizing the existing religious values in Turkey and putting forward what should be instead.

5.3.3. Peace as a Democratic Environment

This theme derives from the peace definition of one of the participants. As a politician known with her religious identity and a member of DIK, for example, the following participant explained her peace definition as follows:

“Peace is a democratic environment in which all people can live in equal conditions in terms of social, political, and economic dimensions.” (Nr. 9)

By expressing her perception of peace, this participant preferred to highlight the necessity to live in a democratic environment, which will bring peace according to her. As seen in the quote, an Islamic emphasis does not exist in her reference on the definition of peace. She was also one of the participants who thought that Islam could not be a peace tool since it falls short of embracing all segments of the society. This participant was a member of DIK which arranges panels to discuss religious issues. As opposed to politicized religious understanding in Turkey, this platform provides another ground for debates on the religion. Thus, as a member of such community, she summarized her new understanding by saying that “I believe in that peace or equality are above faiths”. She prioritized equality and democracy in her definition of peace, rather than expressing it with a religious reference.

5.3.4. Peace as a Misunderstood Term

A participant (Nr. 7), who had a political background and has been active in the Islamic movements, proposed a peace definition by exemplifying it with historical events as follows:

“I am one of those who think that the definition of peace cannot be properly understood. There is an understanding and a perception that peace is a thing which everyone (conflicting sides) wants to obtain in accordance with their political interests. However, peace has to be a common ground in which the conflicting groups find a way to resolve their issues. For instance, let us say

that throughout history, at the end of wars certain peace treaties were signed. If you look at those (peace treaties), the demands of the victors came to the fore (more than the demands of the defeated). Therefore, you can see that those (defeated) societies live with a subconsciousness which reminds them that they were deceived, and they had to accept such forced treaties. (...) By peace, we mean that conflicting parties find a common way (to resolve the conflict) without damaging their honor and dignity. This is peace. Otherwise, we still could not get over the boundaries drawn after Sykes Picot and the partitions as the consequences of it. (...) If I am the victor and you are the defeated, then peace which you would accept is not the peace. It is an obligation. (...) Such (obligatory) peace will create a reserve¹³ in the consciousness of societies.” (Nr. 7)

According to this participant, a clarification on the definition of peace was an immediate necessity. As a citizen who is closely interested in the political matters in Turkey, and who articulated his opinions on the peace process in newspapers as well as conferences, he emphasized ambiguities in the definitions of peace would be barriers in resolving conflicts.

In the peace process of Turkey, the differences of the parties’ expectations from the process were among the obstacles to achieve acceptable outcomes by both parties. Hence, the peace process experience showed what the conflicting parties understand from ‘peace’ is crucial to determine the possibility of finding common grounds between them.

5.4. Religious Actors’ Perceptions of the Characteristics of Social and Political Environment for Peace

Religious actors’ “experiences and the spiritual-moral formation and educational background” and “the external conditions in the society in which they live” shape their interpretations of the religion (Appleby, 2000: 283). These external conditions can be as “the presence or absence of an armed conflict in the region; state policies toward religion

¹³ By this, the participant referred to the bad memories of the societies. Such memories are related to their countries’ defeats in wars and the war treaties the leaders of their countries have signed unwillingly. According to the participant (Nr. 7), these memories will not abolish, but on the contrary, the societies would keep those bad memories as a revenge for the future when their countries have that power.

and religious or ethnic minorities; religious participation in the political economy; the strength of voluntary associations; the availability and quality of general as well as religious education; social mobility; migration and the status of refugees, and the like.” (Appleby, 2000: 283). Therefore, it would be beneficial to analyze how the religious actors perceive the requirements for a peaceful environment and how they consider what the characteristics of the social and political environment should be for achieving peace since their interpretation of religious norms is likely to be affected by the existing conditions of their societies.

Regarding the general characteristics of a peaceful environment as well as specific features of the social and political environment necessary for peace in Turkey for the Kurdish issue, there are certain themes which emerged from their answers to the question of general characteristics of a peaceful environment. The themes that arise out of their responses are the existence of *justice, security, respect, equality, non-discrimination, the struggle for peace, and will for peace.*

One of those (Nr. 1), who was a *mele*, who highlighted justice as a requirement of a peaceful environment, put forward a striking metaphor concerning the relation between justice and stated that:

“If there is no peace in a place, then justice is not carried out there. *The creed of states is justice.* If states, I mean all the states in the world, don't carry out justice, problems emerge.” (Nr. 1)

This participant's metaphor on “the creed of state” shows that if states had a creed, this would have been ‘justice.’ Justice is the keystone of a necessary environment for achieving peace according to this participant (Nr. 1). Since he is a *mele* and a retired imam, and he is occupied only with this profession, his emphasis on this issue is related to the core promise of Islam for a peaceful environment. In other words, he believed in the potential of Islamic norms on justice to create a social order in which peace is achieved.

Three participants (Nr. 6, 10, 15) touched upon *security* as a necessity for a peaceful environment. For the people who are living in a conflictual environment in which armed conflict is ongoing, and the polarization is on the rising, it is quite possible to emphasize

the need for *security*. As another result of such polarization in the country, three participants (Nr. 6, 10, 14) mentioned that people must *respect* each other, and three people (Nr. 9, 10, 13) stated that there must be *no discrimination* towards anyone for a peaceful environment. There is also an emphasis on the *struggle for peace* by three participants (Nr. 11, 12, 13). Although they considered establishing a full-scale peace as a compelling duty in the world, these participants (Nr. 11, 12, 13) emphasized that it is crucial to struggle for achieving peace. Three participants (Nr. 2, 5, 7) put forward there must be *a will for peace* by the conflicting groups. Lastly, other three (Nr. 9, 11, 12) highlighted *equality* as a crucial principle for peace.

There were some salient findings in the answers of certain participants. Those participants (Nr. 11, 12, 13), who mentioned the struggle for peace, are the people who actively voice the problems in their society. While one of them (Nr. 11) was an educator and a columnist who writes periodically concerning the issues in the country (Turkey), another one (Nr. 12) was a politician and an activist. The third one (Nr. 13) was also an activist known with her religious ideology. These participants expressed that they feel responsible for the matters of their society and country, and providing a peaceful environment is a part of their responsibility as well.

The reason why the other three participants (Nr. 2, 5, 7) stated will for peace as a necessity of a peaceful environment is that although they did not explicitly refer to the ‘failure’ of the peace process in Turkey, they complained about the fact that conflicting parties might utilize the peace processes to strengthen their positions. Thus, they believed that under the name of ‘peace,’ they should not aim to consolidate their power, but they must be sincerely ready for peace. Although the question did not include a direct reference to the peace process, they framed *sine qua non*-conditions of a peaceful environment as the willingness of the conflicting parties to achieve peace. Since these were the participants who observed the peace process from within the region¹⁴ and from an ‘inside’ perspective since these participants live in the region, their approach might reflect one of the perceptions of the peace process in the eyes of the Kurdish people.

In respect to the question of specific features of social and political environment necessary for peace in Turkey for the Kurdish issue, three of them (Nr. 2, 14, 15)

¹⁴ ‘The region’ is a political term which the participants used often to refer to the Kurdish-dominated places of Turkey.

articulated that social environment can easily be designed by the discourses of the governing elites for peace. In line with the idea that social environment can be divertible by the governing elites, four participants (Nr. 2, 10, 14, 15) emphasized the effectiveness of the political leaders' discourse on the public. They expressed that if these leaders' discourse is peaceful, then the social environment may tend to support initiatives for peace.

Four participants (Nr. 5, 7, 9, 10) highlighted the need to distance religious opinion leaders themselves from politics since they could reach the society when they leave taking a side for certain political ideology. One participant (Nr. 5), who is a *mele* and a retired imam, mentioned that since religious groups were on the government's side, they lost their credibility. He also drew attention to the need for the people who oppose injustices in their country. As an example, he presented a narrative from Islamic history:

“For instance, during the period of the Abbasid dynasty, one of the Abbasid caliphates oppressed his people. (...) People asked him why he doesn't rule justly like the Caliphate Umar. He answered this question by saying that in the period of Umar, there were people like Abu Dhar al-Ghifari who opposes the Caliphate because of his wrongdoings. However, in my dynasty, although I've made lots of mistakes, people appreciate me for all of my actions.” (Nr. 5)

By this example, the participant explained that the existence of the people who voices their concerns against unjust conducts might be influential in directing a ruler to act and rule justly. When there are no people who criticize the injustices in a country, it may be possible for a ruler to become corrupt in a sense that he/she might rule his/her people without paying attention to norms of justice.

This narrative also concurs with the argument of Appleby (2000: 213) who states that religious actors can contribute to peace by acting as “social critics” which leads them to recall the authorities to the duty of “accounting for unjust and abusive policies.”

Another one (Nr. 9), who is a member of DIK, expressed her opinions on the necessity of the religious opinion leaders to be independent of politics by exemplifying the “Wise

People Committee”¹⁵ project. She stated that it was a positive initiative, however since they could not work independently, the project was not useful. Hence if the religious leaders cannot work independently, they would also fail to contribute to peace.

From a different perspective, one of the participants (Nr. 10), who was a retired imam and works in the private sector, explained his opinions as follows:

“Religious opinion leaders in Turkey cannot take the initiative by themselves to call everyone for common sense and to invite people to come together around the idea of peace as independent of the government right now. Because these people are following the line of the government, they cannot develop an independent initiative. (...) Just like as Islamic literates became supporters of the state, the religious opinion leaders in this region are highly tender about the government’s sensitivities. Thus, if the government does not give a signal, they will not take action (for calling people to peace).” (Nr. 10)

These four participants whose opinions mentioned above (Nr. 5, 7, 9, 10) consist of a mixed group in terms of their distrust towards the actors of the peace process. It can be put forward that regardless of their ideological stances, they needed to emphasize the independence of religious opinion leaders from politics as a necessary condition for their positive contributions to peace. Besides, their emphasis might signify that most of the religious opinion leaders have an intertwined relationship with politics, which necessitates to point out this situation as an impediment to the religious opinion leaders’ potential to contribute to peace.

The reason why those participants (Nr. 2, 10, 14, 15), who highlighted the importance of political leaders’ discourses for peace, might be related to the point that if the political leaders’ discourses are highly effective on the opinions of the religious leaders, then, the active players for peace should be the political leaders who exert peaceful discourses.

Apart from these, there was a contradiction between the opinions of the two participants (Nr. 1 and Nr. 10), who both had a distrust towards the KM, regarding the partiality of

¹⁵ “Wise People Committee was formed by the government during the peace process and it consisted of 63 prominent names. The duty of the committee was to work for finding a peaceful solution to resolve the Kurdish issue by “Meeting with opinion leaders; holding symposiums, panels and conferences; making one-on-one contacts; and getting in touch with local, national and international media” (Hürriyet Daily News 2013).

the religious opinion leaders in the region. One of them (Nr. 1) criticized the religious opinion leaders since they were taking side with the KM by saying that:

“During the process the ministers and top officials of the state came together with imams, as known as opinion leaders, members of civil society organizations, and sheiks to take their recommendations. However, there was no outcome from this meeting. Why? Because 80 percent of our (religious) opinion leaders' children are in the mountains. They are inside of this issue. They are inside of HDP. Therefore, they stand in a partial place. But they realized this now, and I hope they will turn away from that.” (Nr. 1)

On the contrary, the other one (Nr. 10) put forward that the religious opinion leaders in the region are susceptible to the government’s policies. The former participant (Nr. 1) expressed his opinions to answer whether religious opinion leaders should contribute to the peace processes or not by conveying his observations. He told that he twice came together with other opinion leaders, one in the Presidential Complex and one in Diyarbakır for the peace process, but the partial stance of those opinion leaders for him was a barrier to their contribution for peace. He argued that since the religious opinion leaders follow the government’s track, they are unable to develop an independent initiative for contributing to peace. While the former (Nr. 1) was more involved in the religious circles by actively teaching in a madrasah, the latter (Nr. 10) was a retired imam and was busy with an independent business at the time of the interview. The difference between these two participants’ evaluation might be derived from their level of closeness to the religious circles. Since the former (Nr. 1) was actively involved in those circles, he was relatively closer to the religious opinion leaders than the latter (Nr. 10) was. Thus, whose observation could be seen as more reliable requires further research.

According to some participants, the involvement of religious leaders and groups into politics, the discourses of political leaders which polarize the public opinion, and the lack of people who voice their objections towards unjust conducts in the country are the deficits of the existing social and political environment of Turkey for a peaceful environment. Contrary to these evaluations, there was also an optimist opinion on the existing conditions. One of the participants (Nr. 11), who is an educator, approached the existing social environment very positively by considering it as ‘ripe for peace.’ He explained his thoughts as follows:

“Our people are tired of violence. Our people gave up ‘factoid’ demands anymore. They think that if we [Kurds and Turks] are brothers, then we have to do what it necessitates. Thus, demands are at a [mutually agreeable] level.” (Nr. 11)

It is noteworthy to touch upon this ‘optimism’ of the participant (Nr. 11), which was explained by his own words as follows:

“After the 80’ coup, I was unpermitted¹⁶, and I was exposed to tortures. But I am an optimist. There is no unresolved problem on the earth, they all are resolved. We can have new problems, we will resolve them, too. What is important is to resolve the issue with the minimum damage by equity.” (Nr. 11)

As a person (Nr. 11) who was exposed to violence and discrimination, it might be said that he prioritized peace (with limited rights) over ethnic demands. In other words, such experiences may have directed him to desire achieving peace at the expense of certain demands.

It is possible to say that the same political and social environment might be evaluated differently by the religious actors because of their own experiences and their interpretations of these experiences.

5.5. Religious Opinion Leaders as Facilitators of Peace?

The attention on the role of religious actors for achieving peace has been growing as the literature suggested (Gopin, 1997; Appleby, 2000; Alger, 2002; Brewer et al., 2010; Silvestri and Mayall, 2015). Besides this, there are certain factors which affect their potential for contributing to peace works through which they can be involved. These

¹⁶ After 1980 coup, almost five thousand public officers were dismissed via the law no. 1402 by the order of martial law. This participant expressed that he was one of the people who were suspended at that time period.

factors might be either related to their characteristics, such as their experiences or their educational background or to the conditions of the society in which they live (Appleby, 2000). In this study, the participants were asked about both the necessary characteristics of a religious actor for peace works and the external factors, which can affect them, to involve in peace processes.

Four participants (Nr. 5, 9, 10, 11) emphasized that religious actors can play a role as facilitators of peace since the society, which they appeal to, care about the actions of religious actors. In other words, they drew attention to the potential of religious actors to affect public opinion on certain matters. Other two participants (Nr. 5 and Nr. 11) exemplified the local role of religious opinion leaders as intermediaries for small-scale conflicts. According to these participants (Nr. 5 and Nr. 11), the experience of those leaders in resolving the conflicts could render them as proper actors of peace processes.

By referring to the Peace Process (2013-2015) in Turkey, religious opinion leaders were regarded as failed actors by two participants (Nr. 1 and Nr. 6). The reasons for this perception which they put forward are different from each other. One of them (Nr. 1), who was a *mele*, explained the reason as his distrust towards these actors because of their partial stance as quoted before. Distrust of this *mele* (Nr. 1) towards other religious opinion leaders might depict that the ideological stances of these actors might aggravate the unity even among themselves. According to him, the religious opinion leaders who are close to the KM may turn away from supporting the movement since they witnessed that HDP chose the mayor candidates for the Southeastern region of Turkey not from Kurds who experienced oppressions, but from Turks and socialists. He thought that this political party (HDP) did not struggle for the Kurdish issue, but its main aim was to uphold a particular ideology. Hence, the participant regarded the closeness of the (Kurdish) religious actors to a political party, which does not strive for the rights of Kurds, as the lack of those actors to contribute to the peace process. As discussed before, the partial stance of the religious actors might be an impediment to the role which they can play for a peaceful resolution of conflicts.

The reason another participant (Nr. 6), who was one of the *meles*, stated for the failure of religious opinion leaders to contribute to the peace process is related to the lack of authority those leaders had. He stated this weakness as:

“Those opinion leaders made a preparation, but they had no authority. Therefore, although they might have demanded peace, the lack of authority rendered them ineffective.” (Nr. 6)

This participant (Nr. 6) explained only his observations regarding the religious opinion leaders’ lack of authority. However, his observation is important to state that the power of promoting religious norms for peace by religious actors would be inadequate without such authority. These participants (Nr. 1 and Nr. 6) explained the ineffectiveness of the religious opinion leaders to contribute to the peace process with different reasons.

Regarding the characteristics of religious actors necessary for involving in peace processes, seven participants (Nr. 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 10, 14) highlighted the importance of choosing impartial religious actors. One of the participants (Nr. 5) who emphasized the necessity of the religious actors’ being impartial conveyed that:

“Recently, since there is a situation in which religious men act as a speaker of a political party and they are afraid of losing their wages, [and consequently] their dignity in the eyes of the people decreased.” (Nr. 5)

As a critique of the current situation regarding religious leaders, this interviewee (Nr. 5) explained the decrease of their ‘authority’ and ‘credibility’. These participants, who touched upon the condition of being impartial, complained about religious actors’ taking political sides for their interests. According to their opinions, religious actors’ effectiveness for achieving peace requires impartiality.

Another emphasis on the question regarding the role of religious opinion leaders for peace processes made by two participants (Nr. 9 and Nr. 14) is that it is necessary to also include non-religious actors in peace processes. Although one of these participants (Nr. 9) did not regard Islam as an inclusive tool for peace, she agreed on involving religious actors into peace processes since the society in Turkey mostly consists of conservative people who pay attention to the discourses of religious actors. The reason why the latter (Nr. 14) emphasized the inclusion of non-religious actors to peace processes was that a process which only religious leaders would attend could backfire. Thus, these two participants took into consideration the pluralism in terms of beliefs in Turkey.

The participants classified the impartiality of religious opinion leaders as *being independent of political partisanship* (Nr. 7, 9, 14) and *being independent of nationalist tendencies* (Nr. 6, 12, 13). One of them (Nr. 7) clearly expressed his opinions as such:

“Religious opinion leaders should have no side. Their only side is justice. They cannot be party members of AKP, or HDP, or Hüda-Par.” (Nr. 7)

He further added that although these leaders have a relatively good relationship with the society, since they take sides with political groupings, they started to lose this feature. This participant (Nr. 7) argued that there are fewer of the impartial religious opinion leaders as compared to 20 years ago. As opposed to the opinions of the participant (Nr. 7), another one (Nr. 11) stated that there was an adequate number of religious opinion leaders who have necessary qualifications to contribute to peace processes. Since the latter (Nr. 11) had the belief in religious actors and norms’ potential to contribute to the resolution of the conflict in Turkey, he answered the questions in a positive way. The former participant (Nr. 7) had a more critical stance towards the religious leaders and groups in Turkey by saying that:

“Today, Muslims say that since I am a Muslim, I am a moral person. Those who are immoral are nationalists, communists, fascists, Christians, Jews, etc., or Muslim groups say that the followers of my religious community are moral people, the rest is immoral. (...) Islam rejects such kind of an understanding. However, our intrinsic understanding is that while everyone accepts himself/herself and his/her group as moral, ‘others’ are accepted as immoral.” (Nr. 7)

Although this participant also believed that Islam has principles to regulate social relations and to create just social order, their implications by Muslims are the problematic area.

There is another explanation regarding the impartiality of religious actors stated by one participant who put forward impartiality as being independent of the ruling party with the following explanation:

“They (religious actors) must be independent of the governing elites. The Sunni segment of those actors must be independent of the government. As can be seen from the Islamic history, we have a historical reality, where our belief system has always been intermingled with the government. It is necessary to get rid of the idea of the sanctity of the state.” (Nr. 9)

Since this participant was ethnically a Kurd and held a critical understanding of religion which is associated with supporting the ruling elites, she highlighted the necessity to elude this mindset which sanctifies the state in any case. As a member of DIK, this participant (Nr. 9) had an opposite stance towards sanctifying the state.

Concerning religious actors’ being independent of nationalist tendencies, one of the participants explained her opinions as follows:

“The most criticized morality by the Qur'an is the nationalization of the religion by Israelites. They thought that they are the chosen society, which is superior to all other societies. Turks have this virus, too. (...) Thus, those religious opinion leaders who are independent of nationalized religious understanding can enlighten paths of their societies.” (Nr. 12)

Although this participant was an ethnic Turk, by referring to the Quranic morality she criticized that Turks nationalized the religion. As a result of the religion’s (Islam) intertwined nature with nationalism in Turkey (Turkish- Islamic synthesis¹⁷), the interpretations of Islam were affected by the nationalistic repercussions. This participant stated that she found such combination as contrary to the nature of Islam.

Alongside the emphasis on impartiality, three participants (Nr. 11, 14, 15) argued that the religious opinion leaders should have both the knowledge regarding Islam and being informed about the current world affairs. Only religious knowledge was not adequate to be actively involved in peace processes according to these participants since such processes cannot remain immune from the effects of current developments, especially those in the Kurdish issue. The fact, that these participants had a bachelor’s degree in

¹⁷ After the 1980 military coup, Islam had subjected to certain changes by the political elites of that period (Kemalists) by “re-Islamizing” the society from above according to the idea of “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” put forward by “the Aydınlar Ocağı (Intellectuals’ Hearth)”. This synthesis mainly asserted that “Turkish culture and identity is a mixture of Islamic and Turkish values” (Oprea, 2014: 131).

different majors alongside Islamic education, might be the reason of their broad vision in this issue.

According to the two participants (Nr. 11 and Nr. 13), religious actors' ability to contribute to peace was also connected to their potential to reach a wide range of people, and according to one participant (Nr. 6), their ability to contribute to peace was related to have authority and power while working for peace. At this point, the categorization of Brewer et al. (2010) regarding religious actors comes to the forth. They argue that religious actors are not homogenous since they can have either majority status or minority status. While the majority status is associated with "established religions, tied to the state and linked to the majority population's sense of nationalism," one of the definitions of the minority status refers to "those who comprise a small wing of an otherwise majority denomination" (Brewer et al., 2010: 1030). The religious actors, who have the potential to reach many people, and who have authority and power, are likely to have a majority status. The reason why this is the case is explained by Brewer et al. (2010: 1032) as such: "Religious groups with majority status, conversely, gain easier entrée to the political process because of their majority status or established church position and have greater resources to dispense in key market spaces. They become powerful agents in peace processes whenever this privileged status is exploited in political spaces to help realize a settlement."

However, this majority status is a serious disadvantage at the same time since such religious groups are less likely to oppose to "the regime or to exclusive forms of ethnonationalism" (Brewer et al., 2010: 1030). On the other hand, although religious actors of the minority status have much less access to resources for peace activities than those of the majority status, the former is able to oppose the existing system since "they have less to lose and most to gain from involvement with peacemaking" (Brewer et al., 2010). Their other advantage is that they have the potential to empathize with the groups who experienced either direct or structural violence. Therefore, although some of the participants emphasized that religious actors must have authority and access to the multitude of people, when these actors have a certain amount of power, their usage of this power for opposing injustices or initiating peace works might not be the case because of their majority status.

5.6. Religious Norms on Removing Inequalities and Pluralism

Religious norms can be seen as useful resources to promote establishing a peaceful environment as stated in the literature review. It is important to note that how these norms are perceived by the religious leaders, who have the potential to spread them, is also crucial. As Appleby (2000) argued in the book “The Ambivalence of the Sacred,” religions are internally pluralistic and this feature of them allows religious actors to choose a range of theologies which can be either inclusive or exclusive. Besides, it is possible to argue that “Identifying constructive dimensions of normative religious values, these can potentially furnish a common platform that may foster the establishment of moral relationships between parties in a conflict resolution process” (Harpviken & Røislien, 2008: 362). Furthermore, to what extent religious actors can embrace the ‘other’ in their societies by depending on religious norms is also worth to examine since such inclusive stance might turn those actors into potential facilitators for peace. Since the Kurdish issue in Turkey might be regarded as an ethnopolitical issue, there may be a possibility for religious actors to “become trapped within the claims of their own ethnic or cultural community” (Southern 2009: 84-85). Hence, how the participants perceive ‘pluralism regardless of ethnicity, sect, race, and gender’ will be investigated.

Moreover, starting from the foundation of the Republic in 1923, the Kurdish population have been exposed to “continuous oppression, inequality, and denial of basic human rights” (Merdjanova 2018: 143). Demands of the Kurds concerning “equal citizenship” were perceived by the state as a threat of the “separatism” (Merdjanova 2018: 143). Since the removal of inequalities might constitute a crucial part of a peaceful resolution for the conflict, perceptions of the participants on religious norms to eliminate such inequalities will be also elaborated. Thus, what the participants of this research recommended on which religious norms for removing inequality exist in Islam, and how they perceived ‘pluralism’ from an Islamic perspective in the context of Turkey’s Kurdish issue will be examined in detail.

5.6.1. Religious Norms for Removing Inequalities

Concepts which are associated with peace in the Qur'an are numerous (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci & Orellana, 2008). Among these concepts, *equality* is the crucial one for creating positive peace in a society (Al-Qurtuby, 2013). One of the Islamic approaches to peace, which is "Islah and Tajdid" approach, suggests that the ethical and spiritual norms of Qur'an and Hadith utter both the existence of social order without 'direct violence,' and emphasize certain values such as "*justice, equality, human dignity, fairness*" and so on (Al-Qurtuby, 2013). Since *equality* occupies a crucial place in the Islamic literature, it might be enlightening to investigate which values are put forward by the Islamic actors to remove inequalities in their society.

The participants' proposals for religious values to eliminate inequalities in a society were questioned. The responses of the participants to the question about 'removing inequalities in a society' revealed certain themes. Four of them (Nr. 1, 7, 10, 14) emphasized *justice* as a core element among Islamic values to remove inequalities in a society. Four participants (Nr. 2, 6, 12, 13) highlighted *Islam's liberalization of slaves* as an example of its opposition to discrimination. Besides this, by referring to the last sermon of the Prophet, Khutbatul Wada, three of the participants (Nr. 2, 5, 7) mentioned *the principle of non-superiority of any nation or race*. There was also an emphasis on *the equalizing function of worships* in Islam by four participants (Nr. 1, 2, 9, 14). Two other themes were "*Golden Rule*" in Islam for equality and *equality before the law in Islam*.

One of the *meles* (Nr. 1), who highlighted justice as 'the creed of states,' put forward five principles of Islam for all people who live in an Islamic state. According to him, Islam guarantees people the protection of mind, honor, religion, property, and life. He further added:

"These rights are protected for Armenians, Jews, Yezidis, Muslims living in an Islamic state. Like I said before, the creed of states is justice. If a state doesn't have justice, then it doesn't have the creed, either. (...) Islam orders these five principles by justice, compassion, mercy, brotherhood, and equality. These are the principles of an Islamic state. (...) "The Virtuous City" of Al-Farabi, which is Al-Madina Al-Fadila (The Perfect State or Dar al-Islam), can be a place in which Islamic justice is carried out." (Nr. 1)

The inclusive understanding of the participant concurs with the arguments from the literature in which Qur'anic ideal stipulates Muslims to live peacefully both among their

co-religionists and with non-Muslims (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci&Orellana, 2008; Sachedina 2000; Said et al., 2001; Silvestri and Mayall, 2015). Besides, this participant mentioned that he traveled to Western Europe and Northern Europe, and from his observations, he stated that Europe was closer to Islam in terms of humanitarian aspect and living standards. He explained the reason why that is as follows:

“Human relations, and infrastructure, which is established for all people to live comfortably from houses to streets, are designed almost by Islamic standards. (...) On the contrary, we are busy with simple things such as what the length of a man’s beard should be or in what way a woman covers her head, etc.” (Nr. 1)

This participant was critical of the discrepancy between the Islamic norms which Muslims are supposed to follow and what they are doing in their lives. Since he had a both Islamic (madrasah and theology) as well as social science education, he could compare what Islam proposes in theory and what Muslims carry out in practice.

Another participant clarified Islamic understanding of equality by differentiating *social equality* from *equality before the law* by the following explanation:

“Islam doesn’t propose social equality. It proposes equality before the law. Besides this, Islam orders justice. (...) Islam doesn’t suggest economic equality like socialism. It accepts that there will be rich and the poor in a society. But it aims justice in income distribution. For example, when there was an increase in poverty, the Caliphate Umar changed the rate of zakat from two-point-five percent to five percent. And he said, ‘until the balance is adjusted between the poor and the rich, I will increase this percentage.’ (...) Islam only proposes equality before the law. Both the monarch and slaves, or both Muslims and Christians are equal before the law. However, Islam doesn’t suggest equality in inheritance sharing, for instance. (...) Islam regards the possibility of all people to be equal as contrary to the disposition. Thus, it puts forward justice. (...) In Friday sermons, imams read this verse: ‘Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded.’ (An-Nahl 16:90).” (Nr. 7)

This participant was rigorous while he was expressing the religious norms, and he needed to clarify the actual meanings of those norms. As it can be seen from the quote above,

when answering the question of Islamic norms on equality, he differentiated ‘social equality’ from ‘the equality before the law,’ and argued that Islam does not offer ‘social equality’ rather it offers ‘the equality before the law.’ Besides, he pointed out that there is no equality in inheritance sharing of Islam and testimonies of women and men. Thus, he further explained that:

“Take it or leave it. Today, with feministic tendencies, some assert that women and men are equal. But Islam does not see women as equal to men in witnessing, I said this because it is a verse from the Quran. Why is this so, then? Since Islam finds the idea that all people are equal as contrary to ‘disposition’ (*fitrat*), it puts forward ‘justice.’” (Nr. 7)

The reason why he needed to clarify the religious norms, which he conveyed, might signal the problem of the multitude of different interpretations on the same Islamic norms. This participant was actively involved in Islamic movements, and he had a comprehensive knowledge of Islamic literature. His detailed explanations regarding the Islamic norms can, therefore, depend on his background.

Hence, this participant evaluated the equality concept in Islam as *equality before the law*. He expressed that Islam's justice principle was the core value to protect the social fabric and to regulate social relations by maintaining balance among the people. His emphasis on what kind of equality Islam proposes reflects both his extensive knowledge on Islamic norms and the divergences of Islamic norms’ interpretations, which leads him to clarify what he understood from the equality in Islamic terms.

As an example, for *the equality before law* principle, one participant presented a historical narrative from the Islamic history as follows:

“In a lawsuit between the Caliphate Ali and a Jew, when the judge addressed the Caliphate Ali as the Commander of Muslims, the Caliphate Ali was disturbed by the attitude of the judge since he addressed that Jewish person by his/her name. Therefore, the Caliphate warned the judge because he treated the Jewish person unjustly.” (Nr. 2)

By this example, the participant pointed out that the judge should treat everyone equal before law, even though one of the defendants in a lawsuit would be the Caliphate. It is possible to see from this example that the participant, who conveyed this narrative, also agreed on the principle which states both Muslims and non-Muslims are equal before the law. According to these two participants (Nr. 2 and Nr. 7), the Islamic understanding of justice does not distinguish religious differences when it comes to jurisdiction.

One of the participants shared the importance of justice in Islam by explaining that the conduct of a state must be just:

“Justice is a very crucial principle in Qur'an, like merit and competence. Qur'an or the Prophet didn't propose a certain type of governance for states, but they recommended specific principles. Whatever your governance type is, you must follow those principles, which are justice, merit, and competence. The principles, which will remove the inequality [in the society], and which all of us, both Turks and Kurds, must compromise on, are these values.” (Nr. 10)

When the question of what Islamic norms that exist in the society can be promoted to remove inequalities in the society was asked, this participant replied by stating the necessary qualities a state must have. According to him, the state was the ultimate authority which could remove the inequalities by ruling the country with the values of ‘justice, merit, and competence.’

These participants (Nr. 1, 7, 10, 14) believed that Islamic justice concept is an efficient principle to create just social order. Since two of these four participants (Nr. 7 and Nr. 14) were lawyers, their emphasis on justice could have been influenced by their occupational background.

It is important to note that although the ideal suggested by Islam is a just social order, Islam also acknowledges that conflicts can occur among believers. For such situations, Islam orders making a settlement between the conflicting groups. This process of making a settlement between them requires to be just as well. Thus, justice is an inevitable principle in Islam while creating just social order and resolving conflicts among people.

Islam's liberalization of slaves is one of the themes which the participants (Nr. 2, 6, 12, 13) chose to highlight for Islamic values for removing inequalities. To exemplify this,

one of the participants (Nr. 2) put forward how the mentality of the wealthy and the ‘noble’ people, who lived during the times of the Prophet Muhammad, was exposed to a change by the proposition of the Prophet Muhammad regarding all people, including slaves, worshipping at the same rank regardless of their socioeconomic situations. Alongside with this example, another participant (Nr. 12) highlighted the liberalization of slaves as both Quranic and Prophetic practice to launch a pilot project to transform the society towards freedom. Another participant (Nr. 13) also interpreted the liberalization of slaves not as the removal of a historical institution but as halting all cruel treatments in the society since slavery was a tool to be abused easily. Thus, these participants regarded this practice in Islamic history as an exemplary value to be utilized for removing inequalities.

Regarding the equality concept from the Islamic perspective, four participants (Nr. 1, 2, 9, 14) emphasized *the equalizing function of worships*. For instance, hajj was put forward by them as one of the Islamic prayers which remove social statuses by bringing all people, including the rulers and the workers, together. One of them (Nr. 9) gave Hajj as an example to bring women and men together as equal, although the relations between women and men are tried to be regulated by the society (Turkish society). As a woman defending actively the abolishment of the discriminatory attitudes towards women, a participant (Nr. 9), who struggled against the headscarf ban in Turkey after 1980 coup, pointed out that the Islamic understanding of the relations between women and men had more egalitarian than the way it was understood in contemporary Turkey.

Overall, these participants explained that in the essence of this religious duty, Hajj could be seen as an instrument to signal the necessity of removing inequalities. However, as an actual example, another participant stated the following:

“For instance, if a Kurd, while doing her/his duty of pilgrimage, speaks Kurdish, some tell her/him that ‘At least, don’t do it here.’ as if speaking Kurdish is an extraordinary thing to do.” (Nr. 13)

This quote might exemplify how such discriminatory attitudes are nested in the perceptions of the people who come to perform their religious duty, while the religion

itself rejects such discrimination towards any nation or race. The same participant (Nr. 13) expressed her criticism towards Muslims as a self-criticism, too:

“Religion reinforces such discriminatory attitudes most of the time when it is understood in a way that there were hierarchical relations between languages or ethnicities. There is a verse in the Quran, which states that races and languages are the verses of Allah. This is a verse in the Quran, but you do not know it. Thus, when the Kurdish language was banned, as Muslims, what did we do to oppose this? We did nothing. Why does no one [from Muslims] voice any self-criticism?” (Nr. 13)

As an ethnic Turk, this participant (Nr. 13) mentioned the wrong attitudes of Turkish Muslims since they remained silent in the face of discriminations against Kurds although they must act according to the religious principles in which they believe. Therefore, it might be said that religious practices which Islam put forward may not have such equalizing effect among the society since ethnic claims might spoil the understandings of Muslims concerning religious norms.

The principle of non-superiority of any nation or race is one of the last legacies from the Prophet Muhammad to his followers. As he stated in his last sermon, “All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black, nor a black has any superiority over a white- except by piety and good action.”¹⁸ This principle was emphasized by two of the participants (Nr. 5 and Nr. 7) directly by the words of the Prophet. The former (Nr. 5) also explained non-superiority in terms of the “Golden Rule,” which requires Muslims to demand their brothers what they demand themselves without seeing themselves as privileged or superior. Thus, Islam does not only invalidate superiority claims, but it also requires Muslims to actively request the rights, which they ask for themselves, to ask for other people¹⁹ as well according to the participants.

This “Golden Rule” was highlighted by six participants (Nr. 2, 5, 7, 11, 12, 15) in total at different points. This principle, is derived from the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad,

¹⁸ (Prophet Muhammad's Last Sermon n.d.)

¹⁹ These ‘other people’ are specified by only one participant as for Muslim brothers; other participants did not specify who these ‘others’ are.

was seen as a unique value for removing inequalities in societies by two participants (Nr. 5 and Nr. 11).

These are the references of the participants from the religion itself. However, their perception of the religious values exist in Turkey differs from the actual principles of Islam. Three of the participants (Nr. 10, 12, 14) emphasized that in Turkey, there is a *culture of submissiveness* which leads people to follow not the actual Quranic principles but certain religious principles which comply with the desires of the governing elites. One of these participants explained the prevalent religious values in Turkey as follows:

“Today, the religious values, which come to the forth, are the values which the governments like the most. I mean if the patience is a value, they tell the people to be patient. For instance, let’s say we are going to a war, then you should make sacrifices. The obedience culture is promoted. (...) The governments say to the people to obey and to be patient. Since the people of the conservative segment of the society doesn't want to lose what they have, the fear of ‘becoming like Syria’ is subliminally given to the people. When the ditch events have happened here, Kurds had experienced this. If these people (the KM) come and rule here, it means that we will be like Syria.” (Nr. 10)

This participant, who was a retired imam and was working in the private sector at the time of the interview, pointed out that prominent religious values were shaped by the policies of the governments. Although this participant stated his distrust towards the KM because of its actions during the peace process, nevertheless he expressed his concerns regarding the promotion of the religious values which the government put forward in line with its political interests. Another one, who has an oppositional stance towards the government, touched upon the same mentality in Turkey as follows:

“Today in Turkey, Islam is taught as a submission without questioning. However, the terms in Quran such as ‘submission (*ba ’yah*²⁰) and consultation (*shura*²¹)’ are wrongly understood today. Last weeks, there was a panel on the subject of ‘Islam and Left,’ and I elaborated these terms there. They are not ‘submission without questioning.’ One can consult to those who rule by

²⁰ “It is an oath of allegiance. To make a pledge.” (Islamic Terms Dictionary n.d.)

²¹ “Consultation. Based on Quranic injunction to Muhammad to consult with his followers (3: 159) and to Muslims to consult with each other in conducting their affairs (42: 38).” (Shura n.d.)

justice and peace, and cannot consult to those, who divide and separate the people. Thus, all these Quranic terms have a certain criterion to be implemented.” (Nr. 12)

This participant, who was a politician and a member of DIK, mentioned that she worked on the Quran with a group of women to understand the real meanings of the Quranic terms. Her objection to today’s understanding of Islamic norms in Turkey might depend on her effort to comprehend those norms with actual meanings. When the religious norms become the discourses of the political elites, they turn into popular concepts which conceal the gist of those norms. Therefore, the politicization of the religious values renders them open to misutilization.

Another criticism was made regarding giving less importance to the principle of morals than the rules of worships. One of the *meles* analyzed the difference between the Quranic classification and the interpretations of the Islamic scholars regarding morality as follows:

“The Islamic philosophers classify the religious knowledge by putting the belief to the first place, then come worship, transactions (*muamelat*), and purification of *nafs* [self] (with moral values). However, the Qur’an places the purification of *nafs* (with moral values) to the first place. (...) Thus, according to the Qur’an, a person can be well-behaved without the belief! (...) We can see immoral Muslims, immoral teachers, immoral pilgrims, immoral professors, immoral politicians in terms of lack of conscience and mercy.” (Nr. 1)

The reason why this participant touched upon this divergence between the classification of the religious knowledge by Islamic philosophers and by the Quran is that ignoring the morality aspect of Islam prevents people in Turkey to absorb its essence. Similarly, a woman participant (Nr. 12), who was a politician and a member of DIK, expressed that she was associating Islam not with the religious obligations such as *salaah*, fast or *hajj*, but with the contribution to form a peaceful and just environment. Likewise, the former participant highlighted a similar point with a different emphasis to ‘honesty’ as follows:

“The students (in madrasah) sometimes ask me ‘How many pillars are there in Islam?’. Everyone says that there are five pillars, but I say that it is one, which is honesty. Those five pillars exist to improve ‘honesty’.” (Nr. 1)

Thus, these participants (Nr. 1 and Nr. 12) highlighted that the function of worships is to teach Muslims the importance of having moral values. However, they stated that in Turkey moral values are overshadowed by those formal rules of the religion.

From a similar perspective, one participant (Nr. 9) emphasized the necessity to put forward the morality for bringing equality to a society. According to this participant, equality must not only exist for the people who are in one's group but also for others as well. She further added that in all conditions, one must defend the rights of all people even for certain groups which one feels hate towards. At this point, the references of another participant (Nr. 7) from the Qur'an reflect that being just in Qur'anic understanding²² requires the Muslims not to adjust their judgments based on their sympathy or hate towards a certain group. Thus, the morality, which the Qur'an proposes, is related to the principle of justice, which is a *sine qua non*-condition in Islam.

5.6.2. Religious Norms on Pluralism

Religions are internally plural in terms of “the multiplicity of their teachings, images of the divine, moral injunctions, and so on” (Appleby, 2000: 31). They have a wide range of interpretations on the same issues. This aspect of religions enables religious leaders to choose certain understandings from the pool of religious values. Since there is an ambivalence towards religious actors' choice on inclusivity versus exclusivity, how they understand the religion's approach on pluralism might be enlightening for this study to comprehend whether peace understanding of religious actors is inclusive or not.

The interesting finding is that those (Nr. 9 and Nr. 12) who didn't regard Islam as a tool for peace concerning Turkey's Kurdish issue, accept *Islam as an all-encompassing religion*. Their distrust towards the misuse and the politicization of religious norms in

²² “O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do” (The Noble Quran n.d.).

Turkey might be the reasons for their differentiation of Islam in theory and practice. Five participants (Nr. 5, 9, 10, 12, 13) explicitly stated that Islam, in essence, is the religion which embraces all people. One of them (Nr. 5) referred to one of the names of Allah as *Rahman* which means that His compassion compasses every creature on the earth. Two participants (Nr. 12 and Nr. 13) mentioned the Charter of Medina²³ which brought Muslims, Jews, and Pagans together under the title of *the ummah*. The emphasis on the first believers of Islam as a base which contains diversity was put forward by another participant (Nr. 9) to exemplify the inclusive nature of Islam. These three (Nr. 9, 12, 13), who highlighted inclusiveness of Islam towards other religions and groups, were both women participants and had a distrust towards the current government. Although religious opinion leaders mostly consist of men, the women's involvement as religious leaders might be beneficial since they have inclusive understanding of religion and they are capable of opposing the prevalent and politicized insight of Islam in Turkey.

Regarding pluralism, two participants (Nr. 9 and Nr. 10), who have different ideological points of view, drew attention to the fact that Allah grants people the right to oppose Himself by denying His existence. They interpreted this as evidence which can depict Muslims to respect both the believers of other faiths and non-believers.

One of the participants (Nr. 15), who was a retired imam and a self-employed craftsman, conveyed two historical examples concerning the relationship of Muslim rulers with non-Muslims. In the first example, he stated the narrative as such:

“The Caliphate Umar designated a governor to Egypt. This governor wanted to build a mosque in the terrain of a Christian woman's house. Thus, he bought the house from the woman and by demolishing it, he ordered his people to build the mosque. But since the woman didn't want to sell her house at first, she sent a letter to Umar to complain about the issue. Thereupon, the Caliphate admonished the governor and ordered him to rebuild the house of the woman just like the former.” (Nr. 15)

The second example, he gave, illustrates the attitude of a Muslim ruler towards non-Muslims for a macroscale conflict:

²³ “This is a document from Muhammad the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), governing relations between the Believers i.e. Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib and those who followed them and worked hard with them. They form one nation -- Ummah” (Constitution Society n.d.).

“When Salahuddin Ayyubid conquered Jerusalem, he ordered his soldiers not to harm anyone living in this region. (...) Their (Muslim soldiers) non-interference to Christians, who lived there, impressed the General of the crusade. (...) This general went to Salahuddin and said to him ‘When we (the crusaders) conquered here, we destroyed your (Muslims’) houses, we dishonored you and we killed your children. (...) However, today you did not take the revenge of our actions from us. (...) Why did you do this?’. Salahuddin answered that his religion bans him to do those actions. (...) He (the general) became a Muslim after he learned that Islam commands them (Muslims) not to harm people.” (Nr. 15)

These examples, which were referred to by a retired imam as his religious understanding of inclusivity, reflect his perception on Islam as an all-encompassing religion, where both Muslims and non-Muslims should be respected and protected.

5.7. Perceptions of Islamic Brotherhood Ideal

Perceptions of the participants on “Islamic brotherhood” ideal are worth to examine since this ideal has been frequently addressed in Turkey by several pro-Islamic political actors (Sarıgil and Fazlıoğlu, 2013). However, its alleged uniting potential had failed to become a common ground for the resolution of the Kurdish issue in Turkey (Sarıgil and Fazlıoğlu, 2013; Glöpker-Kesebir and Somer, 2015; Türkmen, 2018). Ten participants (Nr. 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15) out of twelve stated that an Islamic brotherhood on a large scale doesn’t exist in Turkey. While two participants (Nr. 1 and Nr. 10) emphasized that it might exist on a small scale, only one participant (Nr. 11) expressed that there is an Islamic brotherhood in Turkey. Those, who consider that there is no Islamic brotherhood in Turkey, added that it had been used as a pretext not to give rights to Kurds.

The participants, who did not think that there was an Islamic brotherhood in Turkey, explained their understandings by touching upon different examples as evidence of their opinions. One of these participants (Nr. 2) who is a *mele* and a businessman differentiated the situation during the Ottoman Empire period from the Republican period as follows:

“Frankly speaking, I don't believe that such a thing [Islamic Brotherhood] existed in the Republican period. During the Ottoman Empire period, I am not sure it had existed, either. Nevertheless, even if it was the symbolic brotherhood around the Caliphate, it had existed more than the Republican times. In the Republican period, the religion was shaped by the Republican elites as the religion of Islam and the sect of Hanafi. The people outside of this definition were not counted as Muslims. (...) In this geography, the Muslim brotherhood achieved to win the War of Independence, but after the victory, the first thing the Republican elites did was to destroy the people who established this country with those feelings.” (Nr. 2)

Since this participant was a grandchild of one of the people who were executed after the Sheikh Said rebellion, he could empathize with those people, who felt betrayed by the Republican elites.

Another participant, who was a retired imam and a *mele*, touched upon the events in the current times, and he began his words by criticizing the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which excludes other ethnicities as if they cannot be Muslims. He further mentioned the rejection of the demand of his local association on giving the sermons in the Kurdish language. This participant criticized the attitudes of Muslims towards Kurds as follows:

“In the books of certain writers, who are ‘so-called Muslim writers,’ they identify Kurds as ‘bandits.’ We went to madrasahs for a long time, and when you asked whose murder is permissible, the answer was bandits like Kurds. (...) The religious procedure on funerals does not apply to the rebellions in Turkey since they have rebelled. Muslim writers mostly promote these thoughts. (...) If in a place, some have certain rights, but others don't have them, then it is not Islam. (...) Thus, if an Arab has a state and a Persian has a state, but a Kurd doesn't have one, there is no Islamic brotherhood in that case.” (Nr. 5)

This participant put forward the question that while the discriminatory discourses are mostly coming from the Muslims, how one can mention such Islamic brotherhood in the country is a big question mark in his mind.

As an achievement of Islamic brotherhood in Turkey, one of the participants (Nr. 9) ironically stated that Islamic brotherhood discourse was used to deceive Kurds. According to this participant (Nr. 9), by saying that Muslims are religious brothers, it has been tried to push aside nationality and culture of Kurds. However, although she did not

explicitly specify who tried to deceive Kurds, her emphasis was on the elites who utilized 'Islamic brotherhood discourse'. Another one (Nr. 10), who has different political stance from this former participant (Nr. 9), also touched upon this distrust towards Islamic brotherhood:

"This perception, regarding Kurds and Turks as brothers, was not problematic before. But some people object this idea since this brotherhood becomes a tool 'not to give.' For instance, while Kurds, especially Islamic elites, are writing on this issue, their distrust can be seen. (...) The people expected that if we are brothers, then let us have the same rights, however when these rights come to the forth, they beat about the bush." (Nr. 10)

Two other women participants (Nr. 12 and Nr. 13) highlighted the relationship between the Islamic brotherhood ideal and the nature of being in power since such brotherhood is associated with the government, which is known for its religious discourse. One of them disappointedly expressed her opinions on the Islamic brotherhood:

"I thought that whenever the religious people become the governing elites, they would not do anything which we don't want others to do. Later, I understood that we [conservative political elites and herself] do not believe in the same things." (Nr. 12)

Another one (Nr. 13), who was a human rights activist, touched upon the deteriorating effect of the nature of being in power on the Islamic brotherhood as such:

"When we say solidarity, we mean protecting rights without considering interests. However, when people are in power, this leads them to look out for only the rights and interests of a certain group since this is the nature of the rent sharing for a clique." (Nr. 13)

Although the participants overwhelmingly stated that in Turkey, there is no Islamic brotherhood, one participant (Nr. 11) was quite certain on the existence of the Islamic brotherhood. His explanations were as follows:

“It exists much more than any other country in the world since there is no country in the world in which both Alevi and Sunnis, both Zoroasters and Jews, both Shafiis and Hanafis, both Muslims and Christians, both Kurds and Lazs, both Circassians and Arabs are harmoniously living together. (...) The Muslim brotherhood experienced the Sheik Said event, but it could not separate [the society]. The Dersim event happened but it didn't split [the society], and despite the terror of the PKK, we, as a nation, didn't bear resentment towards each other.” (Nr. 11)

These opinions of this participant reflect a different perception towards the ‘brotherhood’ issue. While other participants (Nr. 9, 10) stated that ‘Islamic brotherhood’ ideal is used by the political elites as a pretext not to give Kurds their legal rights, this participant mentioned that Kurds did not request ‘unreasonable’ demands for the sake of the brotherhood they have with Turks. Why their approaches to the ‘brotherhood issue’ differentiate will be elaborated below.

First of all, since the participant (Nr. 9), who was a politician, had an opposite stance towards the conservative political elites who utilize ‘Islamic brotherhood’ ideal in their discourses, her opinions on this issue might seem obvious. However, although the participant (Nr. 10), who was a retired imam, has a distrust towards the KM, he interpreted this ‘brotherhood’ as a hierarchical approach to Kurds, which regards Turks as the ‘big brothers’ of Kurds. Besides, he stated that despite Kurds are seen as brothers, their rights were not delivered. Thus, while one of them (Nr. 11) conceived that the Islamic brotherhood necessitates Kurds’ giving up their ‘factoid’ demands, the others (Nr. 9, 10) highlighted that the ‘brotherhood’ could not be successful in recognizing certain requests of Kurds. For the former participant (Nr. 11), the Kurdish demands were ‘negotiable’ for the sake of peace, while the other two (Nr. 9 and Nr. 10) questioned the sincerity of Islamic brotherhood ideal, which failed to respond to their demands.

This optimistic perspective was put forward by the participant (Nr. 11) who saw the social and political environment as ripe for peace since he argued that the people, who are living in this country, thirst for peace. As discussed before, this participant (Nr. 11) experienced violence and discrimination after the 1980 military coup. His experiences might lead him to prioritize peace (with limited rights) over ethnic demands. However, although the other participant (Nr. 9) was also exposed to discriminations because of her headscarf as one

of the consequences of the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey, she highlighted that Islamic brotherhood was used to lead Kurds to deny their ethnicity. Thus, her preference concerning a model for peace should enable Kurds to preserve their ethnic identity and demands. In the literature review, while examining Islamic approaches to peace, it was argued that on the one hand, "those who are exposed to unequal and violent treatments may tend to emphasize 'peace through the power of law and institutions, the power of communication, the power of human spirit, and the power of love". On the other hand, "those who hold political power might be likely to prefer prioritizing 'protection of social order' at any price" (Qurtuby 2013: 305). Although these two participants (Nr. 9 and Nr. 11) had experienced violence and discrimination, their approaches to peace differ from each other. While the approach of the former (Nr. 9) might be interpreted as closer to "Islah and Tajdid approach" which requires both negative and positive peace, the latter's (Nr. 11) approach might be read as closer to "political power approach" since he put forward the condition of being powerful as a country for the resolution of the issue. Hence, experiencing unequal and violent treatments does not necessarily lead the religious actors to prefer the Islah and Tajdid approach which includes both negative and positive peace. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, prioritizing political power approach to peace may not mean excluding positive peace dimension as it can be seen in the emphasis of the participant (Nr. 11) on 'justice' as an inevitable part of a peaceful society. Although there was a common belief among the participants for the Islamic norms as an all-encompassing, and the participants highlighted justice and removing inequalities in a society as crucially important, the implication of these values by the Muslims, both the political elites and the laypeople, was seen as problematic. Besides, the general view of the participants on the Islamic brotherhood was that it couldn't soar beyond being an ideal.

5.8. Religion and Its Relationship with Politics

5.8.1. Perceptions of the Ideological Cleavages among the Religious Actors

To investigate the perceptions of the religious actors regarding the reasons of the ideological cleavages among themselves and the factors which affect their diverse choices among different interpretations of religious norms, they were asked about the reasons of the discrepancy between the religious actors' preferences over their ideological orientations. The themes arose from their responses are respectively as such: *prioritization of interest, historical background of the disunity in the Islamic world, and degeneracies in the interpretations of the religious knowledge.*

Four participants (Nr. 2, 7, 11, 15) emphasized that the reason for the different political approaches of the religious actors, who are the members of the same sect and the same religion, depends on their prioritization of the interests. One of these participants (Nr.2) evaluated this variance by putting forward that the differences in their preferences over ideological orientations are derived from the political interests of the religious actors. He compared the situation of the Muslim world today with their situation five hundred years ago:

“I think that they (religious actors) take their political interests into consideration. I mean (they act) according to their interpretations (of the religion). Their own interpretations (of the religion) had caused troubles to the Islamic geography. Let me explain this through an example. Five hundred years ago, in Amsterdam, certain sects of Christianity were not allowed to exist there. The inquisition courts, the clashes between Catholics and Protestants, intolerance towards each other, etc. (...) However, at that period, when one thinks of Baghdad, Damascus, Istanbul, and Tehran, what would come to one's mind? These were the places in which both people from different sects and different religions can live together compared to them (Christians). (...) Now, five hundred years have passed, but a new Prophet didn't come, Allah didn't send a new Qur'an to the earth. What caused to the fact that [today's] Amsterdam has turned into Kabul [of old times], and [today's] Paris has turned into Damascus [of old times]?” (Nr. 2)

This participant, who was a *mele* and a businessman, (Nr. 2) drew attention to the fact that although the precepts of Islam have not changed with the passing years, the situation of Islamic world has changed tremendously because of religious actors' political interests and differences in interpretations of the religious norms. It is possible to put forward that the participant (Nr. 2) stated that there are different dynamics which lie behind a peaceful society other than effectiveness of Islamic norms. Besides, he emphasized that such norms cannot be useful unless they are implemented. According to him, the Christian

world also experienced certain disagreements, however today they achieved relative stability compared to the Muslim world. Thus, the change in the situation of the Muslim world might depend on the ideological and interpretational cleavages among the Islamic actors.

Another participant, who was an educator, clarified his opinions on this issue with two reasons:

“People from the same religion, the same sect, who had the same education from the same madrasah may have different political approaches. First, something may preclude their Islamic knowledge. Secondly, they might be educated but they might also be exposed to serious informational bombardment. For instance, there are some Islamic scholars I know and converse with. When we talk, they say that ‘Okay, but if they (other scholars who they do not agree with) think like you’. But here, the problem is this: “Do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be fair; that is nearer to righteousness.” (Al-Ma’idah 5:8)²⁴. I say this for both the Kurdist and Turkist. If your (Islamic) knowledge and faith are not compatible with justice and equity, there is a problem in your knowledge and faith. We do not have the right to say anything about their faith but there is a problem, so it is necessary to eliminate it. What is it? We said before, the Prophet Muhammad says: ‘All people are as equal as the teeth of a comb’. Or ‘Wish for others what you wish for yourself’. At this point, we are overdoing it. The state does this, but it also does not do this. Then if you say, ‘let us think in this way’, you would look narrowly. Likewise, the PKK does this, then if you say, ‘Kurds are like that’, you would look narrowly again.” (Nr. 11)

There are certain factors which prevent religious actors from approaching the issues with the idea of justice according to this participant. He believed that differences in the personal interpretations of the religious actors hinder them from considering impartially. For instance, this participant pointed out that it would be unfair to evaluate the Kurds by putting forward the actions of the PKK. Likewise, religious actors’ perception of the state as only through its deficiencies of its activities would also be misleading. Thus, he highlighted that religious actors should deal with the issues in accordance with justice and equity to remove the cleavages among them. It is also noteworthy to specify that the participant expressed that he did not expect the total abolishment of the cleavages since the Islamic world after the death of Prophet Muhammad witnessed huge clashes among the companions of him. Although this participant had a distrust towards the KM, his

²⁴ (The Noble Quran n.d.)

distrust may not constitute an impediment to considering impartially towards the resolution of the Kurdish issue. This fact might be important to highlight the religious actors' contribution to peace since although they take certain stances towards the conflicts, values such as justice and equity provide them to set aside their ideological orientation and to prioritize the importance of securing justice and equity.

Another participant (Nr. 7) repeated the same verse²⁵, mentioned above, as one of the core principles of Islam for designing social relations in accordance with justice. In line with the idea of this verse, another one (Nr. 9) emphasized the necessity that everyone should defend rights for all, even for the people who one hates. Thus, the common emphasis by these three participants (Nr. 7, 9, 11), although they had a diverse ideological orientation, was on defending justice in any case and for anyone. Such emphasis shows the ability of these participants to empathize with the people who are otherized. This might be because they were ethnically Kurds who lived in the Southeastern region and witnessed the 'ethnopolitical' conflict at first hand. While the participant (Nr. 11) expressed that he experienced the oppressive measures of the 1980 coup', another one (Nr. 9) was also exposed to the discriminations as a result of the same coup due to her way of dressing (headscarf issue). Hence, experiences of these two participants (Nr. 9 and Nr. 11) might lead them to look from the perspective of the oppressed. Furthermore, although all (Nr. 7, 9, 11) have different ideological stances, their belief in justice for all allows them to prioritize establishing justice.

The second theme, '*historical background of the disunity*,' which was underlined by four participants (Nr. 1, 9, 11, 12), is that the cleavages among the religious actors of the Islamic world date back to the period after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. While one of the participants (Nr. 1), who was a *mele*, explained the beginning of the divisions with the penetration of certain traditions, which don't derive from religion, into Islam, other two (Nr. 9 and Nr. 12), who were politicians and members of DIK, highlighted that after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, fights for power, ethnocentrism, racial nationalism, and sectarianism started. Thus, the period after the death of the Prophet Muhammad was seen by these participants as the beginning of the divisions among the Islamic scholars. The intrusion of certain traditions and of certain principles, which are

²⁵ Ibid.

not compatible with Islam, into the religion might be seen as one of the reasons why there are cleavages among religious scholars.

Another participant evaluated the origin of today's understanding of Islam by criticizing the sacralization of the state tradition:

“After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the power struggles to rule started. (...) The state was sanctified. Likewise, the rulers were seen as sacred. This tradition continues today. But there is no such thing in the essence of religions, especially in the essence of Islam. (...) There are equality and freedom in Islam. I attribute this misunderstanding of Islam to the exegesis prepared by men since ‘man’ means hegemony and power.” (Nr. 9)

This perception of this participant differs from the “political power approach” of Majid Khadduri and Ibn Khaldūn, which regards the state’s legitimacy and authority over people as a necessity to assure preserving “social order” (Al-Qurtuby, 2013: 305). The political power approach to peace lacks the positive peace dimension by just emphasizing “an absence of war” (Qurtuby, 2013: 306) whereas the approach of this participant might be related to “the Islah and Tajdid approach” which necessitates both the existence of negative peace and implementations of Islamic norms such as “justice, equality, human dignity” (Qurtuby, 2013). Contrary to the approach of this participant, another one (Nr. 11), who was an educator, linked the formation of a peaceful environment in the case of the Kurdish issue to be powerful as a country. The reason why he related peace to be a powerful country was that if the country would become powerful, it could eliminate the manipulations of the external pressures. Besides this explanation, he put forward that the people of the region did no longer insistently claim to have certain rights after seeing the situation of Libya and Syria. Thus, this participant’s approach might be seen as closer to the political power approach to peace. Nonetheless, the closeness of the perception of the participant to political power approach in this issue does not necessarily mean that he disregards the requirements of a positive peace for a peaceful society. However, it might be argued that he may prioritize this approach for the resolution of the issue.

The two participants (Nr. 9 and Nr. 12) criticized the cleavages among the Islamic scholars by putting forward the ‘sanctifying the state and men’ mentality as a serious problem. The reason which these participants put forward this criticism reflects their

ideological orientation. Being a woman and a member of DIK, which is known with its closeness to the KM, they were in the position of opposing the religious understanding which defends 'state' as a divine institution and 'men' as an ultimate authority among the people.

As mentioned above, the interests of religious actors might affect their interpretations of religion. To illustrate the *degeneracies in interpretations of the religious knowledge*, one of the participants, who was a *mele*, (Nr. 5) expressed that today the notion of the right and the left in Islam are considered as ideological right and left by some. The participant (Nr. 5) explained that in Islam, one of the Prophet's hadith recommends Muslims to enter a mosque with the right foot and exit from there with the left foot. Besides, he mentioned the belief that in the day of judgment, the people, who will be going to paradise, will take their file in their right hands. However, the participant criticized this misunderstanding since the people from rightist ideologies do not act by the principles of Islam. He further stated that:

“For instance, helping the poor is mostly carried out by the social democrats, not by so-called conservatives. They are the rightist and the conservatives, but they don't share their wealth with the poor. Their neighbors are hungry, but they are going to *umrah* every year. (...) Thus, I am devout, but I see myself closer to social democrats.” (Nr. 5)

These explanations of this *mele* signify that although religiosity is associated with rightist ideologies in Turkey, in practice, he expressed that there is a discrepancy between the requirements of the religious principles and the actions of the people who define themselves conservative and religious. Thus, as an Islamic leader, he preferred to identify his ideological orientation with 'social democrats' who are more likely to act in accordance with the Islamic principles according to him. As a participant who expressed his distrust towards the current government, his criticisms towards the conservative elites might enlighten the reasons why he disassociates himself with the prevalent understanding of Islam by those conservatives in Turkey.

5.9. Discussion of the Findings

While the majority of the participants (eleven out of twelve) regarded Islam as a source of peace in essence, three participants did not recommend an Islamic formula for the resolution of the Kurdish issue. The reason why two of these three participants did not recommend an Islamic formula was that such formula could not be inclusive. However, on the other hand, these two accepted Islamic norms as all-encompassing. This dilemma might signify the difference between the norms and the practices of the religion by its followers. Moreover, these two participants, who did not accept Islam as a tool for peace in Turkey's Kurdish issue, were the members of the same political party, which promotes an understanding that human rights are above all religions, cultures, and ethnicities. Although these two explained that they interpret Islamic norms as the same with this understanding, they expressed that the prevailing interpretation of Islam in Turkey differs from its essence. Besides, five of those, who saw Islam as a source of peace and had ideologically diverse positions, explicitly warned about its misuse by both political and religious authorities, which might be a sign of the existing misutilization of Islamic norms.

Concerning the Islamic values for removing inequalities, and pluralism, five participants, who were ethnically Kurds, highlighted that Islam doesn't see any ethnicity or race superior. Highlighting the non-superiority principle of Islam might be an indicator of the pressure on their ethnic identity.

Six participants, who consist of five Kurds and one Turk, put forward "Golden Rule" in line with the Islamic values for removing inequalities. Their emphasis on this rule depicts that although these six participants were ideologically dispersed, they commonly share the belief in the power of empathy.

Three participants expressed that 'struggle for peace' is a requirement for a peaceful environment. The common side of these three was that they were the people who actively voice the issues of their society by engaging *civic activism*. In the absence of generalizable data, the fact that two women of this study were involved in such civic activism can lead one to further hypothesize that women are more likely to strive for a peaceful environment. Likewise, three women participants of this study made the emphasis to inclusive aspects of Charter of Medina and the composition of the first believers coming from diverse background regardless of race, gender, religion, and

culture. The role of women as religious actors who believe in ‘inclusivity’ needs to be empowered for achieving peace.

‘Will for peace’ was highlighted by three participants who were ethnically Kurds and were able to observe the peace process from ‘an inside perspective’ since they were the residents of Diyarbakır. Their emphasis on ‘will for peace’ depicts that peace processes might be likely to be utilized by the conflicting parties as leverage to strengthen their positions. Hence, these people who experienced the peace process in Turkey as insiders needed to emphasize that a peace process must be initiated if there is a sincere will for peace by conflicting parties.

Half of those who highlighted justice as a crucial principle in Islam to remove inequalities, were the participants who had an ideological closeness to the government. Their emphasis on justice as a requirement for peace might reflect that among the Islamic approaches to peace they prefer “The Islah and Tajdid approach,” which covers both negative and positive peace. However, one of these three participants, who had an ideological closeness to the government, highlighted the importance of being powerful as a country for the resolution of conflicts and his approach might also be read through “the political power approach to peace” as discussed before (Al-Qurtuby, 2013). Hence, according to him, it might be put forward that although prioritizing the “political power approach to peace” is a necessity to resolve the Kurdish issue in Turkey, the existence of justice is a crucial ingredient of a peaceful society. Thus, since ‘peace’ is a multidimensional concept, emphasis of the participant may include simultaneously two approaches to peace. The argument presented in the literature review which states that while the religious actors who have ideological closeness to the government might be likely to prefer prioritizing “protection of social order” at any price, those religious actors, who are exposed to unequal and violent treatments may tend to emphasize “peace through the power of law and institutions, the power of communication, the power of human spirit, and the power of love” (Al-Qurtuby 2013: 305) did not entirely concur with the findings of this study. Although the participant, who put forward the necessity to be powerful as a country for the resolution of the conflict, had ideologically a close stance to the government, he also highlighted the importance of ‘justice’, ‘freedom’, ‘equity’, and ‘equality’ for all people as requirements for a peaceful society. Besides, this participant expressed that he was subjected to ‘unequal and violent treatments’ after the 1980 military coup in Turkey. Furthermore, those, who touched upon the existence of justice, equality,

human dignity, respect for all people as a crucial condition for peace as “Islah and Tajdid,” approach proposes, consist of ideologically diverse participants, including the participants who had ideological closeness to the government. Although the main emphasis made by the government is on ‘justice’, the participants who had a close ideological stance to the government preferred to draw attention to certain inclusive values other than ‘justice’ for creating a peaceful environment. Hence, such closeness to the government does not necessarily lead to prioritizing ‘political power approach to peace’.

Moreover, six participants who drew attention to ‘justice’ as a value to remove inequalities in a society were ethnically Kurds. This emphasis signifies that as devout Kurdish people, they saw a lack of justice in their society. These participants consisted of those who had ideologically close stance to the government and those who had neutral stance. Even though ‘justice’ is perceived in different ways according to one’s ideological stance in Turkey (Balta, et al. 2017), the participants, who highlighted ‘justice’, also emphasized the need for ‘equality, respect, empathy, freedom, equity, and protection of the rights for all’. Hence, they held a more inclusivist perspective in their understanding of peace.

Another interesting finding is that although four participants had ideologically divided approach, they emphasized ‘equalizing function of worships in Islam.’ The common aspect of these participants is that they were ethnically Kurdish people. Thus, despite their ideological differences, they believed that the aim of Islamic duties (worships) was to teach Muslims that all people are equal regardless of their ethnicity, race, gender.

The classification of Haynes (2009) highlights “mediation between conflicting parties” as one of the contributions of the faith-based peace activities. In line with this argument, three participants emphasized ‘making settlement between the conflicting groups’ as a religious responsibility. Since one of them was a local mediator, the emphasis of this participant to mediation can be seen as an expected result. Two other participants highlighted this responsibility by referring to the Quran since the religious method of conflict resolution is embedded in this verse²⁶.

Regarding the social and political conditions for a peaceful environment, four of the participants touched upon the need for a peaceful discourse by the political leaders. As

²⁶ (The Noble Quran n.d.)

Alger (2002) argued, one of the ways in which the religious actors contribute to peace is that they can act as “social critic” by calling government officials and other authorities to “account for unjust and abusive policies.” Thus, as religious actors, these participants reflect that the religious actors can call the political leaders for using a peaceful discourse via their feature of being “social critics.”

An important reference made by three participants to a verse in the Quran which states that “*O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is acquainted with what you do*” (The Noble Quran n.d.). Although these three participants had a different ideological stance from each other, they met in the same reference from the religion. Believing in this verse might be effective on the religious actors’ prioritization of justice for all regardless of the people’s ideological position. Besides, the fact that they were ethnically Kurds, who enables them to empathize with others as the largest ethnic minority in Turkey, might be seen as effective factor in their emphasis on being just for everyone, including those who one has negative feelings for.

The participants (nine out of twelve) overwhelmingly stated that they believe in the pluralistic nature of Islam, which presents a just society to both Muslims and non-Muslims. The findings are in line with the arguments of Soroush, who is an Islamic thinker and an advocate of human rights, who defend that religious governments should aim to protect “the rights of man” and the “sanctity of religion” at the same time by prioritizing human rights (Soroush 2000; Appleby, 2000: 261). These participants put forward that Islam and the practices of the Prophet Muhammad order Muslims to create a just social order which guarantees both the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus, Muslims have to deal with non-Muslims in a framework of Islamic law according to their interpretations. Two of the participants exemplified Al-Farabi’s al-Madina al-fadila (The Virtuous City) for all people on the earth as a place in which Islamic law is carried out. This inclusive understanding of the participants might depict their potential to contribute to peace since the religious actors who have such feature can play a role in resolutions of conflicts.

As argued at the beginning of this study, since ethnically and politically heterogenous, but religiously homogenous groups could have certain problems in utilizing religion as a

peace tool, there is a need for liberalizing religious actors from their deeply associated ties with ethnicity and politics. The findings of this research show that while three participants stated that religious actors, who might contribute to peace, should be independent of nationalist tendencies, the other three defended that those actors should be independent of political affiliations. Besides, two other participants emphasized that religious actors should be impartial to be effective players in the resolution of conflicts. Thus, eight out of twelve participants agreed that religious actors, who are independent of nationalist and political affiliations, could become effective players for contributing to peace.

In terms of the religious actors' relation to the politics, Sandal (2007) puts forward that such actors should refrain from the party politics to preserve their "credibility" and to avoid being an interest-seeker. Seven participants of this study emphasized the significance of religious actors' impartiality and distance from politics since they considered that the closeness to politics is likely to undermine the peculiar characteristics of religious actors, such as trust, respectability, and credibility. On the other hand, four participants highlighted that those actors should also have authority and power, and the potential to reach many people. These resources are the opportunities of the religious actors who are in "the majority status" (Brewer et al., 2010). While the majority status enables the religious actors to enter political spaces and have more access to resources, those who have such status are less likely to oppose "the regime or to exclusive forms of ethnonationalism" (Brewer et al., 2010). Thus, there is a dilemma concerning the situation which necessitates the religious actors' being influential and distanced from the politics at the same time.

6. CONCLUSION

The prevalent understanding of Islamic norms in Turkey and its practical implications substantially differ from the theoretical understanding of those norms. The misutilization of religious norms became frequently a highlighted aspect of the discussions of Islam. Although the participants touched upon the redundancy of religious norms for removing inequalities and providing a pluralist environment, ‘culture of submissiveness’ was emphasized by the participants, who had ideologically diverse backgrounds, as a practical outcome of religious values in Turkey. The emphasis on the misutilizations of religious norms might be effective in depicting the fact that religion has also a potential to justify the violence and the enmity, and to become a tool for obtaining political interests. The interpretations of religious norms by depending on the political interests, and the differences between actions and beliefs were among the factors, expressed by the participants, which lead to the misuse of religious norms. A further examination on these factors may enlighten the fact that under which circumstances religious norms might be more likely to be misused.

Despite such misuse of religious norms by either political elites or religious elites, there are still Islamic norms which can be facilitated to promote peace in a conflictual environment. “Golden Rule” is one of those norms which might be useful to create a mutual understanding between conflicting groups since it emphasizes “the power of empathy”. It is a rule which was recommended by the participants who had a diverse ideological background.

“Struggle for peace” is regarded as a religious and humanitarian responsibility by those who actively voice the concerns and the problems in their society. The motivation lies behind their “struggle for peace” depends on their understanding of Islamic norms. This signifies the potential of those norms in giving a motivation to their adherents for working in achieving peace.

Women participants of this research touched upon the “inclusive nature” of Islam and gave the examples from Islamic history to illustrate the inclusiveness of Islamic principles. Since religious actors who promote such inclusive understanding of religions might be potential players to contribute to peace, women as religious actors need to be empowered.

As opposed to the argument which states that religious actors who have an ideological closeness to the government prioritize “the political power approach,” the participants of this research, including those who had such closeness to the government, preferred to prioritize “Islah and Tajdid approach” which contains both negative and positive peace. Besides, although there was also an emphasis to “the political power approach” to the resolution of the Kurdish issue, the same participant, who made this emphasis, also put forward the significance of the values such as ‘justice’, ‘freedom’, ‘equity’, and ‘equality’ for all people in a country to live peacefully. Furthermore, since ‘justice’, ‘equality’, ‘freedom’, and ‘equity’ were commonly put forward by the participants as an inevitable condition for peace, it can be argued that they chose to prioritize “Islah and Tajdid approach.”

The “equalizing function of the worships in Islam” was another theme which was put forward by those participants who had an ideologically diverse stance. This was one of the unifying themes among the ideologically divided participants. Such function of Islam was put forward as an example to Islam’s unifying feature regardless of race, gender, and ethnicity. This indicates that if peace process is ever to be initiated the political elites can refer to worshipping and places for worship to highlight the need for peace in the society.

As in line with the literature which regards that religious actors might have a duty to be *social critics* to call the political elites to account unjust treatments, the need for political leaders’ peaceful discourses was expressed by the participants. The religious actors pointed out the necessity to have such discourses in a country to create a peaceful environment for its people. Their call might depict that they can be *social critics* as the literature suggested.

Another reference from the Quran, that is, “*Do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness.*” is a common point made by the several participants who had ideologically diverse stance. This approach of those participants might signify that the religious actors may have the potential to prioritize

“justice” for everyone regardless of their feelings of hatred. Hence, ideological diversity might not be an obstacle for those religious actors who embrace the importance of this verse. Even though the understanding of ‘justice’ among the people in Turkey differs from each other, the existence of ‘justice’ is a common need for all members of Turkey’s society (Balta, et al. 2017). By taking into consideration the recommendation of Islam concerning ‘justice’ regardless of one’s feelings of hatred, Islam’s impartial approach to ‘justice’ might be put forward as a norm for peace in Turkey.

In order to facilitate religious actors as contributors to peace, it can be argued that there is a need to liberalize those actors from their entrenched bonds with ethnicity and politics. This argument was supported by the arguments of most of the participants of this research. As the literature suggested, religious actors are not homogenous since they can have either “majority” or “minority” status. They are expected to have authority and power to make decisions and potential to reach many people. Such expectations can be met by the religious actors who have a majority status, which refers to “the established religions, tied to the state and linked to the majority population’s sense of nationalism” (Brewer et al. 2010: 1030). On the other hand, those actors are also expected to be impartial towards the conflicting parties. Those who have majority status might lack the quality of being impartial since they are the members of “the established religions, tied to the state and linked to the majority population’s sense of nationalism” (Brewer et al. 2010: 1030). Although the minority status of religious actors might be more beneficial to their contribution to peace since they are likely to empathize with “others,” such status lacks the quality of having authority and reaching many people. Therefore, this dilemma implies that guaranteeing impartiality and having authority and power of religious actors at the same time would be a compelling duty.

Lastly, it is important to note that ideological divisions among the religious actors might create some obstacles to provide a common framework for their understanding of the Kurdish issue. Although they defined the Kurdish issue by touching upon the problems which were emerged from the foundational ideology of the Republic, the pressure on the Kurdish language, and the denial of ethnic identity, their perceptions of the peace process and of the actors of the process might signify a potential drawback to create a common ground among them.

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APPENDIX A



Sabancı Üniversitesi Araştırmaya Katılım Onayı Formu

Araştırma Başlığı: İslami aktörlerin Türkiye'deki barış sürecine ilişkin olarak barış algılarını ve barışa ulaşmak için önerdikleri normatif değerleri anlamak

Projenin Esas Araştırmacısı: Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik
Projenin Saha Araştırmacısı: Merve Kayan/ FASS Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi
Görüşmeyi yapan kişi: Merve Kayan

Bu araştırmanın amacı:

Bu araştırma, Sabancı Üniversitesi Sanat ve Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi Uyuşmazlık Analizi ve Çözümü Yüksek Lisans Programı öğrencisi Merve Kayan'ın, Prof. Dr. Ayşe Betül Çelik sorumluluğu altında yürütülen tez araştırması için bilgi toplamak amacıyla yapılmaktadır.

Bu araştırma, Türkiye'deki İslami aktörlerin Kürt meselesine dair normatif önerilerini keşfetmek için yarı yapılandırılmış sorularla yapılacak görüşmeler ile bu aktörlerin barış algılarını anlamaya yöneliktir.

Önerilen araştırmanın spesifik amaçları aşağıda özetlenmektedir:

Türkiye'deki İslami aktörlerin barış algılarını anlamak ve onların Kürt meselesi için barışı sağlama yolunda önerdikleri normatif değerleri keşfetmektir.

Görüşme sürecinde sorulacaklar

Kürt meselesi için barışa nasıl ulaşılabileceğine dair düşüncelerinizi öğrenmek amacıyla açık uçlu sorular sorulacaktır.

Görüşme yaklaşık altmış dakika sürecektir.

Aşağıda bu araştırmaya katılmanızın içerdiği riskler veya rahatsızlıklar belirtilmiştir:

Katılımınız gönüllülük esasına dayanır. Katılmamayı tercih edebilirsiniz. Görüşme süresi yaklaşık altmış dakikadır. Eğer bazı soruları tartışmalı ya da hassas içerikte olduğunu düşünürseniz soruyu atlayabilir veya çalışmadan ayrılabilirsiniz. Eğer bu araştırmaya katılmaya karar verseniz bile istediğiniz zaman geri çekilebilirsiniz.

Bu araştırmaya katılmanın size herhangi bir maliyeti olmayacaktır. Cevaplarınız gizli kalacaktır ve cevaplarınızı tanımlayıcı bir bilgi -mesela isminize veya kimliğinize dair- toplanmayacaktır. İsim bilginiz gizli kalacaktır ve -onayınız olmadığı takdirde- asla açığa çıkartılmayacaktır.

Kabul etmeniz durumunda, görüşme ses kayıt cihazı ile kaydedilecektir. Eğer buna onay vermezseniz, kabul etmeniz durumunda not alınacaktır. Görüşmeyi istediğiniz herhangi bir anda durdurabilirsiniz ve cevap vermek istemediğiniz soruları geçebilirsiniz.

Eğer bu görüşme hakkında sorularınız olursa, lütfen Sanat ve Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi öğretim üyesi Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik ile (216) 483 9298 telefon numarasından veya bcelik@sabanciuniv.edu e-mail adresinden irtibata geçiniz.

Eğer haklarınızın herhangi bir şekilde ihlal edildiğini düşünüyorsanız, lütfen Sabancı Üniversitesi Araştırma Etik Kurulu başkanı Prof. Mehmet Yıldız ile (216) 300-1301 numarasından veya meyildiz@sabanciuniv.edu e-mail adresinden irtibata geçiniz.

Bu onay formunu imzalamakla, bu araştırmaya katılımınıza rızanız olduğunu kabul etmektesiniz.

Ses kaydına onay veriyor musunuz? : Evet Hayır

İmza _____

Tarih _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) Kendinizi tanıtabilir misiniz? (Doğum yeriniz, yaşınız, eğitim seviyeniz, işiniz, etnik köken vs.)
- 2) Dini kimliğinizi nasıl tanımlarsınız?
- 3) Barış herkes için başka bir şey ifade edebiliyor. Sizin genel barış tanımınız nedir? [Barış ortamının sağlanmış olduğu bir dünya nasıl bir yerdir ?]
- 4) Sizce “barış”ın sağlanması için öncelikli amaçlar neler olmalıdır? Yani barış ortamının olmazsa olmazları nelerdir ?
- 5) Biraz da Türkiye’deki Kürt meselesi özelinden konuşalım. Öncelikle siz bu sorunu nasıl tanımlıyorsunuz? Size göre Kürt meselesinin sebepleri nelerdir?
- 6) Bu soruna yönelik bir barış süreci yaşadık geçmişte. Siz bu barış sürecini nasıl değerlendirirsiniz? Hangi alanlarda iyi gelişmeler hangi alanlarda kötü gelişmeler yaşadık?
- 7) Barış süreci neden bitti? O zamandan bu yana gelişmeleri nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?
- 8) Yeniden bir çözüm ihtimalinin nasıl olacağını düşünüyorsunuz? Sizce bunun için neler gerekiyor?
- 9) Sizce, din (İslam) barışa ulaşmak için bir çözüm aracı olabilir mi? Nasıl? Neden?
- 10) Sizce dini kanaat önderleri “barış”ın sağlanmasında rol almalı mıdır? Neden?
- 11) “Barış”a ulaşmakta rol alabilecek dini düşünce önderlerinin niteliklerinin neler olması gerekir?
- 12) Dini düşünce önderlerinin barışın sağlanmasında etkili olabilmesi için toplumsal ve siyasi atmosfer sizce nasıl olmalıdır?

13) Aynı dine ve mezhebe sahip olmasına rağmen, dini düşünce önderlerinin siyasi yaklaşımlarının farklı olmasını nasıl açıklarsınız? Peki toplum bireylerinin? [yani aynı dini kimliğe sahip insanlar neden birbirleri ile çatışır?]

14) Size göre din, bir toplumun bireyleri arasındaki eşitsizliği gidermek için hangi değerleri öncelemelidir/öne çıkarmalıdır? Türkiye’de hangi dini değerler öne çıkmakta?

15) Genelde din ve özelde İslam; çoğulculuk, yani etnisite, mezhep, ırk, cinsiyet gözetmeksizin herkesi kapsama ve herkese eşit haklar sunma açısından neler söyler?

16) Sizce Türkiye’de sağlanmış/oluşturulmuş/tarihsel olarak var olan bir “Müslüman kardeşliği” var mı?

17) Sizce “Müslüman Kardeşliği” bu coğrafyada neleri başardı ve neleri başaramadı?

Konuştuğumuz konulara dair eklemek istediğiniz başka bir şeyler var mı?

Teşekkür ederim...

APPENDIX C

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation	Ideological Stance	Date of the Interview	Place of the Interview
Nr. 1	56	Male	Kurdish	Mele – Retired İmam	Distrust towards the KM	January 15, 2019	Diyarbakır
Nr. 2	55	Male	Kurdish	Mele	Distrust towards both	January 11, 2019	Diyarbakır
Nr. 5	53	Male	Kurdish	Mele - Retired İmam	Distrust towards the current government	January 12, 2019	Diyarbakır
Nr. 6	73	Male	Kurdish	Mele	Neutral	January 12, 2019	Diyarbakır
Nr. 7	55	Male	Kurdish	Self-employed lawyer	Distrust towards both	January 12, 2019	Diyarbakır

Nr. 9	40	Female	Kurdish	Co-mayor and teacher – DIK member	Distrust towards the current government	January 14, 2019	Diyarbakır
Nr. 10	55	Male	Kurdish	Retired imam	Distrust towards the KM	January 15, 2019	Diyarbakır
Nr. 11	60	Male	Kurdish	Educator	Distrust towards the KM	January 16 2019	
Nr. 12	59	Female	Turkish	The politician is known with the religious identity – DIK member	Distrust towards the current government	January 30 2019	İstanbul
Nr. 13	54	Female	Turkish	Human rights activist is known with the religious identity	Distrust towards the current government	February 14, 2019	İstanbul
Nr. 14	46	Male	Kurdish	Lawyer	Neutral	January 15, 2019	Diyarbakır
Nr. 15	50	Male	Kurdish	Retired imam	Distrust towards both	January 14, 2019	Diyarbakır