

Sehlikoglu, Sertaç (2015). Intimate Publics, Public Intimacies: Natural Limits, Creation and the Culture of Mahremiyet in Turkey. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 33(2), 77-89.

Intimate Publics, Public Intimacies

The Natural Limits, Creation and Culture of *Mahremiyet* in Turkey

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This article offers an ethnographic account of the culture of *mahremiyet* [intimacy and privacy] in Turkey, not only as an institution of intimacy regulating everyday sexual relationships between individuals in public, but also as a system enabling the operation of social normalcies through the creation of boundaries and privileges. By probing the concepts of *mahremiyet* and *fitrat* [creation or natural disposition], the article investigates how intimacy operates in religious, mundane and political registers, and delves into the intricate relationship between the intimate and the shared. It suggests that the culture of *mahremiyet* is deeply rooted in the ways individuals construct their sense of selves in relation to others, and imagine *mahrem* boundaries as natural, God-given, or *fitri* laws in their entanglement with gender. The use of the language of *mahremiyet* in contemporary politics not only enables what can seem to be a meta-cultural intelligibility that guarantees popular support, but also distances any critique as strange or foreign.

Keywords: intimacy, Islam, *mahremiyet*, normativity, Turkey, sexuality,

Introduction

It was during the first couple of weeks of my fieldwork visit to Istanbul, in July 2011. While I was trying to settle down, as a former Istanbulite, I was also trying to adjust to the bustling and overwhelming lifestyle of the city, which had become much more crowded and transformed from vibrant to intense, exhausting and noisy since I had left in 2005. I was trying to adapt to various aspects and customs of socializing which either I had forgotten in

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the seven years of absence or were newly developed Istanbul habits. On one of these adjustment days, I was walking through one of the old markets, the Egyptian Bazaar in **Eminönü**, passing the various shops that sell spices, herbs and teas. The sellers were trying to attract the attention of the passers-by, mostly by trying to customize their sales talk to the potential needs of their targets. When a salesman finally addressed me, a slightly overweight young woman in a headscarf, his wording switched from ‘We have traditional Turkish apple tea’, (in English) to ‘*Abla* [sister], we have a new weight-loss tea’ (in Turkish). I was struck by his bold move of targeting a potential customer’s perceived ‘defect’. I turned round, looking surprised, and said, ‘Excuse me?’. ‘It’s summer time’, he replied, ‘You need to lose weight before you go swimming’. He was smiling with confidence. My feminist sensibilities reacted strongly against this approach, which turned women’s bodies into objects of (public) humiliation and reproduced normative beauty standards. In one sense, he had said nothing extraordinary, as we live in a world where women’s body images are within the public panopticon, subject to media portrayals and targeted by the beauty industry, which overwhelmingly focuses on women’s overweight bodies. I walked off proudly with the words: ‘Perhaps you should start drinking teas for your half-bald head and big belly!’ I later re-visited the shop several times to further study the salesman’s targeting strategies. His customized ‘beauty’ tea advertisements consistently targeted women only. Although the shop occasionally had male customers seeking recipes for ‘hair growth’ and sometimes ‘male endurance’, their requests were handled confidentially, in low voices, and the products were wrapped in old newspapers for privacy.

As a native speaker and a former Istanbulite, I was able to respond to the seller like a ‘local’ person: hastily and with confidence. My response did not, however, reflect my true feelings, which were ones of shock and the sense of having been violated. The experience sparked several thoughts and questions for me: are assumptions about women’s forbidden

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and sacred bodies in Islamicate contexts unfounded? And what are the current conditions that render women's theoretically more sacred and secret bodies an easy target for public, random intervention? All these questions led to a series of broader ones: How do intimacies operate in public? What are the dynamics that prioritize certain privacies, secrets and intimacies over others? Most importantly, how do they become reified as norms and gain public intelligibility?

Intimacy, as I argue elsewhere (Sehlikoglu 2015, 2016), is not limited to coupling or love in the context of Turkey, but is also about creating boundaries and making them intelligible, shared and thus normalized. Thus, *mahremiyet* is concerned with gendered bodies and the ways in which norms associated with femininity and masculinity are built and rebuilt, made and remade in everyday life (Moore 1988, Strathern 1990, Yanagisako & Collier 1987). To investigate such re-makings and reconfigurations, this paper traces two main concepts, *fitrat* [creation] and *mahrem* [intimate], across political debates in Turkish life. Both of these concepts are immanent in the culture of *mahremiyet* as an institution of intimacy (Berlant 1998). I simultaneously lay out the ways in which normalcies are formulated through the culture of *mahremiyet* and how these are intertwined with or diverge from the carnal, the sexual and the divine. The article critically engages with language and vocabulary derived from the culture of *mahremiyet* and attempts an analysis of their use in a contemporary politics aiming to achieve support from the public. I suggest that politicians gain support due to their proper use of intimate language that draws a boundary between those who understand (the 'value' of *mahrem*) and those (political opponents) who do not.

Introducing the *Mahrem*

In Turkey, the concept of intimacy can be translated many ways. An intimate bond between two people is described as *samimi*, which can be translated as 'genuine' or 'sincere' (Liebelt

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2014, Liebelt Forthcoming). If a relationship becomes *samimi*, it means that it is purified from artificial manners, words and poses, and becomes unpretentious. Applied to a person, it describes one who is able to reveal his or her ‘true’ self. Barriers are lifted, exclusively and often temporarily, for one particular person. This act of lifting enables an intimate bond between and amongst those who are included, or ‘allowed in’, as those barriers remain for those who are excluded. There are several words used to refer to this moment of lifting, as an act of sincerity. *Candan* [from the soul] or *içten* [from inside] can describe both an individual, and a relationship; while *sıkı fiki* [tightly bound] and *yürekten* [from the heart] refer particularly to an intimate bond. Several of those words reflect an interiority, and direct contact with a sense of self.

As in English, in Turkish intimacy is about boundaries, yet with its own particularities. *Samimi*(yet) [a state of candour or sincerity] needs to be mutual. Trespassing over one another’s boundaries without mutual agreement may make one *laubali* [unceremonious] to say the least: inappropriately informal, if not a violator or harasser. Those borders are pre-subjective, pre-semantic, and pre-discursive.

As I discuss elsewhere (Sehlikoglu 2016), the regulations embedded in Islamic family law interlink proximity and prohibition in the sense that two immediate relatives of the opposite sex, related by blood or by breastfeeding (milk), are *mahrems* to each other and therefore cannot marry. The culture of *mahremiyet* thus operates as an ‘institution of intimacy’ that gains its ‘metacultural intelligibility’ (Berlant and Warner 1998: 553) through the public. By looking at women’s everyday concerns regarding their public sexualities, I analyse the ways in which the culture of *mahremiyet* is *done* in the entanglements of everyday life (Sehlikoglu 2015, Sehlikoglu 2016). I talk of ‘culture’ to capture the practices, perceived manifestations and customs, and the social behaviours that have evolved around the particular understanding of *mahremiyet* in the Turkish context. Through the culture of

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mahremiyet, we can understand the operations of the intimate as it is imagined and operates in Turkey beyond the realm of the sexual.

The culture of *mahremiyet* creates boundaries, which simultaneously means that it differentiates insiders from outsiders: familial vs. unfamiliar, *mahrem* vs. *non-mahrem*, private vs. common, familiar vs. strange. The binary nature of *mahremiyet* has been highlighted in works that have studied the way it operates in several contexts in Turkey.¹ In her in-depth analysis of the term, Göle (1996) points out that the insider/outsider binary in *mahremiyet* does not fit into the customary theoretical framework of public/private. She suggests that *mahremiyet* encapsulates a more complex, dynamic and layered process of creating insiders vs. outsiders. Her ability to go beyond the public/private dichotomy can be traced in the anthropological literature as a means to further understand socialities in non-Western societies and to question the applicability of such a dichotomy in both non-Western and Western settings.²

There are times when the interior of those unspoken boundaries is so private and confidential that it cannot be easily vocalized, mentioned or described. Proprieties of confidentiality forbid it to be enunciated. In such cases, the word *mahrem* is used to avoid breaking confidentiality, since *mahrem*, derived from the Arabic root h-r-m, literally means 'forbidden'. *Mahrem* is a voiced yet non-descriptive reference to the *intimate*. The ineffable nature of the intimate is precisely why the word *mahrem* is not easily translatable into contemporary Turkish (Göle 1996) and can therefore have multiple references: one's home, wife, bedroom (*mahrem* space), secret (*mahrem* information), familiarity, domesticity, confidentiality and even sacredness. *Mahrem* refers to anything and everything one might avoid enunciating.

The Intimate Paradox

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What happens when the *mahrem* is enunciated in unveiled, explicit language? A public example from contemporary Turkey that can help us understand the uneasy relationship between the culture of *mahremiyet* and language is the ‘vagina debate’ that took place in December 2012.³ Aylin Nazlıaka, a female MP from the opposition party (CHP), stated in her parliamentary speech that ‘the Prime Minister should stop standing guard over women’s vaginas’.

Nazlıaka’s words targeted the then prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, along with his political party, and a particular type of attitude seen to have been violating women’s sexual privacy for many years, turning caesarean sections, abortions, and the preferred number of children (three) per woman into public matters.⁴ In line with the prime minister’s pro-natalist propaganda, it became routine for MPs, ministers and heads of local authorities, when invited to act as wedding witnesses, to publicly call on the young couple to have at least three children. A strange incident occurred at one formal reception when, in the presence of the press, a minister told a newly wed female professional, within earshot of everyone present, ‘I want a child from you’. Quite amusingly, the sentence has the same double meaning in Turkish as in English. It was unclear whether he wanted to father the baby or was just encouraging her to become a mother. However, nobody in the room showed discomfort at the minister’s comment. This incident once again raises the question of *mahremiyet*, the gendered making of the private and shows how easily women’s bodies (otherwise suggested to be sacred and honourable) are turned into public objects.

Going back to Nazlıaka’s statement, although the phrase ‘standing guard over women’s vaginas’ is very familiar to those accustomed to the activist feminist genre in Turkey and elsewhere,⁵ it violated the codes of *mahremiyet* in at least three levels. The first code violated is the linguistic. The public and explicit reference to the vagina, the *mahrem*, broke an important code in the culture of *mahremiyet*. Vagina [*vajina*] in Turkish is a

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technical, often medical, word that refers to women's genitalia. It entered the language as a loan-word only recently, and has been in circulation for no longer than thirty years, i.e., it does not carry much historical or ethical baggage. It is neither an inappropriate term nor a swearword nor a euphemism taught to children to avoid explicit reference to their sexual organs. The second code violated here is that of visualization: Nazlıaka's words provided a vivid mental image of Erdoğan keeping watch over the *mahrem* to illustrate the violations of women's privacies within those debates. She was calling upon the Prime Minister to show respect and sensitivity to issues involving women's privacy and sexuality.

As Nazlıaka had broken those two codes, when Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç stepped up to comment with an air of vexation and characterized her speech as 'shameful', it made great sense to the public. As a politician from the party in government, Arınç understood that his political agenda had been targeted by Nazlıaka's statement. He said that he felt 'ashamed' and that he 'blushed' when he heard a woman, and a mother, refer to 'her own organ' in public. Arınç chose his words – 'ashamed' and 'blushed' – deliberately to target Nazlıaka's honour as a woman in the public eye. They implied that Nazlıaka was a woman of dubious morality – while hinting at his own decorous manner, as a gentleman who 'blushes'.

Through this linguistic strategy, Arınç was able to turn the debate away from Nazlıaka's alert to the social crisis triggered by debates on abortion and towards Nazlıaka's own body, her own vagina. He twisted Nazlıaka's words and shifted the use of the word *vajina* from a symbolic reference to an embodied private reference. When a female politician refers to sexuality in order to address a pressing problem, she is framed as someone *shamelessly* talking about 'her own organ', hence the 'call for *shame*'.

By using the *mahremiyet* genre proficiently and articulately, Arınç was able to defeat Nazlıaka by redirecting the shame raised by her vivid description of the prime minister as

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guard of female genitals to Nazlıaka herself, her own body, and thereby away from her critique of the government. In fact, the intimate, the *mahrem*, is positioned as the most fragile privacy, because it can still be addressed, and thus subjectified. In other words, at the moment *mahrem*, the intimate that is forbidden to be enunciated, is addressed with proper, full and explicit reference, it becomes the subject of shame, and this was precisely the reason why Arınc made sense to many.

The third code broken concerns the speaker's position; within the duality of the culture of *mahremiyet*, Nazlıaka, being a woman, was positioned as the embodiment of *mahrem*. Islamicate⁶ heterosexual duality positions the feminine as passive, *mahrem* and penetrated – and the male as active and penetrating (Sehlikoglu 2016, Ze'evi 2006). Thus, when Nazlıaka pronounced the word *vajina*, she was breaking the *mahrem* codes twice: as a non-mute woman and by using an explicit (unveiled) language. Arınc, with his 'blushing', therefore contrasted with Nazlıaka and could thereby reflect extreme chastity.

Arınc's competence in the language of *mahremiyet* also revealed itself in another way, in his adoption of the position of a concerned male relative. According to the basic principles of the culture of *mahremiyet*, those who have (often familial) access to the *mahrem* zone are bound by fewer restrictions. She or he can act and speak more freely than an outsider. The same act (i.e., touching, gazing or addressing) is an indicator of intimacy between two insiders, whereas it may be harassment when coming from an outsider.

Therefore, in order for a male (whether the spice seller or Arınc) to trespass on the borders of a woman's privacy, they must first access the position of a presumed family member such as a brother (Bora 2012). By putting himself in the position of brother or father, an unrelated male may gain permission to publicly trespass on the borders of privacy. Arınc's pedagogic tone and the spice seller's term of address to me (*ablacım*: dear older sister) indicate this. By adopting such a familial position, they present themselves not as disrespectful harassers from

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the outside, violating another person's privacy, but as rightful insiders. However, what might be seen here as a twisted use of the language of *mahremiyet* often remains unrecognized locally.

The fragility of women's privacies (*mahrem*) in public is a result of the paradoxical nature of intimacy in the culture of *mahremiyet*: the significance of *mahrem* is embedded in its silence or invisibility; it is recognized as private when it is not enunciated. The *mahrem* is referred to through a veiled language (Najmabadi 1993). The moment the intimate [*mahrem*] is addressed or enunciated, it is no longer private but public. Thus, female bodies, which are formulated as *mahrem* and passive in Islamicate heterosexual duality, hold a more fragile privacy.

The fragility of the privacy of *mahrem* is the distinctive feature of its public mediation. Quoting Laurie Anderson's lyrics, 'it is not the bullet that kills you (it is the hole)', Braidotti reminds us how the 'boundaries between the inside and outside ... are not a one-track sequence. Their meaning, consequently, cannot be restricted to a one-way mode' (Braidotti 2013: 28). In other words, the fragility of the privacy of *mahrem* is not about the porous boundaries reified by the culture of *mahremiyet*, but about the easy reversibility of the position of the *mahrem*. This paradox is also the very mediation of intimacy. It is this reversibility that makes and re-makes the intimate in both public and private. In fact, the moment we speak about 'reversibility', we refer to the boundaries that the very institution, the culture of *mahremiyet*, creates. As becomes apparent in the next section, the culture of *mahremiyet* and the boundaries it suggests gain their 'meta-cultural intelligibility' through reference to a larger cosmology that links normative desires to human nature (*fitrat*) against chaos and recession.

***Fitrat*: Anticipated Nature**

If a woman acts in accordance with her *fitrat* and does not cross her (set) boundaries,
there is no reason for her not to live in peace (*huzur içinde*).

Havva

Vignette 1

Every now and then over the last seven years, Turkish feminists have woken up to yet another day on which they have to object to a statement by a politician, bureaucrat or even scholar. The debates all evolve and eventually end in a similar manner: the opponents severely criticize the statement, allies defend it and a large majority simply watch the entire process, partly finding it trivial and unworthy of such a furious response.

In November 2014, then President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan delivered a speech at the Women and Justice Summit hosted by the Turkish Women and Democracy Association (KADEM).

In response to the question ‘What do women need?’, Erdoğan explained that equality should be established between those of the same kind, following which he elaborated on the issue of gender equality:

What a woman needs is not equality, but equity,⁷ and thus, justice. That is what we need. You cannot equate women and men. That would be against *fitrat* [creation]. Because their *fitrat* is not the same. Their nature is not the same. Their constitutions [*bünye*] are not the same. For instance, you cannot ask a pregnant woman to work under the same conditions as a man.

His words circulated on the internet and in the media, summarized as ‘gender equality is against *fitrat*’. Many opponents of the ruling party and of Erdoğan were already inflamed with rage against the word *fitrat*, since it had not been long since Erdoğan had suggested that death is part of the *fitrat* of labour in mines. This had been his attempt to comfort the families of deceased miners after a tragic mining accident with 301 deaths in May 2014. Feminist

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activists, on the other hand, had long seen the potential of such a discourse to legitimize femicides, sexual harassment and inequalities in the workplace. Feminist theologian Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal contributed to the debate by stating that the Qur'an does not describe a particular *fitrat*, or nature, for man or woman. Feminists were responding critically to such statements as they knew of the wider implications speaking to the minds of the majority. Before I discuss the linguistic and epistemological limits of *fitrat*, it is necessary to visit another snapshot from everyday Turkey.

Vignette 2

The following vignette is from Istanbul, on a winter weekend in February 2012, featuring a vibrant debate between two pious women and their discussion about segregation, and about gender and sexuality in relation to *fitrat*.

I was spending time with two of my interlocutors, Aysu and Ezgi, two middle-class housewives in their early thirties, each a mother of two children. We started speaking about segregation at home when guests come and they both said that they did not like home settings where there was absolute segregation. There were even cases where they did not see the male host at all. Aysu said she finds 'too much religiosity ... so backward [*gerici*] and it does not exist in religion [*dinde yok*']'. Ezgi added that 'it is not *fitri* either'. I was accustomed to secularist discourses that refer to certain traditional practices as backward and not modern. However, Aysu and Ezgi's critique was fundamentally different, not only because they seemed rooted in an Islamic perspective, but also because their claims had something normative, universalistic and even naturalistic about them. As they recognized my interest and were themselves involved in ongoing reflection, Ezgi suggested listening to Mustafa *İslamoğlu*'s view on this. *İslamoğlu* is a Turkish preacher, well known for his appearances on TV and his videos on YouTube. Ezgi recommended him because, according to her, he was

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one of the most ‘balanced’ preachers. After checking several videos, we found one from 2005 where İslamoğlu responded to the question: ‘How should segregation [*haremlik-selamlık*] take place?’⁸ I realized that the expression ‘too much segregation’ was recurrent in the debate as İslamoğlu was also using it. Just like Ezgi and Aysu, İslamoğlu found ‘too much’ segregation backward. He associated such practices with ‘nomadism’ [*bedevilik*] and Islamic segregation with civility [*medenilik*]. Moreover, he suggested that the ‘legitimate’ [*meşru*] boundaries Islam advocated were related to the true nature [*fitrat*] of men and women. During his preaching, he called on Muslims to pay attention to the *fitri* boundaries that Islam put forward. He said:

If you set extra rules that go beyond the legitimate limits, your children will have problems in sexuality. The child has problems because the *fitri* limits are not guarded. A mother keeps herself distant from her own son ... This may result in such shocking transgressions that even you will be astounded and ask ‘is this boy mine?’

His words require some explanation for those who are unfamiliar with the context and discourse. He gives an extreme example in order to convince his listeners. He uses ‘veiled’ language in his preaching since he is speaking to women. By saying ‘you will be astounded and ask “is this boy mine?”’ he means that the son may start developing sexual attraction towards his own mother if she keeps herself distant from him.

***Fitri* Boundaries**

Fitrat has multiple meanings. It means ‘nature’ and ‘God-given’, but it also refers to acting as one was meant to act, being as one is meant to be. In the encyclopaedia written by the large team of scholars from the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Turkey, *fitrat* is defined as ‘creation, possessing a disposition, proclivity or inclination’ (Hökelekli 1988). *Fitrat*

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principally refers to and defines human nature, rather than that of non-humans or non-living objects which are also created by God (Aydüz 2014).

According to İslamoğlu, *mahrem* borders were set by the Creator who knew the ‘true nature’ of human sexuality. In his analysis, İslamoğlu admits that it is the very boundaries that create the sexual attraction itself. They maintain heterosexual norms under which women and men are attracted to each other and women’s body parts and certain movements are defined and therefore reified as heterosexually appealing or desired. In İslamoğlu’s understanding, once you play with those boundaries, you start setting new sexualities, which may be ‘too dangerous to play with’.

İslamoğlu’s description of desire seems to have some parallels with Lacanian desire (Lacan & Miller 1988). According to Lacan’s psychoanalytical perspective, desire is constituted by three elements: lack, law and signifier. One dimension of the conversation above that needs more explication is that of desire and boundaries – which have more to do with law and the signifier than with a lack. From İslamoğlu’s perspective, ‘dangerous’ (illegitimate) desires are only unleashed when *fitri* boundaries are not guarded, as those borders signify the limits of non-subversive desire. Although not equally legitimate, all desires (heterosexual and non-heterosexual alike) are God-given, embedded in the nature of humans (both male and female). Indeed, the above discussion suggests the possibility of non-normative desires – but they are not seen as *fitri*. The relationship between the two sexes is thus regulated by God himself through the creation of *mahrem* borders. God also created religion in order for people to live in harmony with their nature. This is precisely why İslamoğlu is suggesting that the boundaries should be maintained in the way God intended them. This also explains why Arzu and Ezgi find İslamoğlu persuasive: not necessarily because he confirms their view of the limits of segregation, but because he is able to make

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the limits intelligible, by linking them to a larger cosmology of universal desires and juxtaposing them with danger, chaos and recession.

These boundaries reach beyond the sexual realm. On the one hand, they produce a sexual script as Ze'evi (2006: 47) discusses. On the other hand, as becomes obvious in the above vignette, *mahremiyet* is imagined in relation to a larger cosmology, a universal balance of desires. When Arzu and Ezgi are trying to understand the boundaries of *mahrem*, they try to make sense of the validity of the normative boundaries by linking them to the essence of manhood and womanhood.

We should note that *fitrat* is not a stationary concept. It refers to potentiality rather than actuality, based on the ability of humans to evolve or change. This change should take place along the same lines as the purpose of creation. In terms of temporality, the term is embedded in the future rather than in the past or the present. In other words, *fitrat* suggests both norms and ideals about human possibilities while affirming life as potential, which partly parallels Braidotti's (Braidotti 2010) formulation. Yet, according to Islamic texts, understanding *fitrat* ensures contentment (al-Bukhaari 1994, Hökelekli 1988). If an individual discovers the purpose of his or her creation and acts according to it, he or she will not be doomed in this world or in the other. Therefore, living according to Islam is part of *fitrat*, and so is acting according to your age and gender. In the everyday life of Ezgi and Aysu as pious Muslims, *fitrat* is a mechanism to understand the way things are meant to be.

Public Intelligibility

Berlant says that 'intimacy ... involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way' (Berlant 1998: 281). Going back to Erdoğan's statement on *fitrat*, despite the furious nature of the critique raised by different political perspectives, Erdoğan's words were both sensible and intelligible. To

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many it was almost as if Erdoğan was stating the obvious. Conversely, his ability to use a particular terminology derived from the institution of intimacy, *mahremiyet*, enabled his speech to establish an intimate connection between himself and the public. The infuriating statements and outrage it triggered are all normalized, rendered mundane and ordinary by the institution I analyse here.

The vocabulary Erdoğan uses is not derived from Western values: he was referring to creation, to how individuals are created as women and men and thus should be evaluated and treated differently, based on their feminine and masculine needs. He did not need to elaborate on what those needs are, since he was referring to the norms that he signalled as shared with his followers. The particular language makes the statements not only intelligible, but also familiar, unpretentious and thus *samimi*, resulting in an intimate bond between those in power and their supporters.

In fact, Erdoğan's ability to tap into language to intimately connect with his followers has already been mentioned in several studies and described as devotion (Çakır & Çalmuk 2001, Görener & Ucal 2011). According to Gulalp, Erdoğan is someone his followers can relate to (Gulalp 2003: 386). Although intimate relations and intimate bonding are about proximity, the language of intimacy enables Erdoğan to connect with the public, with those who are not physically close.

However, his use of the language of *mahremiyet* is paramount less for securing simple intelligibility here than for its ability to create new boundaries between insiders and outsiders. This is why he responded to critics by saying that feminists could never understand what it means to have 'heaven below the feet of mothers', referring to a *hadith* (saying of the Prophet [pbuh]). The moment he drew on the language of intimacy, he could reach out and connect with his followers at an intimate level, those who understand and support his words within

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the *mahrem* zone. All others who criticize him, whether from a secularist, feminist or other standpoint, were thereby declared foreigners, outsiders.

Going back to the institution of intimacy as something ‘mediated by public’, Berlant and Warner (1998), argue that heterosexual culture creates privacy in order to operate and preserve its own coherency. In this ground-breaking work, the authors focus on queer counter-intimacies and counter-publics, that is, primarily unofficial aspects of intimate bonding which may help in revealing transitional dynamics that are not otherwise apparent. This is different from Shryock’s (2004) formulation of mass mediation and social intimacy. Focusing on identity formation, Shryock (2004: 3) suggests the term ‘off-stage’ as a terrain ‘in which the explicitly public is made, even staged, before it is shown’. He says that ‘[t]he gaps and screens that set this terrain apart from contexts of public display make it hard to represent, ethnographically, aesthetically, and politically, despite the essential role it plays in the creation of public culture’ (ibid.). The public mediation Berlant and Warner refer to takes different forms and shapes in different socialities, spaces and geographies. In the context of Turkey, it is important to realize that this is formulated through an understanding of ‘creation’, *fitrat*.

Conclusion

As discussed in the introduction to this special section, one of the conceptual barriers anthropological enquiry encounters in relation to intimacy is its ambiguous relationship with language. Recent studies show that the culture of *mahremiyet* as an institution of intimacy has an uneasy relationship with other senses. Gazing, for instance, has a physical power in this culture due to its ability to penetrate (Sehlikoglu 2015, 2016). Affect theory has helped us to grasp the unspoken aspects of intimacy, intimate relations and intimate bonding in human and non-human life. It is equally crucial to address the systems that operate in the making of

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the intimate, i.e., what makes the intimate intelligible. Indeed, there are multiple forms of intimacies and it is important to recognize the distinctions between those multiple forms (Rubin 1975), including the pre-, peri- and post-lingual ones. When Henrietta Moore delivered the keynote speech to the workshop on intimacy that became this collection of articles, she mentioned ‘an awkward relationship between language and intimacy’ as one of the intimacy’s components (Moore 2014). The way the institution of intimacy operates in multiple realms of everyday Turkey suggests, as this article tries to demonstrate, that this awkward relationship between language and the intimate is in fact the very foundation of its public intelligibility.

It is no surprise that the intimate is able to manifest itself across multiple realms of everyday life, political and social alike. In her ground-breaking work *Erotic Vatan* [Homeland], Najmabadi (1997) demonstrated how national communal bonds are established through domestic and familial norms and through the desires attributed to those norms. In a similar vein, Nagel (1998) shows how the nation and the modern state can implicate subjects through masculine, emotive attachments.

In this understanding, intimacy is entangled with boundaries, privacies, proximities, insiders and secrecies. As the discussion on *fitrat* suggests, this entanglement is not static or fixed. It constantly shifts, formulates and reformulates itself. *Fitrat* is particularly important in understanding public operations of intimacy in the context of Turkey since, as we have seen, the language of *mahremiyet* can also provide both the intelligibility of normative politics and an intimate bond between politicians and their supporters.

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Notes

¹ There is a literature on the historical studies of the ways *mahremiyet* operates in families and neighbourhoods (Duben 1985, 1990; Armağan 2008; see also Duben and Behar 1996, 2002; Yılmaz 2000; Mills 2007; Kalender 2013), and there is also a literature on the ways in which modernization influenced *mahremiyet* as an institution and ruptured gender relations (Özbay 1995, 1999). In contemporary Turkey, discussion of *mahremiyet* as an institution that creates an untouchable sacred zone can be found in Zengin (2011) on politics and family, mostly in relation to hegemony, power, and public/private distinctions.[check]

² Hall (1984), for instance, suggested the term proxemics to mean non-verbal communication during intersubjective relations in multiple social settings. See also Candea M. 2011. Our division of the Universe. *Current Anthropology* 52: 309-34

³ The vagina debate took place after a series of political instances triggered by Erdoğan's statement: 'Each abortion is Uludere', referring to the military airstrike which took place in December 2011 and resulted in the killing of thirty-four civilians in Uludere, a Kurdish village in the southeast of Turkey.

⁴ Although abortion is subject to regulation in every country, there are no such widespread restrictions concerning caesarean sections performed on medical grounds, or (with the exception of China) the number of children a family ought to have, which is usually a matter of choice. It is therefore significant that the Prime Minister chose to make statements about the undesirability of caesareans and the necessity for each family to have a minimum of three children.

⁵ Feminist activists in Turkey have a history of awareness of bodily rights and one of their core slogans is 'my body is mine', which is closely connected to the Western feminist activist perspective of 'my body, my choice'.

⁶ Babayan and Najmabadi developed the term 'Islamicate' to refer to contexts where Islam is lived as a religion. The term allows the researchers to locate the values associated with Islam and its local fractions within its historical and geographical limitations, without necessarily essentializing those values at the centre of the lives of those who are living in that context (Babayan and Najmabadi 2008). It fits nicely with my discussion of the culture of *mahremiyet* and its public mediations.

⁷ *Eşdeğerlik* is the word he uses, which can also be translated as 'equivalence' although he means 'equity' in this context.

⁸ Available online at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVNVrGgoG2o>> (accessed 15 July 2015).

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