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**Shifting boundaries and dynamics of neighbourhood:**

**Women in public parks in Ankara, Turkey**

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## Abstract

Based on my master thesis field<sup>1</sup>, this study examines the dynamics of the women's participation to and appropriation of urban neighborhood parks in Ankara, Turkey. In this pursuit, the subjective experiences of a group of conservative women informants and their families' emergent practices, activities and encounters are scrutinized and elaborated on with regard to the dynamic re-negotiations between private and immediate public space, and their familial middle class aspirations. This study is based on an ethnographic research conducted in a conservative lower-middle and middle class neighborhood, which is governed by a conservative municipal authority. Regulated and controlled by municipalities, the neighborhood parks in Turkey have created a viable public domain for females, which is perceived, experienced and appropriated by women in several contradictory ways, all of which are deeply inlaid with moral, traditional, and pious opinions, habits and attitudes, but also blended with modern and secular practices. Public parks, as the immediate public spaces of urban life indeed provide rich ground for various public encounters and a source of social relations for women. Participation in and appropriation of urban neighborhood parks shape and transform women' patterns and characteristics of social relations with family, neighbors, friends and strangers. Whilst it is experienced and appropriated as a site for diverse forms of sociability, the discussion does address to the ways in which new forms of localism and civic engagements are reconfiguring. How and in what ways are these relationships mediated? What would be the possible (un)intended consequences of these relationships?

The patterns of use and modes of sociability in the urban parks in Turkey have been significantly transformed in the last decade. The change can be traced not only in the increasing number of small and big public parks specifically in cities like the capital Ankara, but also from the ways citizens use, experience and appropriate the public parks. There are also several exceptional but still important examples specifically tackling the inclusion of women in public space. For instance, there was an effort to transform a public park named Yılmaz Güney in Siverek, Şanlıurfa, a city in the south-eastern Turkey, into 'Bayanlar Parkı'

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<sup>1</sup> The title of my master thesis is 'Recreating Gender, Class and City Culture Through Recreation Sites: Women in Keçiören Public Parks in Ankara', submitted to the Social Anthropology Department, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey.

(Ladies Park). This effort was followed in Konya and in Istanbul's Bağcılar Municipalities, this time with labeling like 'Family Park'. The issue of whether there should be women-specific parks or no was highly debated at the time. Whereas mainstream daily newspapers accused conservative municipalities of gender discrimination in public spaces, some other conservative dailies supported the regulation and cited the 'Pink Buses' in Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo and 'Pink taxis' in London as parallel examples to 'Women's Parks'. Paradoxically, urban parks are presented as insecure urban public spaces for women while simultaneously being put forward as potential, proper urban public spaces that women can participate in and enjoy freely.

Moving from my master thesis, in this paper I aim to describe and discuss how a group of conservative women experience, perceive, appropriate and transform the urban neighbourhood parks in the Keçiören district as a public space. The fieldwork for the thesis took place in Keçiören district, which is a conservative neighbourhood with a lively public life in the capital city Ankara. The group of women studied and observed is regular residents of Keçiören, who and/or whose families migrated from Central and Eastern Anatolian cities to Keçiören beginning in the late 1950s. All of the informant women are of Sunni background, and all except of three of fifteen participants wear headscarves. Even though gender lies at the centre of my analysis, it does not constitute an exclusive analytical paradigm. Instead, this thesis traces how women's experiences, appropriations and perceptions of urban parks open up a discussion about gender in conjunction with public-private space, religion, and middle classness. In this context, I will examine how my informants drew upon a repertoire of social-cultural and bodily practices to develop their reasons, strategies so as to cultivate moral and pious comportments. Drawing upon feminist geography, I intend to illustrate how neighbourhood parks function as a public space in the urban scene and as both a site for diverse forms of sociability, and as a confrontation zone for the subjects. It will be argued that the parks have created a viable public domain for females. The second sets of questions specifically focus on the shifting meanings and boundaries of women's interpersonal relations. Participation in and appropriation of urban neighbourhood parks shapes women's patterns and characteristics of social relations with family, neighbours, friends and strangers. In examining this, along with the dynamic re-negotiation between the private and public,

and middle class aspirations are examined in terms of the subjective experiences of women informants and their families' emergent practices and activities.

### **The Field Site: Keçiören Urban Public Parks (Atatürk Botanical Garden, Gökçek Park, & Gün Sazak Park)**

'Ataturk Botanical Garden' (Atatürk Botanik Bahçesi), 'Gökçek Park' (Gökçek Parkı) and 'Gün Sazak Park' (Gün Sazak Parkı) located in the Keçiören district of Ankara. These three urban parks were selected on the basis of their size, the variety of facilities (i.e. security, safety, and leisure features) and distance to dwellings. While Ataturk Botanical Garden, the biggest park, at the entrance of Keçiören, is generally used for its sports facilities, Gökçek Park, located at a rather inner circle of the district and constructed by the mayor of Ankara as a gift to Keçiören, is more of a promenade without any exercise facilities. Finally, Gün Sazak is a customary neighbourhood park primarily considered a playground for children or a shady place for the elderly to rest on one of the sets of benches. In this study, the goal is to elaborate the urban public space as my informants experienced varying degrees of publicness and privateness. Equally important, however, the locality or the site in this thesis is not considered merely context. Rather it is taken as a space, which both shapes and is shaped by interaction.

Keçiören is situated nearly three kilometers away from the Ankara city center. As the most highly populated district of Turkey, with a total of 799.646 residents, Keçiören itself is even bigger than many cities in Turkey. Keçiören is classified as a lower-middle class district (Ayata & Ayata, 1996; Güvenç, 2001). The district consists of people from differentiated occupational and social class backgrounds. The majority of people dwelling in Keçiören are the owners of their houses, and a majority again are wage earners, self-employed and propertyless 'owner occupiers'. This includes semi-skilled and skilled manual workers, self-employed craftsmen and shopkeepers, and small business owners, as well as lower-middle class occupational groups for teachers, health workers, sales clerks, and security officers. As some families remained poor, a sizable proportion sought middle class status as they improved their living standards.

According to the statistics, Keçiören district votes mostly go to right-wing and nationalist parties, especially since early the 1990s. For the election period of 1989, and despite the fact that they lost in 1994, in late 1980s and early 1990s to social democrat parties - the RPP (CHP, Republican Peoples Party), SDPP (SHP, Social Democratic Populist Party) and DLP (DSP, Democratic Left Party) received the majority of votes. The total vote percentages of two parties - the JDP (AKP, Justice and Development Party), which portrays itself as a moderate conservative democrat party and the NMP (MHP, Nationalist Movement Party), which is a pro-nationalist right-wing party - constitute almost seventy-five percent in the local elections of 2009 and just under that during the previous electoral cycle. According to the numbers, Keçiören has earned its title as the 'Right-Wing Castle', as it was dubbed by the media. The media particularly latched onto the choice of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to dwell in Keçiören instead of the Prime Minister's residence in Çankaya. Turning back to voting patterns in Keçiören district, Işık and Pınarcıoğlu, in their analysis of the 2002 Ankara general elections, documented that majority of the neighbourhoods in Keçiören district had voted for the JDP (2005). Keçiören district has emerged as the highest density residential district in Ankara during the last decade.

The district has experienced a construction boom in which the proportion of gecekonducovers covered land dramatically declined and was replaced by high-rise apartment blocks. It has been speculated that the sum of construction permits issued by Keçiören municipality in 2005 is equal to the sum of all permits given in Ankara. From 1994 to 2009, the district has been governed by the same mayor, who contributed a lot to the spatial transformation of Keçiören. His personal efforts as a social actor should be highlighted because, though politicians from the same political party have governed many other municipalities, none of the municipalities has undergone the kind of transformation that Keçiören has experienced. Coming from an Islamist nationalist background, the mayor was very ambitious in his goal to turn Keçiören into a locus of attraction in the city. For the spatial organization of the district, nuances of Turk-Islam synthesis are incorporated with modernist architecture and landscaping. Among the rearrangements of the district, parks have occupied a noteworthy place. The number of parks in Keçiören has increased to four hundred, and additionally they have been transformed both in concept and form.

## **Urban Public Parks**

The development of public parks in the West was an outcome of the transformation of the industrial city; the emergence of this public space for Turkish cities on the other hand dates back to the period of Ottoman rule and is said to have been initiated by Ottoman elites in an imitation of the westernized lifestyle . In fact, the splendid gardens of the Ottoman palaces were famous and at the time mesira - promenades - were built in service of the community as well. The transformation of these green spaces into public parks in the European sense corresponded to the period of the decline of the Empire, when the art of gardening and parks weakened and many of the gardens of palaces were transformed according to the European models (Evyapan, 1999). Yıldız Park, Beylerbeyi Park and Gülhane Park are among the sultan's parks in İstanbul. During the early Republican period, the spatial formation of the country played a symbolically remarkable role in the modernization project. The modern image of Ankara as the new capital needed to be transformed from simple town to ideal city of the Republic. The most direct way to reflect the ideal modern life was to create public spaces in and through which the modern an urban way of life could be learned, produced and appropriated.



**Photo 1:** Scenes of public life of Ankara in late 1930s.

Source: (Ulus, 10.06.1938, cited in Uludağ, 1998)

During 1980-1990, the population of Ankara reached more than two million. Such a dramatic change in the population turned Ankara into a more segmented and fragmented city. The middle classes preferred to move to outskirts as they avoid social heterogeneity and



pollution in the inner city (Ayata, 2002). In the same way they left public parks, no longer incorporating time at parks for contact with nature into their routines. The 1994 elections became one of the turning points in contemporary Turkish political history. The Refah Party (Welfare Party) took many of the major cities, including İstanbul and Ankara. Thus social democrat parties, which had been the constant winners of the local elections suddenly no longer had the privilege of controlling and monitoring urban public spaces. The Greater Ankara Metropolitan Municipality has been governed by the same mayor since 1994, though the designation of his affiliated party changed twice. In the most recent decade in particular, urban public parks are among the major spaces that have been most dramatically transformed, produced, and reproduced by Ankara metropolitan municipality (see Photo 2).



**Photo 2:** A contemporary view from Ankara Greater Municipality Parks

Source: Ankara Bülteni, No. 244, September 2009

Although all sorts of shopping malls and centers have dominated the daily lives - particularly the weekends of urbanites, public parks still succeed in appealing to different segments of society. Indeed, the lively crowds in these parks -especially during weekends and during summer - affirm that such public spaces meet the demands of the community. What makes

a public space appealing? And which segments of society prefer to enjoy these public spaces? Both of these relational questions help us to explore and examine through social spaces the dynamics of fragmentation, segmentation and lifestyles in Ankara. However, there is a serious scarcity in studies of the history, development and transformation of public spaces of Turkish cities. I believe that there is an urgent need for studies exploring and examining the gendered manifestations of public spaces created by different political and cultural contexts and how these manifestations are both challenged and negotiated by social agents.

### **The Public and the Private: Gendering the Space**

Scholarly discussions on the presence and participation of women in the public realm have always been tied to the construction and experience of the public-private dichotomy that is central to the organization of modern social life. The distinctive experiences of modernity both in Western and non-Western contexts widen the repertoires of the social, political and cultural meanings of the public and the private realms. Therefore, moving from the assumption that the manifestations of the public-private distinction differ in distinct political, social and cultural contexts, a plethora of studies have emerged, trying different approaches in order to come to grips with the specificities of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, race, and history (Helly and Reverby, 1992, p.6).

Moving from the most common usage of the concepts by students of social sciences, 'public' and 'private' refer to the differences between the economic and the domestic, between the communal and the individual and between the formal and the intimate (Domosh & Seager, 2001). Fraser, on the other hand, revisited Habermas, approaches the dichotomy on the notion of 'sphere' which is rarely if ever spatialised. Fraser mentioned that while 'public' refers to 'state-related', 'accessible to everyone', 'of concern to everyone' and 'pertaining to a common good or shared interests', 'private' is used to mean private property or to 'intimate domestic or personal life' (1992, p.128). Drawing on the four major ways of drawing a public-private distinction that Weintraub (1997, p.7) delineated, it is possible to trace how the demarcation has evolved; (i) the 'liberal-economistic model'- distinction is drawn between state administration and the market economy, (ii) 'the republican-virtue (and classical) model'- in which 'public' is taken to mean political community and citizenship,

and which is chiefly discussed through the works of Habermas and Arendt, (iii) the third approach takes the public realm to be the domain of fluid and multiple sociabilities (with strangers, citizens, neighbours, and colleagues) that come out in the form of intricate interplays of spatial and social arrangements. The basic literature on this approach includes Sennett, Aries, Jacobs, Simmel, Elias and Kasinitz. (iv) the last approach is employed by feminist analysis and the line is drawn between the family and the larger economic and political order. The feminist analysis' contribution to the discussion was to treat the family as 'private' domain whereas it had been associated either with the market or the atomized individual in the previous models. Feminists criticized the ways in which social and political theory approached to 'domestic' sphere - wherein they were used interchangeably with 'private'; one is that the domestic labour within the family was treated as trivial and relegated to a minor role (a Marxist interpretation), two is the rigid distinction and fixity in the separation of women and men's spheres on the basis of their 'natural' features, passing over issues of male authority and female subordination. Challenges to understanding "the spheres of private domesticity and public labour" (Rose, 1993, p.120) as separate and mutually exclusive domains have brought different approaches to taking on the notions of 'public' and 'private' as historically mutual social constructs in relation to "the interrelationship of production and reproduction as a part of single inseparable process that varies across space and time." (McDowell, 1992, p.410). Besides, feminists are highly critical of the political and spatial dimensions of the public-private dichotomy, which has been employed to construct, control and exclude gender and sexual differences while preserving traditional patriarchal power dynamics (Duncan, 1996, p.128) What is also quite important to note and emphasize is the spatiality of public and private spheres. In accordance with what Lefebvre (1991) suggests space is not merely a neutral, pre-given context but it is a social product (a site of struggle) both shapes and is shaped by interaction. To his theory of space, the urban is composed of three related concepts, namely 'space', 'everyday life' and 'reproduction of capitalist social relations' (1991). His development of a spatial triad - named respectively spatial practices (physical/perceived space), representations of space (mental/conceived space), and representational space (social/lived space) (Lefebvre, 1991, p.33) offers a holistic account of the multilayered and relational analysis of the diverse scales of the urban space. What the Lefebvrian conceptual approach lacked was a gendered perspective, which has since been contributed. Feminist geographers (Bondi, 1990; Rose,

1993; Massey, 1994; McDowell 1998; Laurie et al.1999; Moss, 2000) debate that gender is constructed through spatial relations and in turn spatial is gendered. Hence due to the gender inequality inherent in the construction of the modern public and private realms, the struggles, negotiations and appropriations of women over the uses of public spaces are important to reveal and explore relationships of power both in the organization of social life in general and in the quotidian in particular. In addition to the growing stress on the gendered manifestations of cities with a focus on everyday lives, feminist scholars urge us to avoid treating women as an 'undifferentiated category' overlooking differences between women (McDowell, 1993, p. 308). In his elaborated account on the distinction between 'public' and 'private', Weintraub questions 'on what basis the contrast is being drawn' between the two, and in response he argued that there are two fundamental criteria through which the 'private' can be contrasted with the 'public' (1997, p.4). These are 'visibility' and 'collectivity'. As 'visibility' refers to 'what is hidden or withdrawn versus what is open, revealed, or accessible', the 'collectivity' criteria is used to mean 'what is individual, or pertains only to an individual, versus what is collective, or affects the interests of a collectivity of individuals' (ibid, p.5). Weintraub asserts that though the difference in principle is explicit the two may overlap and combine in various ways. Between the two criteria, 'visibility' deserves special attention, first for the gendered nature of the dichotomy in general, and second for the construction of public and private in Muslim contexts in particular. How and in which ways women have appeared in everyday urban spaces has been the subject of examination by feminist historians, geographers, and anthropologists (Spain, 1992; Duncan, 1996; Domosh, 1996; Bondi, 1998). The public visibility/presence of women has been subjected to certain conditions, meaning there have always been 'right-wrong' times, 'right-wrong' places, 'right-wrong' manners of dress, and 'right-wrong' manners of comportment. There are two clashing arguments over whether women experienced the urban spaces of modernity differently than men did during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While the first argument depicts the city as a potentially dangerous place for women, the second stresses that modern city offers an exciting and fulfilling place for women (Domosh and Seager, 2001). In other words, the former portrays the city with fear, oppression, trouble and danger, in which women are both symbolically and literally excluded from many benefits of urban life (Wolff, 1985; Pollock, 1988). The latter presents a rather emancipatory image of the city, filled with possibilities for empowerment and

appropriation through various performative acts in everyday life (Wilson, 1991). Indeed, the fluid and contradictory nature of cities have enabled women to go beyond the fixed categories of 'public' and 'private'. Various studies have illustrated the ways in which women transformed, challenged or appropriated the spaces, from spaces of 'self-made man and... true womanhood' into spaces of struggle of agencies (Ryan, 1990; Bondi & Domosh, 1998; Cranz, 1980). For instance, Ryan mentions that "gender distinctions might be corroded by the informal, everyday uses of public space. .. [in conditions of] spontaneity, diversity, and volatility of life on the streets of the big city might not be so easily corralled into neat distinctions between the dualistic classifications of male and female" (1990, p.59). All in all, cities are not essentially emancipatory or oppressive for women but offer complex and diverse possibilities and pressures for the embodiment, contestation, subversion, transformation, and mobilization of gender (Bondi, 2005). A good deal of work has increasingly attended to the gendered realities of urban life through performativity, social relations and embodied identities. Among these works, studies on the geography of women's fear and the risk of violence (Valentine, 1989; Pain, 1991, 2001; Costa Meyer, 1996; Namaste, 1996; Day, 1999) have received some criticism for presenting the cities as hostile to women.



**Photo 3:** A scene from Atatürk Botanical Garden. (a photo by the author)

I will detail and examine how my informant group perceives, experiences, negotiates and appropriates public park spaces in Keçiören, and I seek to explore the dynamics of change in their subjective perceptions and appropriations of urban culture. In doing so, I will particularly investigate how gender presents a determining factor in the portrayal, function and reproduction of urban neighbourhood parks in Keçiören. Neighbourhood parks - I chose three differently scaled public parks in Keçiören as my sample - are the most immediate public spaces, in which diverse forms of sociability take place, and they function as confrontation zones when their users come from a diversity of backgrounds. My attempt is to elucidate the practical reasons behind why and how my women informants use urban neighbourhood parks, the challenges they encounter in such a pursuit, and the negotiations and judgments that they make about the presence of themselves and others in the parks. Within this framework, I will elaborate on how my women informants drew upon an evolving and growing repertoire of social-cultural and bodily practices in support of their reasons and strategies in order to cultivate moral and conservative comportments in public spaces. I will attempt to more deeply scrutinize the relationship between gender, control of body, and the fluidity of public-private space.

### **Keçiören Public Parks as Family Places**

There is a growing body of literature on women's perceptions of safety and danger in relation to urban spaces and their fear of crime (Koskela and Pain, 2000). Through the years the significance and reputation of public parks has lost a lot from the establishment ideals; public parks were in decay and associated generally with fear (drunks and gangs were two of the common sources of hesitation for women). Moreover, the facilities the parks provided remained limited; many neighbourhood parks were designed as children's playgrounds or as a serene spot for the elderly to rest on a bench beneath a tree. As mentioned in the second chapter, not only has the number of parks increased within the last decade, but also the facilities provided by the parks has drastically transformed. Keçiören is one of the most remarkable examples of this with its widely used parks. According to my informants, the basic features that distinguish the parks in Keçiören from other parks in the metropolitan Ankara were safety, cleanliness, good maintenance, proximity, and wholesome recreational activities. Historian Rosenzweig (1983), in her book titled 'Eight Hours for What We Will:

Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1921' has reported that many urban parks were designed particularly for the working classes to provide them with 'safe' and controlled leisure activities. It has been discussed that the parks were also for some middle and upper-class women since they suggest a 'legitimate' way for them to socialize outside of the house (Domosh & Seager, p.79). The classes of female attendees of urban public parks have changed over the years in different localities. Many studies indicate that in accordance with the transformations and changes in urban inner cities, the visitor profile of the public parks has been changed. Recent studies assert that the presence or absence of green scenery, other than exercising facilities, impacts the attendance of women, especially those who lived in rural areas previously (Taplin, 2002; Low, Taplin & Scheld, 2002). For my informants, many of whom were born in different Anatolian cities and migrated to Ankara during the late sixties, the most important features of the parks in Keçiören is the greenery, which has upgraded the scenery of Keçiören. Fatma, a forty-year-old woman who was born in Yozgat, was clearly proud when she said: 'Our district Keçiören is more Çankaya than Çankaya district is. It is Paris to me. They made it green like heaven. It has turned out to be as green as our hometown'. Çankaya is the central metropolitan district of metropolitan Ankara. It is not only the centre of government and embassies but also a fashionable business and cultural center. Public parks in Keçiören are 'clean', both in the material and metaphorical sense. That is to say, one of the other features of parks that recall the rural is the sense of safety that the women reported being extremely pleased about. Their perceptions of the security of the three parks have been supported in various media. In the Ataturk Botanical Garden at the center of Keçiören district, there are no official security guards in charge of the safety, but when a problem occurs; the personnel responsible for the maintenance of the park intervene. There are several security cameras located in different parts of the park, but the most appreciated feature of the park is that it is well lit all night long. Gökçek Park is the second park in to which I followed by my informant group of women. In Gökçek Park, safety is controlled by uniformed security guards of ANFA and by security cameras. Although the women said it feels safe knowing there are security guards in the park, they noted that sometimes the gaze of male personnel could be annoying as well. In the last park, Gün Sazak, there are no cameras or security guards; in fact this oldest park, small and central, and is mostly preferred by the older males around visits to the mosque. Most of them have never been to Çiğir and Mamak districts but all associate them with crime and immorality;

they said that had they been living in those districts, they believed that they would not have been free to go out as they did in Keçiören. In their perception of public parks as safe places also lies their belief in and perception of the safety of the neighbourhood. They used terms like 'modest' (mütevazi), 'pious' (dindar), 'ordinary' (sıradan) and 'concerned with daily survival' (hayat gaylesi derdinde) to describe families wherein certain occupational groups are concentrated. 'Family' is the keyword of all narratives and descriptions of parks in the perceptions of women. 'Parks are for families' (Parklar aileler için), 'Parks are family places' (Parklar aile yerleri), and 'Parks are family gardens' (Parklar aile bahçesi) and 'Parks are types of community gardens' (Parklar bir tür halk bahçeleri), they would continually emphasize. The basic unit of community is considered to be the family, and women particularly appreciate the transfer of family values to public space. Therefore, the social construction of the safety for women in the Keçiören district in general, and in the parks in particular, has been shaped by and through their subjective perceptions of the occupational status of the inhabitants of the district in relation to religious ideas of morality and family. Though the general perceptions of the Keçiören district is profoundly loaded with the sense of security, solidarity, and belongingness, the neighbourhoods in the district are highly differentiated and fragmented. That is to say, although the sense of security, similarity and belonging encourages women to go out, the social life of the neighbourhoods might constrain the women through social control, insecurity, exclusion and oppression. Two young women, Gülsüm and Zeynep, both in their late twenties, both with lycée degrees, both married with one daughter and one son, pinpointed the intricate nature of life in a conservative neighbourhood. Whereas Gülsüm was living at a cross street, almost half kilometer away from a closest public park, Zeynep was living in an apartment block on a lively pedestrian shopping road diversely filled with shops, markets, hairdressers, etc. On the ground floor of the building, which is across from Gökçek Park, her husband also runs a shop selling dried fruits and. She expressed her experiences with the social control she felt whenever she attempted to go out in the following way:

'Keçiören is supposed to be a place where pious Muslims live. So we are. We feel relieved when we pray but sometimes I really get bored of the ongoing gossip of these Muslim people around. There is nothing left of neighbourliness, no one visits each other but everybody is talking and gossiping about each other. Here is the most beautiful street, crowded till late at nights, well-lit, but whenever I want to go out,



even with children, but leaving my husband aside everybody starts to ask where and why I go out. You have to find accompany, better still if she is old. If you are two young mothers, you have to be deaf. You have to be careful about what to wear when you go out. If as ladies we are not even allowed to go out to parks, let us die then! In the park, one can escape from the boredom of home and street.'

Gülsüm, on the other hand, lived in a rather isolated part of the neighbourhood on a cross street in which, as she mentioned the social control and oppression are felt more deeply. She explained:

'There is a huge difference between living on a main road and at a cross street. First of all, it is livelier outside on the main road. Even if you cannot go out, it would be enough to look out from a window or balcony. On our street, there is nothing to do during the day, and that is why people visit and meet with neighbours. We resent explaining ourselves to so many people whenever we go outside. We should pay attention what to wear, for instance. Otherwise, people begin gossiping... But to go out to parks has been very normal. We go out to get some fresh air with kids, an escape... Whenever you get bored, you say 'I am going to the park; and nobody asks why.'

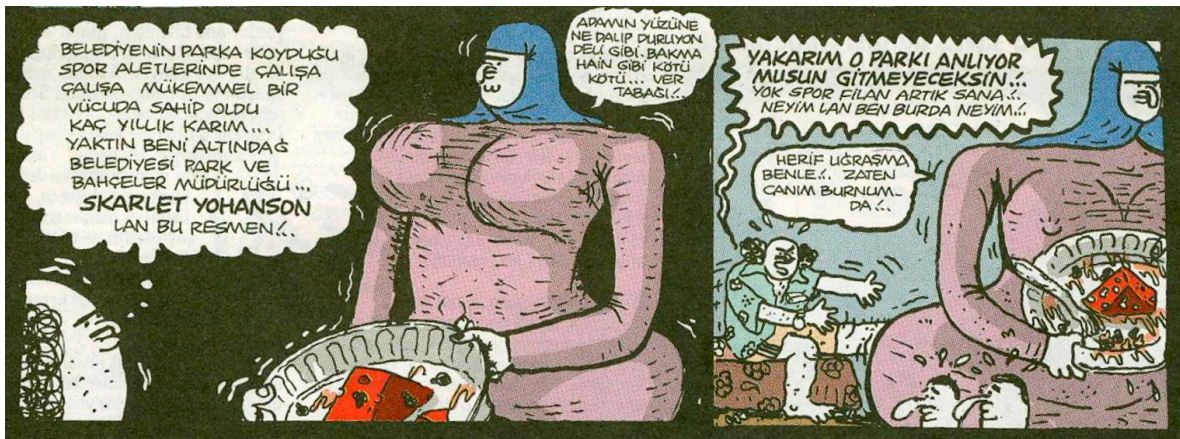
In the scholarly studies, it has been emphasized that the ideology of 'family' is very significant to the establishments of the urban parks (Cranz, 1980; Schenker, 1996; Marne, 2001). In other words, the park space serves as a stage on which the family ideology can be embodied and reinforced. In relation to and as a result of the women's perceptions of the parks as safe, green, and clean environments, the frequent keyword to define the parks in Keçiören is 'family place'. The extension and the embodiment of the sphere of home - family place - into the public parks will be discussed in the coming section on the relationship between the shifting boundaries of the public-private distinction with respect to the three parks focused on. Despite the general perception of the park as a place for women in the public domain, there is no dramatic change in the perception of the patriarchal norms of morality and the basic cultural conservatism around family relations and female-male responsibilities. In other words, it would be too narrow to evaluate and discuss the outdoor

activities of women in parks as a pure form of either empowerment or resistance to structural constraints related to gender and family.

In my analysis, I stick to two reference points in observing, exploring and examining the changing meanings and boundaries of public space through my informants' perceptions and experiences. One is the Lefebvrian assumption that space is a social product (a site of struggle) both shapes and is shaped by interaction (Lefebvre, 1991). The other is the feminist geographers' intervention in theorizing how the intersectionalities of gender, class, ethnicity etc. are embedded in, performed, and produced through symbolic and material space (Spain, 1992; Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999; Rose, 1993; Domosh & Seager, 2001). Following Lefebvre (1991), it can be argued that public parks are not only places, the boundaries of which are officially determined, they are also living spaces that are used, appropriated, and experienced by people. More precisely, a public park is a conceived space that is represented mentally, it is a representational space that is socially lived through its associated symbols, codes, and images, and finally it is a spatial practice, which is perceived through physical experience, falling between daily routines and the infrastructure that allows it. The feminist geographers' usage of the concept of boundary, on the other hand, helps to expose the ways in which gendered urban spaces generate and are generated by social relations (Bondi, 1993; Miranne & Young, 2000). That is to say, as the concept of boundary implies flexibility and permeability, the employment of the concept enables us to examine and expose the complex and intricate nature of the presences - visibilities and invisibilities - and participations of women in the city. The fact that women do not live in fixed, neat categories has been definitively established in the literature, and this is mirrored with my informant group in the ways they constantly transgress and transcend the boundaries between public and private spaces. As Ghannam asserts (2002), this has nothing to do with denying the gendered nature of the dichotomy between the public and private; rather there is an effort to stress the importance of the constant struggles to define the boundaries of public and private space toward the reproduction of power relations and the reinforcement of gender inequalities.

## Conclusion

Since their inception during the nineteenth century, the urban public parks have been discussed as one of the major public and semi-public spaces, designed to accommodate women, and as a response to the growing presence of women in the public sphere (Ryan, 1990). These gendered public spaces served to shape the public presence of women, guide their public behaviour, and legitimize certain roles for women in the urban public (Ryan, 1990, p.302). For the Turkish context, studies of gender take an important place in understanding the larger debates in the country, since the discourses of secularism and Islamism, modernity and tradition utilize the bodies and practices of women as a site of debate. However there is a lack of historical or sociological study on the presence, experience, and participation of women in public spaces like public parks in the Turkish context. I will thus not be able to detail and discuss a historical account on the public experiences of women in public parks. In the preceding section, I mentioned that the three Keçiören public parks chosen for this project are perceived and defined as a safe, clean, home-like family place. As nearby, free and open spaces, women for various reasons, including mental and physical restoration, recreation and sociability, welcome parks. As discussed, women appropriate public parks as a space with permeable boundaries, which provides a subjective experience outside the home ideology. Nonetheless, women's perceptions, appropriations and definitions of the public parks are still contoured, transformed and performed in relation to family, which here will be discussed within the dynamics of public-private distinction.



A cartoon by Umut Sarıkaya, Uykusuz, 24.06.2010

*Husband:* 'By keeping on exercising in the sports tool in the park that municipality put, her body perfectly gets in shape. You burnt me Altındağ Municipality Parks and Gardens Directorate... She is almost Scarlet Johansson now!'

*Wife:* 'Why do you keep staring at me...like a betrayer... maliciously... give me the plate?'

*Husband:* 'I will burn that park, do you understand! You are not going anymore. No sports I said to you! Who am I supposed to be here! '

*Wife:* 'Leave me alone! I am already exhausted!'

In conclusion, as in the comic below teases, the public parks have created a viable public domain for females, which is perceived, experienced and appropriated by women in several contradictory ways, all of which are deeply inlaid with moral, traditional, and pious opinions, habits and attitudes, but also blended with modern and secular practices. Public parks, as the immediate public spaces of urban life, provide rich ground for various public encounters through which women get to know others, and in the case of the public parks in Keçiören, we observe that women's encounters and acquaintances turned into personal ties that in many examples seem to have the characteristic of reciprocal recognition. Though described as the public domain, it is appropriated as a site with the varying degrees of publicness, privateness and intimacy in which the moral order of family is translated into the public space. Furthermore, as it is experienced and appropriated as a site for diverse forms of sociability, it can also be appropriated as a stage for middle class performance, which includes physical exercise via activities like jogging, as well as through clothing and bodily comportments. Many vignettes from the field bring out the ironies and polysemy of modernization in Turkey.

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