SPEAKING OF WOMEN? EXPLORING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN THROUGH POLITICAL DISCOURSES: A STUDY OF HEADSCARF DEBATES IN TURKEY

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Abstract: This paper explores the production of violence against women through political discourses in Turkey. Since the foundation of the Republic (1923), women's bodies have been on the agenda as the markers of secular Turkish modernity. With the rise of political Islam as of the 1970s, the image of the headscarved woman has challenged the construction of "modern Republican woman" and the association of women's bodies with secularism. Especially after the 1980s with the introduction of bans, "the headscarf issue" has intensified and become the embodiment of the clash between political Islam and the official secularist ideology. By drawing on the sexualizing aspects of the headscarf and its significance in the construction of female honour, I will demonstrate how women's bodies are turned into readily available topics for consumption in politics. I argue that headscarf debates have factored into patriarchal discourses, which inflict violence on women on both discursive and material levels. By analysing a few cases on media reflections and art projects on the "headscarf debate", I aim to show how women's bodies become vulnerable to violence through political discourses.
Keywords: headscarf debates, violence, sexuality, female body, honour.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Turkish media has been occupied with rape trials in which final judgments are made in function of the victim's "lifestyle" and the woman's "honour." But beyond these cases, misogynous murders based on the male partner's jealousy or rage have always been part of the news landscape. In 2011, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that domestic and family-based violence on women are notoriously high in Turkey. According to HRW, 42 per cent of women aged 15-60 in urban areas and 47 per cent of women in rural areas had experienced physical or sexual violence by their husbands or partners at some point in their lives (HRW, 2011). The Turkish Statistical Institute's figures show that, in the past five years, there has been a 30 per cent increase in the number of cases of rape and sexual harassment against women (TUIK, 2012). The HWR report also argues

that there are too many gaps in the law and that authorities' infrequently enforce preventive and punitive measures (HRW, 2011).

Other than feminist groups and NGOs, no authority has publicized these figures or taken action to fix the problems they point to. Instead, the political scene has focused on women's need to regulate their behaviour and dress in public space in order to not get assaulted. For example, in February 2011, theology professor Orhan Ceker publicly stated, "Wearing décolleté is asking for rape" (Dekolte giyene, 2011). And in 2012, in the midst of a debate on the introduction of an abortion ban, the mayor of Ankara publicly stated that pregnancies as a result of rape should not be exempt from an abortion ban, since "it is the fault of the mother not the child who has to suffer" (Cocugun ne sucu, 2012). These statements support a gender regime in which female sexuality, as it is defined on and through the female body, becomes the measure of women's honour. The adoption, at a political level, of a patriarchal discourse with normative understandings of female honour justifies and reproduces the enactment of physical and sexual violence on women.

These public and political entanglements with women's dress, bodily rights and sexualities are not new in Turkey. Since 1923, when the Turkish Republic was created, there have been political traditions that have made women's bodies and sexualities into legitimate points of discussion. The secularist state has incorporated the modernly dressed Turkish woman into its political ideology and discourse, while political Islam, especially since the 1970s, has incorporated the headscarved woman into its political discourse. Since then, the headscarf has been persistently categorized as an issue of Islamist identity politics, rather than as a women's issue that pertains to women's sexuality.

Perceived as proof of the Islamization of public space, headscarved women have been stigmatized and become subject to bans and regulations since the early 1980s. Beyond being the symbol of Islamist politics and lifestyle, the headscarf became the embodiment of the conflict between the competing sexual regimes prescribed by Western forms of secularism and Islamist discourses in Turkey. Contained within the dichotomist framework of "modern, liberated Republican woman" and "religious headscarved woman", headscarf debates have formed a significant part of the political rivalries between political Islam and the defenders of the secularist state ideology. These discourses are masculinist not only in the sense that they prescribe and reproduce traditional gender roles for women, but also, in that they rely on constructions of female sexuality and honour that approve of and aggravate violence against women.

In this paper, I focus on the headscarf debates as an issue that has extensively occupied the Turkish political scene in the past three decades. I aim to show how wearing

a headscarf, a practice quintessentially linked to female sexuality and honour, has been constructed as a political matter in ways that enable violence against women. Here, I perceive women's dress as a way of conveying and performing female sexuality and honour on the body (Werbner, 2007); and I discuss wearing a headscarf as a particular dress code. I take adoption of headscarf as a way of ensuring women's sexuality and honour in public space (El Guindi, 1999; Werbner, 2007) which can be forced upon or taken up voluntarily, or neither of these, as any other form of dress can be. I introduce female honour into this debate as a fundamental aspect of the construction of 'proper' and 'acceptable' form of femininity that significantly relies on female sexuality and chastity. Honour, specifically within the context of Turkey and the Middle Eastern societies in general, is constituted as the primary factor in enactment of violence against women. Through this, I demonstrate how debating the propriety and sincerity of headscarf enables violence as it is actually a debate on women's bodies, sexualities and the construction of female honour.

By headscarf debates I refer to the political engagements with the headscarf bans, which, since early 1980s have prohibited women from wearing headscarves at university campuses, state offices such as court rooms and the parliament, in addition to barring their employment by the state. These debates have involved political parties' reactions to the attempts for removal of the ban, discussing either women should wear headscarves or not, and how they should wear it in case they are allowed and where. These discussions have placed women's bodies and their sexualities at the centre of an ideological conflict, and solidified the tensions between the sexual regimes prescribed by republican secularism and by Islamism, as well as the moral claims each ideology can make over women's bodies. Formed within the discursive framework of patriarchy, headscarf debates have increased the discursive and physical tangibility of women's bodies and sexualities, and they have contributed to the gender regime that enables and tolerates violence against women.

In order to demonstrate this, firstly, I will provide an overview of Turkish modernization and secularism, with an emphasis on the construction of gender identities since the early Republican era. Secondly, I will briefly explain the emergence of the Islamic middle- and upper-classes and the parliamentary gains made by Islamist political parties since the 1970s. Through a survey of the trajectory of headscarf bans and debates in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, I will show how women have been collapsed into a "headscarved" vs. "non-headscarved" dichotomy. I will examine, in particular, crises surrounding state protocols and receptions, as well as student reactions and court cases. I will then discuss the semantic field of sexuality, honour, and gendered violence in which the headscarf has been understood. And finally, to demonstrate the connection between headscarf, honour

and violence, I will provide examples from national news media and social media, and artistic reflections on the issue to show how critiques of women's sexualities – such as sexually explicit remarks on headscarved and non-headscarved women – target women's bodies.[1]

TURKISH MODERNITY AND SECULARISM

One of the founding principles and practices of the Turkish Republic and nation-state was the secularization of state practices and the removal of religious items from the public sphere, such as the state, the law, and public space. Reforms were made in civil law and various facets of life. In 1924, the Ottoman caliphate and *sharia* law, two significant institutions of religious regulation, were abolished. Religious schools and orders (*tarikats* and *tekkes*) were also closed as part of the process of regulating this new secular public space by removing religious identities (Ozdalga, 1998). These modernizing reforms included the adoption of Western time and metric measurements, the Latin alphabet, monogamous modern marriages under the purview of law (as opposed to religious marriages and polygamy), and Western clothing (Kandiyoti, 1997).

These were significant components of the Kemalist[2] project, which committed the society and people to a particular way of being. As Saktanber (2002) suggests, the Kemalist reforms of the 1920s had once and for all released the state apparatus from the hold of a "backward looking," traditional, religious order. The new public sphere of the nation-state was imagined and institutionalized as a site for the implementation of a secular and "progressive" way of life (Gole, 2002; Cinar, 2005). This new way of life was built on a dichotomist understanding of public and private spheres, in which religious practices would be confined to the private sphere (such as daily prayers and religious clothing) and public ones (such as funerals) be subject to the control of religious institutions (Arat, 1998; Saktanber, 2002). Turkish secularization was a two-fold process that aimed at clearing the state apparatus—law, education, state institutions, and political parties – from religious references, and of integrating all public religious affiliations and practices under the state's Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) (Davison, 2003).[3]

[1] The examples I provide are selections from a wide range of findings based on content research of national news media and social media on the internet for over the period of 2000s. While searching archives of conservative right wing (*Zaman, Akit, Yeni Safak*) and mainstream (*Radikal, Hurriyet, Milliyet*) newspapers, as well as social media such as facebook and eksisozluk, I used key words such as "turban", "basortusu" and "turbanli kadin".

[2] Kemalism is the official ideology of the Turkish state and is defined by the principles of republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism, and revolutionism (or reformism), as established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Ozcetin, 2009).

[3] DRA, founded in 1924 to monitor and regulate religion, is annexed to the prime minister. As Gokariksel and Mitchell (2005) suggest, it promotes interpretations of Islam that help create a "modern" republican subject that will develop the modern state.

These processes took place under the name of the principle of *laiklik*, which is a direct adaptation of the French word *laicite*. Although largely used synonymously, *laicite* and secularism represent two related, but distinct phenomena. As various studies have explored, in principle secularism defines a negative relationship to religion; the secularization process refers to the decline of the social importance of religion; and a secular state means a "religion-free" state (Asad, 2003; Casanova, 2006; Davison, 2003). *Laicite,* on the other hand, emphasizes the distinction of the laity (people, community of believers) from the clergy (religiously wise, clerical strata) and thus refers to an institutional arrangement between the state and the religion (Davison, 2003). Similar to its meaning and use in the French context, in the Turkish case *laicite* means the separation of state and religious affairs and the state's control over religion (*ibidem*). This can be seen through the abolition of the caliphate and the establishment of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, which embodies a Sunni Islam identity, functions within a state-defined space, and overlooks issues such as the education of religion (Gokariksel and Mitchell, 2005). However, in their contemporary use, the principle of separation of religion and state, *laicite*, is used within the broader context of secularism and secularization processes, which connote a negative relationship to religion.

From its beginning, Turkish modernization and secularization relied heavily on gender identities and sexed bodies in public space. This included the regulation of public attire to erase religion from public space and the introduction of markers of "civilization" to form new "modern and civilized" identities (Cinar, 2008: 898). The idea of "emancipating" women from the "confines of the Islamic patriarchal regime" constituted the general scheme whereby women's public visibility and citizenship rights were defined (Gole, 1997; Saktanber, 2002). The Swiss Civil Code replaced Muslim family law, and women were granted equal rights in inheritance and divorce in 1926, and suffrage rights in 1934 (Arat, 1998; Kandiyoti, 1997). Suffrage was accompanied by nationwide campaigns for women's education and the abandonment of veiling (Parla, 2001).

Modernization of dress constituted a significant part of the modernization of identities and the public space in which these identities were visible. To regulate men's dress, the Ottoman *fez*[4] was banned through a forceful introduction of European-style hats in 1924; and later, in the 1930s, religious attire was restricted to individuals who performed official religious duties. For women, Islamic veiling was discouraged and emphasis was put on modern/western-style apparel, which was deemed to be "proper" (Gokariksel and Mitchell, 2005; Gokariksel, 2009). These measures were geared toward increasing women's

[4] The *fez*, a felt hat in the shape of a red truncated cone, was widely adopted by men in the late Ottoman period.

presence in the public sphere, a presence seen as emblematic of Turkish modernization (Cindoğlu and Zencirci, 2008).

Nevertheless, the image of the modern and liberated Republican woman has never been exempt from standards of virtue and chastity or her role as the bearer of national values and honour (Parla, 2001). Traditional gender roles were reproduced with an emphasis on women's reproductive roles as mothers, caregivers, and carriers of culture, and national honour (Sirman, 2004). By promoting the new public sphere through women's unveiled bodies, the official state discourse laid the grounds for doing politics through women's bodies, which rendered women's bodies and sexualities as legitimate discussion items.

ISLAMISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAMIST IDENTITIES[5]

The modernizing and secularizing Kemalist reforms were mainly carried out by middle-class elites (including politicians, bureaucrats, and military personnel) (Keyman, 2007) who distinguished themselves from the parochial elites who remained attached to more traditional, local, and religious lifestyles (Gole, 1997; Gulalp, 2001). The new public sphere was established through the social recognition and status gained through the exclusion of religion and the Islamic life-world (Gole, 1997). This dynamic became the background from which emerged Islamist movements in the 1960s and the "secularist" and "Islamist" encampments that exist to this day (*ibidem*).

Following a large-scale migration to urban centres starting in the 1960s, the Muslim rural population gained access to secular education and upward social mobility (Gole, 1997; Delibas, 2009). Through the neoliberal economic policies of the 1980s,[6] this population also obtained social and political power (Gokariksel and Secor, 2009). A new Islamic middle class emerged and started appropriating the urban space in an effort to fuse it with Islamic lifestyles (Gole, 2002; Komecoglu, 2006; Seckinelgin, 2006). This appropriation includes the emergence of the veiling fashion industry, the establishment of cafés and restaurants serving only non-alcoholic beverages, and everyday spaces such as segregated beaches (Komecoglu, 2006; Seckinelgin, 2006).

Starting with the National Order Party (NOP) in 1969, Islamist political parties have joined the Turkish political scene with an agenda to provide previously rural Muslims with a guide of conduct for daily life and new forms of political expression (Gole, 1997; Gulalp, 2001). Since the dissolution of NOP in 1971, secularist anxieties have helped shut down

[5] I differentiate between the words 'Islamic' and 'Islamist'. In this paper, Islamic refers to the norms, customs and practices that emerged from sources of Islam (Quran, *hadith*, the life of the prophet); whereas, I use the concept 'Islamist' to refer to particular discourses of Islam, especially associated with political discourses.

[6] These policies include market and trade liberalization, financial austerity measures, increased transnational capital mobility, and the privileging of small-scale businesses more adaptable to flexible markets (Gokariksel and Secor 2009).

Islamic parties, which have continued to exist by reopening under different names (Sakallioglu, 1996). These parties pursued steady growth and gained major electoral success in the mid-1990s and 2000s. For the first time, under the name of the Welfare Party (WP), Islamist politics entered the parliament and became part of a coalition government in 1997 and then closed down. One of the successors of WP, the Justice and Development Party (JDP), has been in power since 2002 as the single ruling party.[7]

The political discourse adopted by Islamist parties has always created significant concern for Kemalists, military generals, and secular-minded civilian politicians (Uzgel, 2003). High on Islamist parties' agendas have consistently figured the dress, mobility, and status of Muslim women as well as the secularists' headscarf ban. Following the 1980 military coup, the government introduced in 1982 the "Dress and Appearance Regulation," which defined the headscarf as a symbol of Islamist ideology and prohibited its wear by public employees in state institutions and on university campuses (Olson, 1985). This development coincided with the increased enrolment of headscarved students at universities and created considerable legal and Islamist opposition to the Turkish state (Gole, 1997). Headscarved students started protesting in front of university campuses. With a visible corporeality that challenged "secular" public space, headscarved women came to be perceived as crucial agents for the daily articulation and reproduction of Islamist ideologies (Saktanber, 2002; Gole, 1997).

HEADSCARF: THE POLITICIZED HEADGEAR

Since the moment Islamist political parties started playing a significant role in Turkish politics, a subtle but strong distinction emerged between "political" and "cultural" Islam (Saktanber, 2002). Anything considered harmful and threatening to the existing secular social order was allotted to the category of "political Islam," whereas that which was considered harmless and tolerable was put into the category of "cultural/traditional" (*ibidem*). This distinction occurred due to the disruption of the trajectory that secularism prescribes for religiosity and its public display through dress. This is a trajectory that anticipates decreasing or more privatized representation of religiosity as parallel to increasing level of education and urbanization, which are taken as markers of modernization. This led to categorization of the headscarf of rural women and housewives as "traditional", while singling university students' and professional women's headscarves out as "political" markers.

[7] JDP is considered to be the current active Islamist party in Turkish politics; however, in terms of political discourse it cannot be fully identified with the previous Islamist parties. JDP led a much more pro-EU and liberal-economy politics than have previous Islamist parties.

This distinction constituted the background to the aforementioned bans on headscarf and the secular state's efforts to modernize and secularize the public space through women's bodies. In reaction, as of the 1990s, a new style of Islamic dress became popular among the educated, upwardly mobile young women who started playing active roles in Islamist politics (Aktaş, 2006; Gokariksel and Secor, 2009). Termed as veiling-fashion, this new style includes an increasingly diverse range of ways of wearing a scarf combined with overcoats or tunics, all the while adhering at varying degrees to an Islamic code of modesty for women (Gokariksel and Secor, 2012: 2). As opposed to its perception as a sign of women's oppression in "backward" religious regimes, which is essential to the secularization processes and the bans, the headscarf is now adopted in defence of individual rights of religious expression, as well as a symbol of prestige (Saktanber and Corbacioglu, 2008). Accordingly, a veiling industry proliferated, driven by an Islamic middle class that started gaining economic power (Gokariksel and Secor, 2009).

Through 1960s and increasingly into 1980s, legal cases were being made against the headscarf ban. These cases have been situated within the broader context of "human rights" in Western liberalism, which emphasized equal claims to rights and citizenship benefits as well as religious freedoms (Saktanber and Corbacioglu, 2008). University students and women in various professions and occupations argued that the ban violated constitutional rights to freedom of religion and conscience;[8] they filed their case at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In their articulation, freedom for religious expression through religious outfit, as in this case, was annexed to equal rights education and employment and principle of non-discrimination. In all of these cases, however, ECHR reached a decree stating that the headscarf ban in Turkey was not a violation of human rights and asserted that the state holds the right to make prohibitions in order to protect public order, pluralism at universities, gender equality, and respect to others (Saktanber and Corbacioglu, 2008: 520-521).

The unrest about the headscarf ban in social life pursued a parallel process in the political arena. The 1982 ban was implemented somewhat loosely and inconsistently until the military intervened in politics in February 28th 1997. Also called the postmodern coup, this intervention sought to silence the voice, and shut down the power, of Islamist parties. Rather than a complete usurpation of power as in previous times, this time the military engaged in an education campaign to reverse the Islamization of Turkey through a number of "suggestions" for the government. [9] This coup led to extreme measures against

[8] These court cases were based on the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, article 8, respect for private and family life; articles 9 and 10, freedom of thought and of expression; and article 14, prohibition of discrimination (Saktanber and Corbacioglu, 2008: 259).

[9] On 28 February 1997, army generals declared Islamist fundamentalism the biggest threat to national security. This was the beginning of a process that led to the closure of WP and the elimination of agents of

the "Islamization" of politics and society and prescribed a strict implementation of the headscarf ban (Cindoglu and Zencirci, 2008).

In 1999, the headscarf appeared in parliament and lead to the highest form of crises that took place on this headgear. Elected as a member of the Virtue Party, Merve Kavakcı attended the parliamentary oath-taking ceremony wearing a headscarf. She faced extreme protest from social-democrat parties, and her action was defined as a bald challenge to *laicite* and secular order.[10]

Similarly, after JDP came to power in 2002, state protocol was challenged by several "headscarf crises." "Reception crises" occurred in 2003, when the presidential palace failed to invite to a significant reception the headscarved wives of JDP deputies (Cindoglu and Zencirci, 2008).[11] In 2007, the presidential election of Abdullah Gul, one of the founders of JDP, was met with massive public protests and became a sensational issue.[12] These elections were remarkable: the previous staunchly Kemalist president, considered "as the last castle of Kemalist establishment," was replaced with someone with an Islamist background who had a headscarved wife. Moreover, in 2008, JDP tried passing constitutional amendments to overturn the headscarf ban in higher education. However, the Constitutional Court of Turkey immediately annulled the amendments on the grounds that they violated the principle of secularism, threatened national security, and undermined the integrity of the Republic's foundations.[13]

During the three decades leading up to 2010s, the headscarf remained one of the most popular and frequently visited topics in politics, media, and public discourse. In addition to the institutional regulations and court appeals, opponents to and defendants of the headscarf in civil society started to organize around the issue.[14] State-level crises found their reflection in society in people's mutual objectification and stigmatization in

Islamist fundamentalism, such as religious organizations, schools, etc. As Cindoğlu and Zencirci (2008) suggest, the 28 February process is significant because it instigated the suspension of normal politics until a secular correction was completed.

[10] This incident initiated a Constitutional Court case that led to the closure of Virtue Party and more significantly objectified the headscarf as an Islamist weapon against secular order (Saktanber and Corbacioglu, 2008).

[11] These cases included also various smaller occasions in different cities when military officials abandoned the meeting upon the arrival of headscarved women. Also, until recently, no headscarved wife of an MP was invited to any reception held at the presidential palace.

[12] Kemalist women's organizations led several massive public protests under the name of "Republican Meetings" as a reaction to his candidacy. These protests were against the JDP's "hidden Islamist agenda" and the possibility of having a headscarved first lady (Cindoglu and Zencirci, 2008; Cinar, 2005). However, in the end, Abdullah Gul was elected president, and his wife, Hayrunisa Gul, obtained privileged access to state protocols and state offices.

[13] At present, bans of religious clothing, especially of headscarves, are not strictly applied on university campuses. Since 2011, headscarved students have been accepted with only a slight change in the Council of Higher Education's regulations, and without amending the constitution (Universitede artik, 2011).

[14] On the side of the Kemalists were the Association of Kemalist Thought (Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği), the Association for the Support of Modern Life of Turkey (Türkiye Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Vakfı), and the Association of Republican Women (Cumhuriyetci Kadınlar Derneği). On the Islamist side were organizations such as Rainbow Istanbul Women's Platform (Gökkuşağı Istanbul Kadın Platformu), Capital Women's Platform (Baskent Kadin Platformu-BKP), and Women's Rights Association against Discrimination (Ayrimciliga Karsi Kadin Haklari Dernegi-AK-DER).

public space. On TV and in print media, women's bodies and the ways women should or should not wear headscarves became objects of debate.[15]

These debates are constituted of political discussions in the parliament and in media amongst representatives of political parties. As I demonstrated through review of the abundant scholarly literature on headscarf debates, they were centred on the main question of whether or not headscarved women could enter university campuses, courtrooms or the parliament building as MPs; or how the acceptable style of headscarf should be. As heated discussions took place at the level of politics, the effects trickled down to different layers of social organizations, activists and associations as well as to everyday conversations. These debates emerged from competing interpretations of religious expression and proper representations of female body in public space in the respective domains of Islamist and secularist socio-politics.

SEMANTICS OF THE HEADSCARF

Studies on the meanings and cultural significance of the practice of wearing a headscarf, cross culturally and generally referred to as veiling, are inexorably rich. Various scholars of gender and Islam have studied and complicated the story of the "veil"[16] by introducing the culturally divergent and historical reasons for this practice (whether within religion or not) and by analysing in-depth religious texts. Fatima Mernissi is one of the first theoreticians of gender and Islam to offer a gender analysis of Quranic verses and the *Hadith*s (stories from Prophet Mohammed's life). According to her study, the veil, or *hijab*, was introduced and conceived in the Quran's Sura 33, as a means to regulate sexual relations within the community and to separate the private sphere of Prophet Mohammed and his wife Zaynab from public space and other men (Mernissi, 1991: 85). Fadwa El Guindi's (1999) study also suggests that the veil was used to regulate the Prophet's homestead, which was open to anyone at anytime for advice and counsel. In this sura, Mohammed was ordained to draw a curtain, a *hijab*, between his wives' privacy and the community (El Guindi, 1999: 153).

Besides segregating space and covering women's bodies, the *hijab* was also introduced as a solution to Mohammed's wives' problems in everyday life (Ahmed, 1986). Both Mernissi (1987) and El Guindi (1999) suggest that Mohammed's wives were the first women to adopt the Islamic practice of veiling to mark themselves as separate from "other

[15] This was also reflected in the marketing strategies of Islamist businesses. For example, in response to the attempts to lift the ban, Tekbir (a major Islamic clothing company) publicized new styles of wearing the headscarf for university students and projected a 30 per cent increase in sales (Gokariksel and Secor, 2009: 10).

[16] I am using the term 'veil' here while referring to the works of the authors who have preferred to use it that way. In Turkish context, and throughout the paper, I use the term headscarf (*başörtüsü*) that is used most generally to refer to the act of covering the head and a form of religious dress.

women," who could be suspected of being slaves or prostitutes. Ayahs 30 and 31 of Sura 24 state that both men and women should control their gaze in public and not reveal their private (sexual) body parts and beauty. And in several other places in the Quran, women are directed to "draw their *jilbab* [a form of head covering] close round them […] so that they may be recognized and not molested" (Quran 33:59 quoted in El Guindi, 1999: 154-155).

Mernissi's (1987, 1991) and El Guindi's (1999) analyses make it clear that the sexual segregation of spaces and the introduction of the *hijab* emerged from the need to regulate everyday life and sexual relations within the first Islamic community during the life of prophet Mohammed. However, El Guindi's (1999) cross-cultural and comparative analysis of the practice of veiling suggests that neither gender segregation nor women's veiling was specific to Islam at that time or to Arab societies. Also, Shirazi (2001) suggests that head covering was a common practice in pre-Islamic Iran as a marker of prestige and a symbol of status for upper-class women (also El Guindi, 1999: 16). Likewise, the practice of spatial segregation of women was established in Hellenic and Byzantine societies and was based on the lower status given to women (*ibidem*: 17). However, in Islam and Islamic societies, these practices became institutionalized through their incorporation into the Islamic texts (Ahmed, 1986).

As studies indicate, these practices are rooted in the regulation of sexualities through control of bodies and spaces. Mernissi puts it succinctly: "Muslim sexuality is territorial" (2003: 489). In her chapter "The Meaning of Spatial Boundaries," Mernissi contends that Muslim sexuality is regulated through a strict allocation of space to each sex and "an elaborate ritual for resolving the contradictions arising from the inevitable intersections of spaces" (Mernissi, 2003: 489). Having an important place in sexual spatial regulations, the concept of veiling gains significance in a three-dimensional perspective: visual, spatial, and ethical (Mernissi, 1991: 93). First, the veil visibly "hides" certain parts of a woman's body from public gaze; secondly, it spatially separates and marks a border between bodies who are considered illicit (because they exist outside of marriage or familial ties); and, thirdly, "it belongs to the realm of the forbidden" (Mernissi, 1991: 93).

This third aspect is crucial to the ways women's bodies are regulated according to Islamic discourses. In her book *Beyond the Veil* (1987) Mernissi argues that within Islamic discourse, the maintenance of social order depends on the spatial confinement of women's bodies. Because of her strong sexuality, the woman poses a threat to the harmony of the *ummet* (the Islamic community) (Rhouni, 2009: 166). In her critique, Rhouni (2009) suggests that Mernissi's take on the degraded status of women in Islamic societies is based on Islam's ready assumption of the power of female sexuality, which needs to remain under the control of men, who are considered mentally, physically, and

morally superior. Although Mernissi's analysis has been critiqued for essentializing Islam and analysing it from a modernist perspective in isolation from wider cultural and patriarchal influences (see Ahmed, 1992, Rhouni, 2009), it raises points about Islam and sexuality that still pose challenges to current Islamic identities and discourses.[17]

Islamic forms of gender segregation and veiling can be said to have emerged from already-existing forms of patriarchal relations and practices and been consolidated into an Islamic discourse. However, since there is no singular Islamic discourse, these practices have never shown a unitary and homogenous quality as is portrayed through Orientalist discourses. In their meanings and practice, gender segregation and veiling have shown considerable variety and inconsistency. As El Guindi argues, *hijab*, veil, *burqu*, *jilbab*, headscarf, and *purdah* have different meanings and connotations that deserve individual focus from a cross-cultural perspective (El Guindi, 1999). It is the Eurocentric perspective that subsumes all forms of veiling under the concept of "veil" or *hijab* and essentializes them as proof of women's oppression within a framework of "*veil-harem-eunuchs-seclusion-polygamy*" (El Guindi, 1999: 3-4).

It can be argued that the totalizing Orientalist view of Islamic societies has not only epitomized the image of oppressed woman, but has also imagined and reproduced an overtly sexualized and eroticized view. For instance, Mernissi (2001) explores the construction of the image of Muslim women in European literature and art as passive sexual objects in harems. Similarly, Yeğenoğlu (1998) investigates the representation of the veil and the Western fascination with veiled women due to their invisibility and inaccessibility to the Western gaze. She suggests that the "veil is one of those tropes through which Western fantasies of penetration into the mysteries of the Orient and access to the interiority of the other is achieved" (Yeğenoğlu, 2003: 543). In the same vein, Shirazi investigates the semantics of veiling by analysing the plentiful visual and printed material on the veil. By focusing on the role of the veil in popular culture, such as its use to advertise Western products, she explores how fixed sexual images of Middle Eastern women have been imagined in the Western mind, often ascribing an erotic meaning to the veil (2001: 11).

Veiling, however, cannot be considered only as a tool for the regulation of women's sexuality or as an eroticized construct in Orientalist discourses. It is also a practice that equips women, and communities, with tools to resist hegemonizing discourses and gendered power relations. Veiling has had a significant meaning in constructions of anti-

[17] It is noteworthy to emphasize that patriarchal structures constitute the base for not only Islam but all religions, as a main force for shaping social relations and construction of gender identities. However, due to the epistemological standing of Islam as the "other" within the Orientalist Euro-Christian political and social imaginary, gender asymmetries within Islam has always been under the spotlight, as evidenced by the literature I addressed.

colonialist movements and in the development of postcolonial nationalisms. Frantz Fanon's work (1965) on French colonialism and the Algerian nationalist liberation movement presents the veiled female body as a form of resistance to the modernizing and secularizing projects of Western imperialism. Lila Abu-Lughod's early work (1986) on cultural constructions of gender and honour in a Bedouin society also presents examples of how women use veiling to position themselves within a patriarchal social order and how women empower themselves through meanings of sexuality and honour that are inherent to veiling. More recently, Saba Mahmood's (2005) work on the women's mosque movement in Egypt presents a compelling view of women's deliberate adoption of veiling and study of Islamic knowledge to gain power and authority in an area that has previously been reserved for males.

Whether textual analyses of Islamic discourse or examinations of totalizing Orientalist discourses, studies on veiling converge on one point: veiling's sexualizing aspects. As intended by the Quranic verses, as a concept for sexual spatial regulation, and as an aspect of women's dress, the veil has publicly marked the boundaries of sexual interaction in public space and on women's bodies. As Mernissi mentioned in her three-dimensional analyses, the veil connotes what is forbidden: a woman's sexual privacy. It is a practice that "underscores the sexual dimension of any interaction between men and women" (Mernissi, 2003: 491). If we put it another way, veiling is a practice that underscores what we consider to be female honour.

As I will describe in the next part, the concept of honour is intrinsically connected to the regulation of sexual space and behaviour, which in the case of Islamic discourse, becomes synonymous with the veil. Explanations that refer to Mohammed's life indicate that the veil was intended to secure women's privacy and "decency" in public space. European fantasies of unveiling the Oriental woman are symbolically connected to a desire to break the honour of women and, thus, to rupture the sexual social order that the community depends on. Even though they are effaced from today's public political discourses, moral crises related to the headscarf conflict in Turkey have emerged from the moral claims veiling makes through its regulation of female sexuality and honour. If the headscarf conflict in Turkey is a moral one, as I will argue, it is because of the veiling practice's regulation of sexuality and honour of women and the moral claims made through women's bodies.

HONOUR

In 2008, during the debate and controversy caused by JDP's proposal to amend the constitution to remove the headscarf ban at universities and in public employment, one of the prime minister's advisors, Cuneyt Zapsu, said, "Asking a woman to take off her

headscarf is the same thing as asking a woman on the street to take off her panties." (Turbanini cikar, 2008) Out of all the controversial statements made during this debate, this was the most explicit reference to the sexualizing aspects of the headscarf and its significance for a woman's honour. More significantly, this statement underscored the potential of sexual violence that is inherent in the headscarf debates, a form of violence that cannot be dissociated from the construction of honour.

Studies on gender and honour, and the relationship between them in Turkey and surrounding geographies, almost unexceptionally look at their significance within the context of violence against women. As a concept so central to constructions of female sexuality in Turkey, honour subsumes all the cultural codes and meanings that enable and justify a violence that seeks to control women's bodies. As Sirman (2004) contends, the concept of honour pertains to both men and women, and it refers to one's ability to live up to the standards of femininity and masculinity. However, because of the asymmetries in the social construction of gender, a man's honour is measured by his ability to undertake his social responsibilities and to control his sexuality and that of the woman he is responsible for (Sirman, 2004: 44). On the other hand, a woman's honour is linked only to her sexuality, and it is defined within the private sphere in which she belongs (Akkoc, 2004). In this context, female honour becomes a key determinant in women's experiences, because social constructions of love and honour place women in a position that requires controlling their sexuality (being chaste) and demanding them to be sexually accountable to the family and even to the community (Sirman, 2004).

The most common phenomena through which honour and violence have been examined are honour crimes and domestic violence. Within the Turkish context, "honour crime," and more specifically "honour killing," is used as a "generic term to refer to the premeditated murder of a preadolescent, adolescent or adult women by one or more male members of the immediate family or the extended family" (Sev'er and Yurdakul, 2001: 964-965). Upon suspicion or proof of a victim's sexual impropriety, family members form a family council to decide on the woman's punishment—death in the case of honour killings (Sev'er and Yurdakul, 2001). However, even though various forms of sexual violence such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape are also defined as honour crimes, they cannot be limited to the concept of honour alone. In her analysis of the social conditions that produce honour-related crimes and domestic violence, Sirman (2004: 39) refers to these crimes as an "infringement of women's human rights, including their right to work, to travel, to their own bodies, and finally their rights to life."

The problem with honour killings and the reason they persist is that they are considered "traditional" and thus perceived as doomed to disappear with the advancement of modernity, education, and progress (Sirman, 2004). However, as Sirman (2004)

suggests, in postcolonial nation-states the notion of honour is reproduced in the new subject and is still based on "traditional" notions of femininity and female sexuality. The state supports the construction of gender identities through law, and since honour is considered a constitutive element in the making of society, honour crimes are perceived as an extension of the protection of virginity and gender values essential to the maintenance of the social order (2004).

In her study on forced virginity examinations in high schools in Turkey, Parla shows how the state defended these examinations as "a vital means of upholding 'our practices, customs, and traditions'" (Parla, 2001: 67). Until 2004, the Turkish penal code assigned reduced penalties to perpetuators of most honour-related crimes on the legal basis of "grievous unjust provocation," "which refers to a situation when a woman is suspected of bringing dishonour to her family as having provoked her murderers unjustly" (Sirman, 2004: 41). This gender bias is even more obvious in the categorization of attacks on the body as breaches of individual rights only when a male body is attacked (Parla, 2001: 77). As Parla (2001) puts it, attacks on the female body are considered an infringement, not of individual rights, but of the family order.

In judgements of sexual violence cases, discourses associating women's dress with her honour and agency have been prominent. Wolf (1997, cited in Entwistle 2000: 22) gives examples of rape cases in the United States, where (except in Florida) lawyers can legally cite the victim's dress at the time of the attack and whether or not the victim was "sexually attractive." The patriarchal discourse that is pervasive in the court system puts women in a position where they can be blamed for "asking for it" because of how they were dressed at the time of the attack (Entwistle, 2000; Moor, 2010). From this perspective, veiling in general, and the practice of wearing a headscarf specifically need to be considered in their efficacy in either "provoking" or "deterring" sexual assault or attacks. As Secor's (2002) research on migrant and working-class women in Istanbul also demonstrates, women use the headscarf to avoid harassment on the streets and to protect their honour in public.

By covering body parts that are considered as private and sexual, the practice of wearing a headscarf or veil embodies certain codes of honour, which, in most cases, become the criteria that determine the range of women's experiences – from being respected to being harassed. As demonstrated by research on Islamic texts, the initial intention of putting on a veil, or headscarf, conveys certain meanings on the female body, defines a "decent and honourable" female identity, and draws the boundary between public and private on the body of the female subject. Thus, contesting the propriety of such practice, as is the contestation of any form of female dress (such as the mini-skirt),

puts women in a morally obscure space where their sexuality becomes questionable, thus open to violence.

FROM HEADSCARF DEBATES TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A FEW EXAMPLES

When looking at the conflict between secularism and Islamism, it is important to acknowledge that both regimes and the practices they endorse (veiling/unveiling), operate by defining and debating female sexuality, honour, and privacy. During the past three decades, especially since political Islam started posing "threats" to the secular order, perceived discrepancies between these sexual regimes have become sharper and more visible. As Cinar points out (2008), the headscarf becomes a subversive force in the secular public sphere, because it asserts its own unconventional and non-secular (Islamic) norms of privacy and sexual modesty. Secularist norms, on the other hand, assert different public-private boundaries by specifically leaving the hair and neck, which are considered private aspects of female embodiment, open to public gaze (Cinar, 2008: 903).

Whenever the "issue of the headscarf" has been on the public agenda (whether in parliament, in public political discourse, in newspaper columns, or in the claims of various NGOs and feminist groups), its tension has become part of everyday life, too. As I observed from my surroundings and in the national news media, it became all too easy to pass judgement on a headscarved woman and to ask if she was sincere in her adoption of the headscarf or if she is using it just as a tool for Islamist politics. Thus, headscarved women became objects of attention and surveillance in terms of their congruence with the entirety of Islamic principles of sexual modesty.

A picture of a headscarved woman that has been circulated in emails and on social media in the past few years exemplifies this objectification. In this picture, there is a woman sitting on grass by a lake. She is wearing a black top, a black headscarf, and denim trousers. The photo, taken from behind, shows the backside of her belly, revealing her underwear at the waistline and a little part of her buttock cleavage. The important part of the picture is the caption: "She will burn in hell for 80 years if a single string of her hair shows, that's why she has to cover her hair. She is waiting for a new *fetwa*[18] to cover her ass!"

This kind of moral outrage against women's "inappropriate" dress is not an uncommon phenomenon. Joan Scott's work on headscarf conflicts in France provides an enlightening account of the "string affair" in which school girls whose thongs were visible at the waistline were sent home (2007). However, in the case of the headscarved woman whose G-string or thong is visible at the waistline, the critiques point at the inconsistency

[18] Religious ruling.

between the moral claims made by the headscarf and the woman's dress style, perceived as sexually provocative. The persistence of the headscarf and the right-to-wear question in political debates makes headscarved women open to public scrutiny and despise. Similarly, this makes headscarved women who drink alcohol or show sexual intimacy in public open to violent remarks in campaigns against the headscarf.

Moral judgements in defence of the non-headscarved women have also been important. For example, in 2008, at the height of the debates surrounding JDP's proposal to amend the constitution to remove the headscarf ban, the major Islamic-dress company Armine launched a new commercial campaign. In large billboards all over Istanbul, Armine showed a beautifully dressed headscarved model, under which we could read, "Dressing is beautiful" (*Giyinmek güzeldir*). This campaign immediately drew considerable attention and criticism. Several columnists (Arman, 2007; Capa, 2007) expressed their unease with the punch line, as it equated dressing only with wearing the headscarf and thus implied that non-headscarved women were naked or not dressed "properly". The commercial campaign functioned within a semantic field in which "non-headscarf" was equated with nakedness, a state that is intimately connected to a lack of morals and honour and that puts women in a place deserving of sexual objectification and harassment.

The stark contrast between the moral claims made by "secularists" and "Islamists" is also reflected in the work of artists who look at the female body and forms of symbolic violence perpetuated on the female body. Neriman Polat, a visual artist based in Istanbul, produces photography and collages on issues such as class- and gender-based social inequalities, the roles of women in society, and violence against women (Polat, 2012). In a group exhibition called "Collective Privacy," Polat displayed her work "The *Hasema*[19] Series." The exhibit sought to draw attention to the changing notions of "privacy" and "collectivity" in a society of surveillance. In their collective statement, the artists placed special emphasis on the notion of privacy that is often referenced through women's bodies (Utku, 2010).

In this exhibition, Neriman Polat's work on the *hasema* questions how conflicting notions of the privacy of women's bodies are being "collectivized." In one of the installation images, Polat juxtaposes body-length images of two models posing for the camera, with a beach in the background. One of the women is wearing a bikini and her head is cut and pasted from a headscarved hasema model. The other woman, standing next to her, is wearing a hasema, but without a headscarf, since the head is cut and pasted from the non-headscarved bikini model. By creating this provocative image, the artist draws attention to the ways the bans on headscarves, the debates on women's bodies, and women's sexual representations become "collectivized." The image of these two women

[19] A hasema is an Islamic swim suit for women, which covers the whole body and the hair.

portrays the contradictions that are inherent to the ideological conflicts, and it shows that women's bodies and sexualities are at the heart of headscarf debates.

CONCLUSION

Neither the modernly-dressed non-headscarved republican Turkish woman, nor the "Islamist" headscarved women are devoid of moral notions of femininity. Although they might seem contradictory, constructions of the Republican woman and of the headscarved woman are embedded in the same heterosexual matrix that ascribes women with traditional roles of femininity, sexual modesty, and honour. Starting as early as the 1960s, and becoming more persistent into the 1980s, headscarf debates in Turkey have put women's bodies and sexualities under public and political spotlight. Through the headscarf debates, each discourse's idealized image and sexual construction of women's bodies have been further polarized. These debates actively engaged female sexuality and honour, and thus made them matters of everyday discussion and banal aspects of the social dynamics of Turkish society. The increasing number of cases of domestic violence and honour crimes cannot be considered in isolation from the political discourses that reify codes of female sexuality and honour, even when no concrete or direct correlation can be made.

In her work on geographies of slavery and the black female body, Kathryn McKittrick says,

> The point of sale [of the black female body on the auction block] marks the scale of the body as "sellable", thus abstracting human complexities and particularities and discursively naturalizing multi-scalar ideologies that justify local, regional and national violence and enslavement. (2006: 79)

I likewise argue that a multilayered objectification and othering of women, as headscarved or not, is occurring. The discourses over the headscarf allow the emergence of spaces of violence where the female body can be acted upon in terms of its physical integrity, sexuality, and mobility. As demonstrated by the aforementioned cases, the discourse over the headscarf reinforces the control of female bodies through the social construction of female sexuality and honour. It constructs the female body as a scale, which is discussible and measurable, and makes violence possible.

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