



The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies

JASSS

International Journal of Social Science

Doi number:<http://dx.doi.org/10.9761/JASS1890>

Volume 6 Issue 8 , p. 123-142, October 2013

**THE HEADSCARF QUESTION IN TURKEY:
THE EXAMPLES OF THE AKP AND THE CHP
TÜRKİYE'DE BAŞÖRTÜSÜ SORUNU: AKP VE CHP ÖRNEĞİ***

Şebnem CANSUN, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of Political Science and International Relations

Abstract

This study aims to analyze how the main political parties in Turkey, the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, The Justice and Development Party) and the CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, The Republican People's Party), approach the headscarf issue, what kinds of openings, if any, these parties have adopted recently, and to what extent politicians adopt their party's approach. The field research for this study rests on three pillars. The first of these is made up of party documents, that is to say programs, statutes and internal publications. The main publications of the parties are *Türkiye Bülteni* (Turkey's Bulletin) for the AKP and *Halk* (The People) for the CHP. As the second pillar of the research, two dailies, one from the center right (*Yeni Şafak* - The New Dawn) and the other from the center left (*Cumhuriyet* - The Republic), have been chosen. The third component of the research is made up of interviews with at least one man and one woman from every level of hierarchy in each of these parties (i.e. main office administration, youth branches' administration and women's branches' administration at the district, provincial and national

*Bu makale Crosscheck sistemi tarafından taranmış ve bu sistem sonuçlarına göre orijinal bir makale olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

levels). Men and women grassroots politicians as well as at least one woman and one man from the municipal councils of specific districts, provinces and in the parliament were also interviewed. The interview transcripts were treated through the qualitative data analysis software Atlas-ti. This article reveals how, despite recent convergences, the two parties have opposing approaches to the issue of the headscarf in public space. Both the AKP and the CHP accept that head covering is within the Turkish traditions. However, the CHP is against the employment of women with headscarves in the public sector whereas the AKP is for the employment of women with headscarves in the public sector.

Key Words: Headscarf, türban, AKP, CHP, Turkish politics

Öz

Bu çalışma Türkiye'deki iki ana siyasi parti, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) ve *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*'nin (CHP) başörtüsü sorununa yaklaşımını, varsa partilerin konu hakkındaki yakın dönem açıklamalarını ve siyasetçilerin parti yaklaşımını ne kadar içselleştirdiğini incelemektedir. Bu çalışmanın saha araştırması üç ana eksene dayanmaktadır. Bu eksenlerden birincisi, parti dokümanlarıdır ve partilerin programları, tüzükleri ve düzenli yayınlarını içerir. Partilerin düzenli yayınları, AKP için *Türkiye Bülteni*, CHP için *Halk*'tır. Araştırmanın ikinci eksenini olarak, biri merkez solda (*Cumhuriyet Gazetesi*), diğeri merkez-sağda (*Yeni Şafak Gazetesi*) olmak üzere seçilmiş iki gazete bulunmaktadır. Araştırmanın üçüncü eksenini ise, partilerin farklı hiyerarşi seviyelerinden en az bir erkek ve bir kadın siyasetçiyle yapılan röportajlardır. Bu röportajlar, ilçe, il ve genel merkezde, yönetim kurulu, gençlik kolları yönetimi ve kadın kolları yönetiminde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ayrıca, erkek ve kadın taban siyasetçileri, ilçe ve il belediye meclislerinden ve Parlamento'dan en az bir kadın ve bir erkek siyasetçi de röportaj kapsamına alınmıştır. Röportaj çözümlemelerinin değerlendirilmesinde Atlas-ti adlı niceliksel bilgi analizi programı kullanılmıştır. Bu makale, son zamandaki yakınlaşmalarına rağmen, iki partinin kamusal alanda başörtüsüne zıt yaklaşımları olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Hem AKP hem de CHP başörtüsünün Türk geleneklerinde var olduğunu kabul etmektedir. Ancak CHP kamusal alanda kadınların başörtülü çalışmasına karşıdır, AKP ise kadınların kamusal alanda başörtülü de çalışabilmesi taraftarıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Başörtüsü, türban, AKP, CHP, Türk siyaseti

Introduction

This article examines how the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, The Justice and Development Party), the ruling party in Turkey, and the CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, The Republican People's Party), the main opposition party, see the issue of the headscarf in the public sphere, what kinds of openings, if any, these parties have adopted recently, and to what extent politicians adopt their party's approach.

The headscarf question is one of the most debated issues in Turkey, because “head covering receives increasing legitimacy” and is related to the place of religion in Turkish society (Arat, 2010: 869-884). The republican elite want to restrict this religious practice to the private sphere perceiving its presence in the public sphere as a symbol of political Islam (Gürbüz, 2009: 231-249) and “the visible expression of (...) the (re)Islamization of Turkish society” (Jelen, 2011: 308-311). Liberals argue that it is not fair to limit religious preferences to the private sphere (Ayata & Tütüncü, 2008: 363-384). The logic of their defense is that freedom of dress is part of one’s fundamental rights (Saktanber, 2006: 21-31). Regarding the political parties analyzed in this article, the CHP is taken to represent the republican elites and the AKP the liberal masses for the purposes of discussion (Kuru, 2006: 136-159).

The headscarf debate certainly has a direct impact on the way women live their lives. Very conservative circles argue that if head covering were allowed in secondary education, it would have a positive impact on the proportion of country’s girls enrolled in school. The headscarf is also a problem for covered women who want to attend college or work in the public sector. Moreover, women with headscarves cannot be elected to municipal assemblies or to parliament.

According to a representative survey conducted by the TESEV (*Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı*, The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation) in 2006, 61.3 percent of Turkish women cover their heads in 2006: 48.8 percent of those wear the so-called traditional covering (*başörtüsü*), 11.4 percent the “Islamic” *türban* and 1.1 percent the fully-body chador (*çarşaf*) (Çarkoğlu, 2009: 450-461). The traditional head covering leaves the neck and shoulder and some of the hair uncovered, the newer *türban* covers the head, the neck, and sometimes the shoulders and all of the hair, and the chador leaves only the eyes uncovered (idem.) The most politically sensitive of these that forms the subject of this paper is the *türban*, as the controversy stems from the fact that it is widely considered a symbol of Islamism.

This research considers the perspectives of two particular political parties, the AKP and the CHP regarding the headscarf. The AKP, which was established in 2002, is inspired by religion and its leading members come from Turkey’s previous Islamist parties (Ahmad, 2005: 173). The party declares itself to be both conservative and democratic. However, some of its actions arouse suspicions that the party leadership has a hidden Islamist agenda (Hale, 2006: 83). The CHP is the party founded by Atatürk (the founder of the Turkish Republic). The CHP declares itself to be both secular and social democratic but occasionally plays the religion card for electoral purposes (Öymen, 2004: 274). As far as the political power of these parties is concerned, the AKP has headed a single-party government since 2002. It won 46

percent of the popular vote in 2007 and 50 percent in 2011, while the CHP won 21 percent and 26 percent respectively.

The research

The field research is guided by three pillars. The first pillar is made up of a review of the party documents (programs, statutes, internal publications). The AKP's main publication is *Türkiye Bülteni* (Bulletin of Turkey) and the CHP's is *Halk* (The People). Second is a review of two daily newspapers, one centre-right and the other centre-left. These are *Yeni Şafak* (The New Dawn) and *Cumhuriyet* (The Republic). The former has close links with the AKP, whereas the latter has a secular leaning, and therefore might be considered the newspaper ideologically closest to the CHP. *Yeni Şafak* was founded in 1995 and currently has a daily press run of approximately 110,000. *Cumhuriyet* was founded in 1924 and has a daily press run of 60,000. The dates of focus are limited to the years after the Helsinki Summit of December 1999, when the European Union officially accepted Turkey's application for accession. This is mainly because the accession process initiated a period of reforms over every aspect of socio-economic and political life in the country.

Finally, interviews were conducted by me between November 2006 and February 2007. At least one man and one woman from every level of hierarchy in each party (central office administration, youth branches' administration and women's branches' administration at the district, provincial and national levels) were interviewed. Also, at least one woman and one man from the municipal councils at the district, provincial and parliamentary levels, as well as male and female grassroots politicians were interviewed. At the district level, the Kadıköy district of Istanbul was chosen as the CHP research site, because it is widely known as a party stronghold. Another district along the city's Asian coast, Beykoz, was chosen for its clear electoral support of the AKP. Research at the municipal and national levels was conducted in Istanbul and Ankara respectively.

Table 1. General Information on the Interviewees

	Man	Woman	Total
AKP	12	16	28
CHP	10	15	25
Total	22	31	53

The party programs, statutes and the internal publications were read first. Then, the dailies were read at Atatürk Halk Kütüphanesi (Atatürk Public Library) in the Taksim district of İstanbul. Finally, interviews were conducted between November 2006 and February 2007 with the aforementioned party members. The interview transcripts were treated through the qualitative data analysis software Atlas-ti, and the results were supplemented with a discourse analysis of dailies read in the end of 2012.

The Positions of the Two Parties on the Headscarf

Broadly speaking, the approaches of the AKP and the CHP on the issue of headscarf are clear. Both parties agree that hair covering among women is part of the traditions of Turkey's people. However, the CHP is against the employment of women with headscarves in the public sector, while the AKP is not.

Among the interviewees, only one female AKP member (from the district level directorate) rejected the use of the headscarf in the public sphere and one male and one female CHP member (a male deputy and a female municipal directorate member) tolerated it.

Table 2. The Approach to the Headscarf in Public Space

	AKP		CHP	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
The headscarf must be permitted in the public space	12	15	1	1
The headscarf must be banned in the public space	0	1	9	14
Number of interviews	12	16	10	15

Also, at the AKP, the general term "headscarf" (*başörtüsü*) was more frequently used during the interviews than at the CHP, where the more specific term *türban* was the dominant reference.

Table 3. The Number of Word Occurrences

	AKP		CHP	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
<i>Türban</i>	30	34	50	83
Headscarf	65	34	23	19
Number of interviews	12	16	10	15

Notably, among AKP women, the use of both words was balanced. To them, it appears that the choice of one word or the other is not important; the significance lies in the act of covering hair.

Neither party's program mentions the subject of the headscarf. According to Article 90 of the law of political parties, political parties' regulations and activities should respect the constitution, and since secularism has been part of the constitution since 1937, it may be understandable that an approach supporting the use of religious symbols like the headscarf in public does not appear on AKP program. Neither, however would a radical Kemalist approach appear on CHP program, since it tries to position itself as a catch-all party.

The AKP and the headscarf

The issue of the headscarf in the public sphere emerged during the 1980s. In 1987, Abit Kıvrak, president of the municipal leadership of the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP) in Konya, defended the rights of covered girls to education in the process of declaring his opposition to the headscarf ban (Milli Gazete, January 4, 1987: 3). In the Turkish context, the headscarf -especially the versions associated with political Islam, as described above- has mostly been considered a sign of reactionary attitudes. According to Kıvrak, it was those who prevented girls with headscarves from going to school were the ones with retrogressive attitudes. Similarly, sociologist Nilüfer Göle affirmed that there is no logical rift between being covered and being modern; she is one of the first Turkish academics to have done so through her research on the decision-making processes of educated young women who had decided to cover their hair (Göle, 1991).

In the 1980s, women were invisible within the Islamist RP. It was up to men to defend the rights of women, and for them, there existed only the problem of the headscarf. The 1990s marked a sort of transformation for the party. For example, Nermin Erbakan, RP leader Necmettin Erbakan's spouse, finally appeared in public with her husband to stress her "modernity" (Yeni Şafak, January 12, 2007: 12). In 1999, for the first time, women from the RP were even elected to the parliament. The AKP, several members of which were members of the RP before it was shut down, is today a long way off from its ultra-conservative past. Most of the time, it is the party's women who voice their own problems.

In the 2000s, the headscarf dilemma persists, and the women of the AKP are preoccupied with the issue. Remziye Öztoprak, from the committee of party founders, defended her covered colleagues, who make up 6 out of 13 women. According to her, "People should take an interest in [the] capacities [of AKP members who wear headscarves]". (Yeni Şafak, August 21, 2001: 1) Ayşe Böhürler, *Yeni Şafak* columnist and party founder who wears a headscarf, echoed this point in her complaint that politicians with headscarves are viewed only in terms of their style of dress (Yeni Şafak, August 22, 2001: 1).

Some AKP women have particularly suffered because of the headscarf issue. Two among our respondents faced the problem of schooling and of getting promoted within the public sector. One said she could not continue her education because of her

headscarf (woman, 31 years old, high school graduate, member of the party's district women's branches leadership, AKP, Interview conducted on November 7, 2006 in İstanbul). Another, who had hit a career wall because of her headscarf, is a former member of the RP:

I covered my head at 11. I went to an *imam hatip* [religious vocational] high school. Ever since that day this has become a problem in every stage of my life. If today I am not an assistant professor in a university, (...) if I am not a deputy and will not be in the short term, it is because of the headscarf. (...) People say, 'Why don't you find the solution?' (...) We will see. Time is the solution for all (woman, 37 years old, Ph.D. in political science, member of the Central Decision-Making and Executive Committee, AKP, Interview conducted on February 5, 2007 in Ankara).

These women want the headscarf ban lifted; they have things to offer to public life and want to be active in it. They believe themselves to have suffered an injustice. Several AKP women also stress how wasteful it is that women with headscarves are excluded from economic life. Male members of the AKP adopt the same discourse. One journalist, who is also an AKP member, explains:

Many women stay behind because of the headscarf. (...) I have female friends who cannot have yellow press cards because of the headscarf (...) It is Allah's order. (...) Whether she puts on a scarf or not, it should not interest anyone. As we say, adultery is an individual problem and we must be tolerant of it; we need to be tolerant to the headscarf too (man, 38 years old, journalist, member of the party's communications center, AKP, Interview conducted on February 5, 2007 in Ankara).

According to this view, limitations on the presence of the headscarf in the public sphere constitute discrimination against working women. Furthermore, this man has no doubt that covering is God's order. The most interesting point is the comparison drawn between freedom to wear the headscarf and adultery; both situations must be met with toleration.

Declarations regarding students with headscarves are numerous. The state minister responsible for women and family affairs, Güldal Akşit, while presenting a report to the United Nations on Turkish women, criticized the headscarf ban on campus with the assertion that "because of their faith, female students have difficulties accessing to education" (Cumhuriyet, January 5, 2005: 8). Canan Kalsın, president of the women's branches in İstanbul, claimed the reason she did not become an academic was because she saw the oppression of students with headscarves and sensed she

would never be happy in such an atmosphere (Yeni Şafak, March 24, 2002: 1, 2). Deputy Nursuna Memecan reasons that “[i]t is a paradox to defend girls’ entry into social life and then exclude those who want to go to school because of their dress” (Yeni Şafak, July 28, 2007: 16). Minister Nimet Baş (formerly Nimet Çubukçu) considers the headscarf ban in the public sector gender discrimination (Yeni Şafak, January 19, 2008). Women with headscarves officially may not enter university campuses, while men with equivalent values may do so without any problems. The point that conservative male students remain unaffected by such bans, and that the burden is carried disproportionately by like-minded women, is also put forward by researchers Murat Borovalı and Ömer Turan (Borovalı & Turan, 2007: 147).

Although the AKP makes a point of defending the right of covered women to attend university, a survey conducted in 2003 by Binnaz Toprak and Ersin Kalaycıoğlu reveals that only one percent of young women who graduated from high school reported discontinuing their studies because of the headscarf ban on university campuses (Kalaycıoğlu & Toprak, 2004: 98). 29.8 percent of the covered women surveyed who did not attend university cited a lack of success in entrance examinations, 14.6 percent said it was because they married, and 10.5 percent said their families would not allow it.

There was “a reception crisis”, an atmosphere of particular confrontation regarding the headscarf issue during the administration of former President Ahmet Necdet Sezer (Cindoğlu & Zencirci, 2008: 792). Sezer, a staunch defender of secularism, did not invite the covered spouses of deputies to receptions. He went so far as to send invitations excluding spouses to male AKP deputies and invitations including spouses to the female deputies. Most of the female deputies, reacting to the gender discrimination, criticized this choice and many found excuses not to attend the receptions (Yeni Şafak, October 22, 2003: 12). They had a strong reaction to the gender discrimination. In fact, according to sociologist Nilüfer Narlı, who conducted field research in 1998 that she actualized in 2002, women from the Welfare Party, Virtue Party and the AKP take “an aggressive position” on the issue of the headscarf:

[Islamist women] have strong male support behind them when they oppose the headscarf ban, an Islamic issue that is also closely related to female chastity and male honor (...) They do not display such endurance when it comes to protest against severe violations of women’s rights, such as honor killing (Narlı, 2002: 83).

Members of the AKP are particularly concerned with Turkey’s image abroad. For example, one young woman from the AKP who does not cover her hair and has just finished her university education declares she is ashamed of Turkey’s image abroad. She thinks that “this is a problem created on purpose, because in reality, there is no actual problem” (woman, 27 years old, university graduate, member of the party’s provincial youth branches, AKP, Interview conducted on November 21, 2006 in İstanbul). This young woman attacks the CHP with the same arguments the CHP uses

to attack the AKP. Secular people and CHP members, especially women, are ashamed of seeing women with headscarves out of concern the country will be viewed abroad as religiously backwards, whereas AKP women are ashamed of the ban on the headscarf out of concern the country will be viewed as authoritarian and intolerant.

The arena of male politicians' covered wives also occupies a place in public debate. When, in 2006, Prime Minister Erdoğan appointed to the Central Bank a director whose wife covered her hair, he was accused of appointing Islamists to important positions. Erdoğan responded that this appointment was made not because of his wife's headscarf, but based on the appointee's capacity to perform the job in question (Cumhuriyet, December 19, 2006: 5).

In 2007, people in Turkey discussed whether Abdullah Gül, whose spouse was covered, could become the country's president. During these discussions, president of the women's branches Selma Kavaf, who was the minister responsible for women and family affairs between 2009 and 2011, came forward with the contention that "the constitution did not pose criteria for the president's wife (...) The headscarf is a personal choice" (Cumhuriyet, December 19, 2006: 5). This liberal approach towards the headscarf from members of the AKP is logical since there are many covered women among the families of party members. The findings within the Ph.D. thesis of İsmail Safi, a founding member of the AKP, indicate that 83 percent of AKP deputies' wives cover their hair. Among the party's municipal directorate presidents, 90 percent of wives, 100 of the mothers, 75 percent of adolescent and adult daughters were reported to cover. At the district level, 80 percent of the mayors' wives were reported to cover (Cumhuriyet, July 24, 2008: 1, 8). Tayyip Erdoğan's spouse is among those with headscarves. She has confronted problems because of her headscarf and even cried when she was not allowed to make a visit to the military hospital GATA (Cumhuriyet, February 4, 2010: 5).

Within the AKP discourse, there are sometimes differences in approach regarding the headscarf (Cumhuriyet, December 1, 2002: 5). For example, according to House Speaker Bülent Arınç (2002-2007), if a woman is a user of public services, she must be free to wear her headscarf. By extension, this would make a student or patient free to cover her hair. Restrictions against the headscarf are perhaps arguable only in the case of women employed in the public sector. This is an idea supported by the secular columnists like Ali Sirmen as well (Cumhuriyet, February 5, 2010: 4). In contrast, according to one of the interviewees, whether or not to wear the *türban* should not be an individual decision, and "every woman should wear it" (man, 28 years old, high school graduate, office boy with the party, district-level grassroots politician, AKP, Interview conducted on November 8, 2006 in İstanbul).

The AKP has long argued that covering one's hair is not symbolic of a commitment to political Islam but is merely a sign of faith in God and therefore must be free. The CHP on the other hand stresses its symbolic dimension. A female lawyer and an AKP member of the municipal council thinks head covering is not necessarily linked to political Islam but is a means of socialization for conservative women:

I do not think that the actual headscarf is a symbol of political Islam. (...) If [covering] is a means used by women to participate in daily life, if it is only because they are religious women, then we must let them. Let them participate in social life (...) Why do we push them away if it is a means they use it to enter social life? This is what leads to marginalization, this is a very dangerous thing (woman, 38 years old, lawyer, member of the municipal council of İstanbul, AKP, Interview conducted on November 23, 2006 in İstanbul).

The idea that the headscarf should not be considered "a means of limitation but one of emancipation" has been repeatedly emphasized by Islamist intellectuals, Cihan Aktaş being a good example (Aktaş, Summer 1995). The above quotation is interesting, because it focuses on the danger of women's ostracization from public space, which rests on the argument that women who cover do so because they feel it more appropriate to represent themselves this way in the public sphere. By extension, if the secular republic rejects *türban*-wearing women, it becomes natural that they would support an Islamist government that accepts them as they are. It is always women who speak up about the potential dangers created by keeping women out of the public sphere, presumably because it is they who are affected most by such issues.

Here is another characterization of the poor relations between women with headscarves and those who do not let them participate in public life. According to a male AKP member, women with headscarf are the "normal people" of Turkey and the headscarf ban in the public sphere is an excuse not to share the economic benefits:

Normal people, the Anatolian person, when she was in the position of serving others, [the headscarf] did not cause a concern. (...) To me, the cause is totally economic (...) It is like the immigration of Turks to Germany. [Anatolian people] came to İstanbul and people said, 'Well, it is good that they come. They will do our cleaning'. Yet when their children attend the same university, graduate from the same schools, then there becomes a problem with covering heads or not (...) If they had not covered their hair, then they would find something else (man, 44 years old, engineer, member of the party's provincial leadership, AKP, Interview conducted on November 23, 2006 in İstanbul).

In this passage, we see how Anatolian conservatives are posed as "the real Turkish people", as if to say those who do not embrace so-called traditional values lack an authentic identity. According to this view, a "real" Turkish woman is the one who covers her hair, and a real Turkish man is one whose spouse wears a headscarf. Another respondent who expressed similar ideas, a member of the youth branches,

used the metaphor of a “cake”, wherein the headscarf issue was manufactured so that the powers that be did not have to share “one’s piece of the pie” or cake in this instance (man, 29 years old, university graduate, member of the party’s provincial youth branches leadership, AKP, Interview conducted on November 21, 2006 in İstanbul).

In 2008, Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that even if the headscarf were a symbol, it would be unfair to ban it in a time when we speak of freedoms (Yeni Şafak, January 15, 2008). In the process that followed, the AKP tried, with the support of the MHP (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, Nationalist Movement Party), to lift the headscarf ban on university campuses. *Cumhuriyet* columnists affirmed that the AKP wanted to legalize the *türban* throughout public sphere, and that Turkey was on its way to becoming an Islamist state (Arcayürek, January 18, 2008: 1, 8; Arcayürek, January 20, 2008: 1, 8). On the TV program *Siyaset Meydanı* (Politics Square) on the ShowTv network, two important AKP members, Ayşe Böhürler from the Central Decision-Making Council and Burhan Kuzu, president of the Constitutional Commission of the Parliament, defended the right for a woman with a headscarf and a law degree to serve as a judge (Birgit, January 22, 2008: 12). Several other deputies declared that their aim was to eventually lift the headscarf ban throughout the whole of the public sphere (Özgentürk, January 27, 2008: 12; Zileli, January 31, 2008: 17). Tayyip Erdoğan asserted that people should be free to choose how to dress, a declaration that was interpreted by some as containing the potential to open a path towards the Iranian-style black chador (Arcayürek, January 27, 2008: 1, 8).

The AKP’s support for the headscarf at universities was one of the major reasons it was brought to the Constitutional Court in 2008. The agreement of 7 judges, that is a qualified majority, was necessary for dissolution of the party. In June 2008, only 6 judges (out of 11) voted in favor of the party’s dissolution (*Cumhuriyet*, July 31, 2008: 1, 8), but it did decide to deprive the AKP of half of its public funding for the year. According to the court president, Haşim Kılıç, this was a “serious warning”, because 10 judges (out of 11) suspected anti-secular activities were taking place within the party. The Constitutional Court also nullified an amendment that would have legalized wearing the headscarf on university campuses (*Cumhuriyet*, October 22, 2008: 1, 5).

In September 2010, Erdoğan put forward another initiative to lift the headscarf ban and asked for the cooperation of other parties, but the CHP continued to resist (Yeni Şafak, September 1, 2010). Erdoğan declared to be “primitive and reactionary” to deprive women with headscarves from education (Yeni Şafak, October 24, 2010). This tentative step on the part of the AKP and its results show that the subject of the headscarf is still problematic in Turkey. It is notable that even when the initiative was

being debated the party publication *Türkiye Bülteni* published almost no articles on such a hot topic; it is mentioned only once by the prime minister:

When every person in this country, woman or man (...) non-headscarved women and headscarved women (...) stand together (...) then Turkey will live the happiness of being a civilized, modern and liberal country (*Türkiye Bülteni*, April 2006).

It seems likely that the AKP avoids discussion of the headscarf issue in *Türkiye Bülteni* in order not to be labeled an Islamist party.

The conservative-democratic AKP argues that the headscarf ban is a denial of freedom of expression and religious liberty.

The CHP and the headscarf

The CHP is against the public employment of women with headscarves in the public sector. The party members do not employ a discourse of domination although they have family members who wear headscarves. Those with Anatolian origins in particular are likely to have mothers who cover their hair:

Where I come from [Bayburt, in northeast Anatolia] conservatism rules. I have never seen my mother bareheaded (...) But this *türban* is something different. This is not the headscarf to which we are accustomed. This is something that the AKP government, and the Welfare Party before that, have found to extract public resources. We have six arrows. They have the *türban* (man, 44 years old, architect, member of the party's provincial leadership, CHP, Interview conducted on December 25, 2006 in İstanbul).

The idea alluded to by the young party member is that he understands the *türban* as a symbol of "green" or Muslim capital. For him, it is natural for a woman of a certain age to cover her hair, and his grandmothers from both sides put on a headscarf - CHP members do not oppose the traditional headscarf. But the party is "against the *türban*, because people use it as a symbol" (man, 25 years old, university student, president of the party's district youth branches, CHP, Interview conducted on December 19, 2006 in İstanbul).

CHP women have always been the most sensitive with regard to secular values, attacking the AKP for its support of headscarf in the public sphere. For example, in 2005, Birgen Keleş, a deputy from İstanbul, accused the government of taking into consideration only the dilemma of women's head covering (*Cumhuriyet*, March 8, 2005: 6). These women are afraid that if women with headscarves are elected to municipal assemblies and parliament, the country's secular systems will be in danger. They are aware that the militant women with headscarves will ask why they do not have a place in the parliament (*Cumhuriyet*, March 28, 2006: 6).

CHP women are particularly concerned with Turkey's image abroad. The CHP blames the Islamist *Milli Görüş* (the National Outlook) movement for creating the

headscarf problem. *Milli Görüş* was founded in 1969 by Necmettin Erbakan, a mechanical engineering professor. It has existed in the guise of various political parties since the Turkish constitution bans the anti-secular parties. CHP women envy the wives of the leaders of other Muslim countries who do not wear the headscarf and have trouble accepting that the republic founded by Atatürk is being represented by women in headscarves. As one female interviewee put it: “[The *türban* problem] has to do with the political projects of the United States on Turkey. By associating Turkey with moderate Islam, they move it to the Middle East to dismantle it later” (woman, 32 years old, lawyer, member of the party’s provincial leadership, CHP, Interview conducted on December 26, 2006 in İstanbul).

In interviews of CHP party members, declarations that began with “of course it is a woman’s freedom to choose what she wears” ended with in a discourse opposing its presence in public space. CHP women in particular tended to believe that under normal circumstances leftist ideology and feminism would not be in conflict with the headscarf. However, according to these women, head covering has some threatening aspects:

It is impossible that we have a problem with head covering that is based on a religious faith. (...) [But the *türban*] has begun to divide men and particularly women one from each other. (...) People have begun to perceive *türban* wearing women as honorable and *türbanless* women as less honorable. I was a university student at the time. In public transportation, people were giving their places to *türban* wearers. We, we remained standing.(...). ‘You, because you are *türbanless*, you could do bad things at any time’. This is the perspective (woman, 32 years old, lawyer, member of the party’s provincial leadership, CHP, Interview conducted on December 26, 2006 in İstanbul).

In this passage, we see testimony that the women who do not cover their hair suffer from being treated as “non-respectable”. In Turkish society, women’s honor is very important, and it is possible that some conservatives extend the privilege of honor only to women who cover. An opposite discourse has been among the secular-leaning public in discourse, according to which covered women take the liberties with their behaviors that uncovered women would not.

One university professor, who is also a parliamentarian, mentioned from her own experience that her female students had to put on a headscarf in order to finance their educations because aid is available for women who cover (woman, 58 years old, professor, deputy from Adana, CHP, Interview conducted on February 14, 2007 in Ankara). The benefits are not only financial but social also. A male member of the CHP’s municipal direction elaborates on this:

When [*türban* wearers] are candidates for positions, they receive favorable responses quickly. If they want to go out on the street with a girlfriend or to meet a boyfriend this creates new possibilities. (...) [Also], in public space, you overcome harassment. You are then a girl of the community or a member of the family. Then, harassment becomes inappropriate for you (man, 44 years old, architect, member of the party's provincial leadership, CHP, Interview conducted on December 25, 2006 in İstanbul).

The above quotation shows us how women with headscarves are sometimes perceived as capitalizing on notions of honor and respect, with the headscarf functioning as a "visa for the street".

In 2007, the members of the CHP were publicly against Abdullah Gül's becoming Turkey's president since his spouse was covered. Faced with the eventuality of Gül's election, the secular masses organized protests in many cities, under the leadership of Professors Nur Serter and Necla Arat, who were later elected deputies of the CHP. In January 2007, Ayşe Gülsün Bilgehan, CHP deputy and granddaughter of the second president of the republic, İsmet İnönü, ardently opposed the presidency, which she said, would "transform [Turkey] into a country of moderate Islam" (Cumhuriyet, January 30, 2007: 9).

Despite the opposition to Gül's presidency, the CHP has recently adopted a certain tolerance towards the headscarf. The CHP has always considered the headscarf to be part of Anatolian culture, but tries ardently to stress the difference between a headscarf and a *türban* and to specify their opposition is to employment in the public sector of those wearing the latter. In order to emphasize this position, photos featuring CHP women with headscarves appear in the party's internal publication (Halk, March 15, 2006: 12; Halk, May 15, 2006: 4).

In 2008, the CHP made two different statements about the headscarf. At the beginning of the year, it attempted to block the AKP's liberal initiative and worked against lifting the existing headscarf ban on university campuses. Party chairman Deniz Baykal (1992-2010) argued that the *türban* is just "a uniform imposed on Anatolian people like a symbol (...) [that] does not come from religion but from politics" (Halk, February 1, 2008). Baykal asserted that the *türban* and the headscarf were two different things, and that the *türban* was not an obligation of the Koran (Yeni Şafak, February 19, 2008). This is a point of view also stressed in interviews:

There are different interpretations of our sacred book, Koran. (...) If you ask me (...) I do not think that God who created us would ban sun to the half of what he personally created (woman, 51 years old, political scientist and journalist, deputy from Ankara, CHP, Interview conducted on February 14, 2007 in Ankara).

When the AKP began to address the issue of the headscarf on university campuses, the CHP foretold that the rest of public space was next, and that the chador

would come soon after. It asked the Constitutional Court to block the AKP's efforts to legitimize the headscarf on campuses. Female deputies spoke out on behalf of secular values (Halk, February 15, 2008: 4). They contended that if the headscarf made its way to campuses, Turkey would end up like Afghanistan.

Despite these vigorous declarations, Baykal had completely changed his discourse by the end of that year. In November 2008, during the municipal elections campaign, he famously embraced into the party the woman who wore the black chador (Halk, November 15, 2008: 16). This woman was the wife of a candidate for mayor from the CHP. This action could easily have been considered an electoral maneuver. In fact, both the candidate and his chadored wife quit the party due to later disaccord (Cumhuriyet, February 5, 2009: 6).

According to Baykal, the CHP does not discriminate according to dress (Halk, December 1, 2008: 117-118; Cumhuriyet, November 18, 2008: 5) and CHP members with headscarves may be found keeping pictures of Atatürk in their homes (Cumhuriyet, November 22, 2008: 5). In other words, they do not view their dress as a symbol, just a mode of traditional life. University professor deputies Necla Arat and Haluk Koç were the first to react to the CHP openings. Arat affirmed that the party "should not compromise the secular republic". Koç stressed the fact that the message sent through the chadored woman would oppose the CHP discourse. However, according to Baykal, there was no change in the party's approach to the *türban*, and the CHP was still "an ardent advocate of Atatürk's principles" (Cumhuriyet, November 22, 2008: 5).

Like Baykal, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who became CHP chairman in May 2010, has made some ambiguous speeches regarding the headscarf issue. In 2010, the CHP district branch in the Avcılar district of Istanbul compared the *türban* to a nun's habit in some party display posters (Yeni Şafak, September 3, 2010). Because this attitude received much negative criticism, Kılıçdaroğlu announced that the district director would be sent to the party disciplinary committee (Yeni Şafak, September 7, 2010). In the same year, Kılıçdaroğlu promised to solve the problem of university students (Cumhuriyet, July 2, 2010: 5) and attacked the AKP for having not yet solved this problem (Cumhuriyet, August 22, 2010: 6). However, the party continued to see the *türban* as a political symbol (Yeni Şafak, October 4, 2010) and to remain stalwart on the issue in relation to primary and secondary education as well as the public sector employment (Yeni Şafak, October 10, 2010: 1). Erdoğan accused the CHP of insincerity and speech discrepancy (Cumhuriyet, September 1, 2010: 6). He specified no areas of reservation with regard to the headscarf, including in primary schools" (Cumhuriyet, November 11, 2010: 4).

The social democratic CHP is against the employment of women with headscarves in the public sector.

CONCLUSION

In Turkey, the AKP is often considered the emblematic of the country's new political center, the masses, the liberals. The CHP is the emblematic of the periphery and the republican elites. "Turkish women's bodies have become a battleground between rival political actors" making an AKP-CHP comparison on the issue of the headscarf significant in explaining the tensions between the wishes of the masses and those of the elites.

For the AKP, head covering is linked to individual liberties and should not be a source of controversy. Some party members even considered covered women "the real Turkish people" and assert that the problem has been manufactured by the traditional elite to avoid sharing their "cake" of prosperity. The AKP has undertaken a serious initiative to eliminate headscarf oppression in public space and have had to survive a party closure attempt in 2008 because of it. In 2010, the party officials re-opened headscarf discussions and never said "there will be no head covering in primary schools", which was a central detail of the public debate. As of 2012, the AKP government has managed to lift headscarf ban in religious schools only. Female students in regular schools are free to cover their hair during the Qur'an lessons only.

According to the CHP, Islamist political intentions are behind the rise of the *türban*, this new style of head covering. Even though the headscarf is a societal reality, the party considers the public employment of women with this new style of head covering inconsistent with republican ideals. It has welcomed chadored women into the party and even criticized its members who exhibit strong opposition to all head coverings, though such public displays have been dismissed as tactics to please to the conservative electorate. In fact and in contrast to the AKP's silence on the issue, the CHP has maintained that headscarves in primary and secondary schools are "red zone" issues, as in the public sector, wherein their usage should not be allowed.

The headscarf question in Turkey seems solved in practice among most working women, though in some areas the issue still meets with resistance (e.g. there is still no deputy with a headscarf). Time will tell whether the question will be fully solved, but questions regarding the place of religion in the Turkish society and politics and women's head covering as a short hand for them will probably always fuel debates, as they have done since the late Ottoman period.

REFERENCES

(November 22, 2008). "Açılım değil, ahlaki tavır" [Not an opening, but a moral attitude], *Cumhuriyet* 5.

AHMAD, Feroz. 2005. *Turkey, The Quest for Identity*, Oxford, Oneworld.

- (July 31, 2008). "AKP'ye uyarı çıktı" [A new warning to the AKP], *Cumhuriyet*, 1, 8.
- AKTAŞ, Cihan. (Summer 1995). "Kadının Özel Alanla Tanımlanması" [Defining the woman through the private sphere], *Bilgi ve Hikmet*.
- ARAT, Yeşim. (2010). "Religion, Politics and Gender Equality in Turkey: implications of a democratic paradox?", *Third World Quarterly*, 31:6, 869-884.
- ARCAYÜREK, Cüneyt. (January 18, 2008). "Bilen Varsa" [If someone knows], *Cumhuriyet*, 1, 8.
- ARCAYÜREK, Cüneyt. (January 27, 2008). "Laik rejimin yüzü ak mı kara mı?" [Is the face of the secular regime white or black], *Cumhuriyet*, 1, 8.
- ARCAYÜREK, Cüneyt. (January 20, 2008). "TTC" Türkiye Türban Cumhuriyeti [Turkey: *Türban* Republic], *Cumhuriyet*, 1, 8.
- (December 1, 2002). "Arınç tırmandırıyor" [Arınç fuels tensions], *Cumhuriyet*, 5.
- AYATA, Ayşe Güneş & TÛTÛNCÛ, Fatma. (2008). "Party Politics of the AKP (2002-2007) and the Predicaments of Women at the Intersection of the Westernist, Islamist and Feminist Discourses in Turkey", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35:3, 363-384.
- BARBAROSOĞLU, Fatma. (January 12, 2007). "Eş durumundan siyaset" [Politics from marital status], *Yeni Şafak*, 12.
- (July 24, 2008). "Başı kapalıları partisi" [The party of covered heads], *Cumhuriyet*, 1, 8.
- (September 3, 2010). "Başörtüsü sorununu bu zihniyet mi çözecek" [Will this mentality solve the headscarf problem], *Yeni Şafak*.
- (January 19, 2008). "Başörtüsü yasağı cinsiyet ayrımcılığı" [The headscarf ban is sexual discrimination], *Yeni Şafak*.
- (October 24, 2010). "Başörtüsü yasağı ilkelik" [The headscarf ban is primitive], *Yeni Şafak*.
- (May 15, 2006). "Baykal Ordu'da halka seslendi" [Baykal addressed the people in Ordu], *Halk*, No. 59, 4.
- BİRGİT, Orhan. (January 22, 2008). "Burhan Kuzu türbanlı yargıca da sıra gelecek dedi mi" [Did Burhan Kuzu say that the time of the *türban*-wearing judge was coming], *Cumhuriyet*, 12.
- BOROVALI, Murat & TURAN, Ömer. (2007). "A Legitimate Restriction of Freedom? The Headscarf Issue in Turkey" in Fuat Keyman (ed.), *Remaking Turkey*,

- Globalization, Alternative Modernities and Democracy*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 137-153.
- CİNDÖĞLU, Dilek & ZENCİRCİ, Gizem. (2008). "Withering the Counter Hegemonic Potential of the Headscarf: Public Sphere, State Sphere and the Headscarf Question in Turkey", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44: 5, 791-806.
- (February 1, 2008). "CHP Genel başkanı Deniz Baykal: Hedef, laiklik kitlesi" [CHP chairman Deniz Baykal: The target is the the secular masses], *Halk*, No. 96.
- (March 15, 2006). "CHP Rize'de atakta" [The CHP is on the attack in Rize], *Halk*, No. 55, 12.
- (November 20, 2008). "CHP'de çarşaf CHP'de çarşaf tartışması" [The chador discussion in the CHP], *Cumhuriyet*, 1.
- (March 8, 2005). "CHP'liler tepkili" [CHP members are reactionary] *Cumhuriyet*, 6.
- (November 15, 2008). "CHP'ye katılanlar bir oyunu bozdular" [Those who joined the CHP have spoiled the game], *Halk*, 16.
- (September 1, 2010). "CHP'ye türban çağrısı" [Call for the *türban* to the CHP], *Cumhuriyet*, 6.
- (Januar 30, 2007) "Çankaya Köşkü, kamusal alandır" [Çankaya Pavilion is the public sphere], *Cumhuriyet*, 9.
- ÇARKOĞLU, Ali. (2009). "Women's Choice of Head Cover in Turkey: An Empirical Assessment", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and The Middle East*, Vol.29, No.3, 450-461.
- (February 5, 2009). "Çarşaf açılımı geri tepti" [The chador opening backfired], *Cumhuriyet*, 6.
- (January 4, 1987). "Doğramacı'dan hesap sorulmalıdır" [We must hold Doğramacı accountable], *Milli Gazete*, 3.
- (July 28, 2007). "Doğum gününde vekil seçildi" [She got elected deputy on her birthday], *Yeni Şafak*, 16.
- (March 20, 2006). "Erdoğan türbanla ırkçılığı karıştırdı" [Erdoğan mixed the *türban* and racism], *Cumhuriyet*, 4.
- GÖLE, Nilüfer. (1991). *Modern Mahrem, Medeniyet ve Örtünme*, İstanbul, Metis Yayınları.
- GÜRBÜZ, Mustafa. (2009). "Over the Bodies of the T-Girls: The Headscarf Ban as a Secular Effort to Monopolize Islam in Turkey", *Middle East Critique*, 18: 3, 231-249.

HALE, William. (2006). "Christian Democracy and the JDP, Parallels and Contrasts" in Hakan Yavuz (ed.), *The Emergence of a New Turkey, Democracy and the AK Parti*, Utah, The University of Utah Press, 66-87.

(October 10, 2010). "Herkese özgürlük" [Liberty for everyone], *Cumhuriyet*, 1.

(November 11, 2010). "İnancım çok farklı" [My beliefs are so different], *Cumhuriyet*, 4.

JELLEN, Brigitte. (2011). "Educated, independent, and covered: The Professional aspirations and experiences of university-educated hijabi in contemporary Turkey", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 34, 308-319.

KALAYCIOĞLU, Ersin & TOPRAK, Binnaz. (2004). *İş Yaşamı, Üst Yönetim ve Siyasette Kadın* [Woman in the work force, senior management and politics], İstanbul, TESEV Yayınları.

(September 7, 2010). "Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu o ismi açıkladı" [Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu revealed that name], *Yeni Şafak*,.

(September 1, 2010). "Kılıçdaroğlu'nun başörtüsü sessizliği" [Kılıçdaroğlu's headscarf silence], *Yeni Şafak*.

KURU, Ahmet. (2006). "Reinterpretation of Secularism in Turkey: The Case of the Justice and Development Party", Hakan Yavuz (ed.), *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Party*, Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 136-159.

(February 15, 2008). "Laik ve demokratik Türkiye'yi Meclis'te CHP'nin kadın milletvekilleri savundular" [The CHP's female deputies defend secular and democratic Turkey in the parliament], *Halk*, No. 97, 4

(December 1, 2008). "Muhafazakar kesimle cumhuriyeti buluşturacağız" [We will bring the conservative sector and the republic together], *Halk*, No. 16, 117-118.

NARLI, Nilüfer. (September 18-21, 2002). "The Role of Islamist Women in Political Parties in Turkey, Women in Global Community", paper presented to A Fullbright-Sponsored Conference Bridging Academia and Public Policy, İstanbul: Boğaziçi University, 83.

ÖYMEN, Altan. (2004). *Değişim Yılları* (Years of change), Ankara, Doğan Kitap.

ÖZGENTÜRK, Işıl. (January 27, 2008). "Kadınlar çoktan aşmış" [Women have already overcome all], *Cumhuriyet*, 12.

- SAKTANBER, Ayşe. (2006). "Women and the Iconography of Fear: Islamization in post Islamist Turkey", *Signs*, 32(1), 21-31.
- (April 2006). "8 Mart Dünya Kadınlar Gününü Kutladık" [We celebrated the 8th o March, World Women's Day], *Türkiye Bülteni*.
- (October 22, 2003). "Sezer'in yaptığı millete saygısızlık" [Sezer's deed is disrespectful to the people]. *Yeni Şafak*, 12.
- SİRMEN, Ali. (February 5, 2010). "Başörtüsü konusu" [The headscarf issue], *Cumhuriyet*, , 4.
- (November 18, 2008). "Siyaseti yukarı çekelim" [Let's pull politics up], *Cumhuriyet*, 5.
- (March 24, 2002). "Siyasette yeni sayfa açıyoruz" [We are opening a new chapter in politics], *Yeni Şafak*, 1, 2.
- (January 15, 2008). "Siyasi simge bile olsa başörtüsü suç mu?" [Would the headscarf b a crime even if it were a political symbol?], *Yeni Şafak*.
- (August 23, 2010). "Şantajcı Recep Bey" [Mr. Recep, the blackmailer], *Cumhuriyet*, 6.
- (August 21, 2001). "Tenkit takdire dönüşecek" [Criticism will be transformed into admiration], *Yeni Şafak*, 1.
- (March 28, 2006). "Türban ideolojik simge" [The *türban* is an ideological symbol], *Cumhuriyet*, 6.
- (October 22, 2008). "Türban ikinci plana düşürür" [The *türban* reduces [women] to a second plan], *Cumhuriyet*, 1, 5.
- (February 19, 2008). "Türban ne imanın ne Islam'ın şartı" [The *türban* is neither a condition of faith nor of Islam], *Yeni Şafak*.
- (October 4, 2010). "Türban siyasi simge" [The *türban* is a political symbol], *Yeni Safak*.
- (July 2, 2010). "Türbana evet demedim" [I have not said 'yes' to the *türban*], *Cumhuriyet*, 5.
- (January 21, 2005). "Türk kadını Birleşmiş Milletler gündeminde" [The Turkish woman is on the United Nations' agenda], *Cumhuriyet*, 8.
- (August 22, 2001). "Vatandaş ayrımcılığı" [Citizen discrimination], *Yeni Şafak*, 1.
- (December 19, 2006). "Yasada başörtüsü yasağı yok" [There is no headscarf ban in the law], *Cumhuriyet*, 5.
- (February 4, 2010). "Yine türbana sarıldı" [He embraced the *türban* again], *Cumhuriyet*, 5.
- ZİLELİ, Ümit. (January 31, 2008). "Şeriat Devleti" [Sharia State], *Cumhuriyet*, 17.