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Criticizing Patriarchy in Turkey

Edited by Rasim Özgür Dönmez and
Fazilet Ahu Özmen

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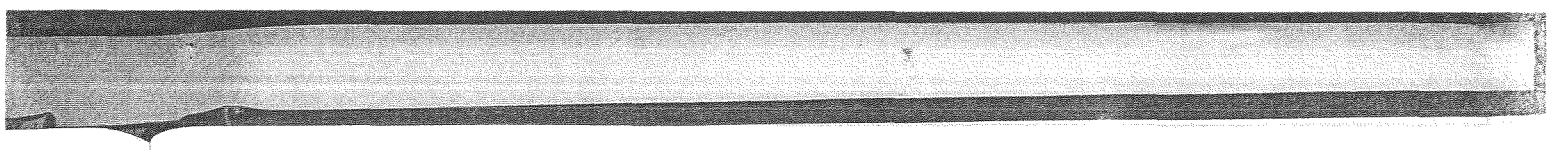

Chapter Seven

ISLAMIC WOMEN'S ORDEAL WITH THE NEW FACE(S) OF PATRIARCHY IN POWER: DIVERGENCE OR CONVERGENCE OVER EXPANDING WOMEN'S CITIZENSHIP?

Canan Aslan Akman

The objective of this chapter is to critically explore how Islamic women's feminist praxis, which has been challenging both secular and Islamic patriachy in Turkey over the past two decades, has responded to the gender politics of the religiously conservative government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has been a pragmatic offshoot of Islamism in Turkish party politics. Since the end of the 1990s, Islamic women's participation in Islamic identity politics has been intertwined with feminist claims to equal citizenship for headscarved religious women. This claim has been carried into the terrain of the democratization process in the context of debates over constitutional reforms to develop a more inclusive citizenship regime for hitherto excluded groups. The expression of agency by educated Islamic women in urban centers has proceeded through their gender activism in civil society and in intellectual engagement as writers and journalists. The new context of the ongoing struggle of these women for the elimination of sexist obstacles to both religious and secular women's individual existence has been the reproduction of patriarchy through a divinely ordained essentialism underlying the AKP's gender-complementarity perspective. The conservative democratic identity of the party prioritizes the family as a heteronormative ideal for the well-being of both the nation and women. A major dilemma faced by Islamic feminists during this period stems from the fact

that, on the one hand, their pious identity constructs their subjectivity as conservative allies of the government, while, on the other hand, they have been subverting the inherent sexism of the male political elite, who have paradoxically strengthened the existing legislative framework to provide significant guarantees for women against gender-based discriminations.

The intersections of various structures, such as class, primordial (sectarian, ethnic and tribal) ties, Islamic communal identities and urban-rural differences have, as elsewhere, compromised the practice of citizenship in Turkey for all female groups, regardless of their religiosity. In particular, secularism has not brought about a complete break with sexist traditions fed by Islamic notions of morality and gender order. Moreover, the gender politics of the secular state controlled by the male elite have contributed to the maintenance of restrictions on women's participation in the public sphere through both a facade of non-interventionist policy into the private sphere and the promotion of an orthodox interpretation of Sunni Islam at the level of official policies that caters to the needs of Turkey's Muslim majority citizens. Consequently, Islamic patriarchy remains an important cultural component in the oppression of both secular and religious women. In particular, Islamic women's practice of citizenship has not only been restricted by individual men through private patriarchy but also by the male-dominated secular establishment through ideological restrictions.

Following the 28 February 1997 military intervention, which aimed at stemming the rising Islamist tide, and the subsequent solidification of headscarf restrictions, pro-feminist and feminist Islamic women have carved a niche for themselves through more secluded public and civic engagements. Their major concern remains the lifting of the headscarf restrictions, which they perceive as a major roadblock to religious women's citizenship during the AKP period. For the government, however, this issue has been secondary to addressing other economic and political issues. This chapter investigates the perceptions, criticisms and concerns of feminist Islamic women regarding the AKP's gender politics, which has reproduced a patriarchal construction of gendered citizenship in Turkey through a family-centered notion of equality for women. It firstly provides an overview of the gender activism of the profeminist and feminist Islamic women; then it inquires into their perceptions and criticisms of the gender politics of the government through an analysis of the views of Islamic women writers in the media and of the interviews carried out by this author at selected pious women's organizations in Ankara and Istanbul. As part of an ongoing research project of this author on Islamic women's feminist activism, in-depth interviews were conducted with twelve women from Istanbul-based AK-DER (Association of Women's Rights Againts Discrimination), HAZAR Association (Hazar Association of Education, Culture and Solidarity), Ankara-based Capital City Women's Platform Association and İLK-DER (Knowledge, Principles and Culture As-

sociation). The interviews, which took place at these associations, followed the logic of semi-structured survey research to tap into the subjective views of the respondents as individual pious women. The founders, former and current chairs and/or leading members of these organizations were asked about their stances on women's issues in Turkey including the headscarf problem, and to give their evaluations of the policies and discourses of the government regarding these issues. In addition, a prominent feminist Islamic woman journalist (and TV program producer), who has been close to Islamic women civil society actors, and who has held a formal position within the executive organ of the AKP, was interviewed in Istanbul. Finally, the ex-director of the now defunct Women's Center of the Diyanet Foundation, affiliated with the Presidency of Religious Affairs, Diyanet was also interviewed to obtain detailed information about the significance of the gender politics of the Presidency as an organ of central government. Although not all of these women self-designated as feminist, they have built up a discursive repertoire on women's equal rights on the basis of the accumulated feminist body of knowledge born out of feminists' struggles in the West. They also all underlined the contributions of the achievements of feminism to the rise of their own gender awareness through their particular experiences of exclusion as women. The fact that they have dedicated their public activism to critiquing patriarchy in both secular and Islamic sectors means that they can be taken as representatives of Islamic feminism in Turkey, which has been asserting itself within the wider women's movement since the late 1990s. Related to this, a major concern of the analysis underlying this study's research objectives was to attain an understanding of these women's predicaments as pious and feminist actors while they have been challenging, negotiating and accomodating the AKP-led patriarchy's controlled inclusion of religious and secular women into the prevailing gendered citizenship regime.

PROBLEMATIZING WOMEN'S LESS-THAN-EQUAL CITIZENSHIP IN TURKEY THROUGH THE INTERACTION BETWEEN ISLAMIC AND SECULAR PATRIARCHY

The patriarchal state compromises women's full citizenship through both legal and informal, invisible and subtle ways that create a rigid separation between the public and the private. Feminist scholarship has long problematized this issue, along with the discourse of rights adopted by liberal states which constructed "universal subjects that are devoid of difference," but at the expense of obscuring the conditions of inequality for particular women's groups.[1] However, through the forces unleashed by globalization, minority women with claims of "difference" in many parts of the world have been

challenging their exclusion from citizenship by "exercising their agency."[2] This process entails the reconstitution of women as political actors.[3]

Far from being a monolithic entity, the patriarchal state in the West has gone through a metamorphosis to expand women's citizenship through anti-disciminatory legislation in many realms. Ultimately, however, its interest in promoting male supremacy has meant that women have been forced to struggle for citizenship through their participation in political and civil society. Throughout the transformations of women's legal citizenship in secular Turkey, the gendered nature of the national context in which citizenship was practiced was made invisible through a discourse of inclusion that saw legal reform as the major tool to create equal women citizens. The collectivist outlook of Kemalist modernization considered women's equal rights to be part and parcel of the modernization of the country.[4] Consequently, as Göle contends, "women as public citizens and women's rights" have overshadowed a scheme of "citizenship and civil rights in the Turkish modern imaginary."[5]

In both secularist patriarchy and Islamic patriarchy, the images of modern uncovered women and Muslim women were constructed as binary categories in a reciprocal process of the creation of "the other."[6] The early Republic's gender equality reforms including the state's imposition of Western dress and lifestyles for modern female citizens led to an inward-looking reaction from pious families: either their daughters were not sent to school at all, or they were forced to discontinue their education. In contrast to the secular construction of a gender-neutral public sphere, in the religously conservative strata, public life was defined in masculinist terms as a male-dominated arena. As reflected in Islamic periodicals, Islamic communal norms and expectations regarding women held that women's primary responsibility was management of the home, caring for the husband, and raising children, and working for the overall welfare of the family. From a functionalist perspective, if this gender order did not succeed, "the inner balance of the society would be disrupted."[7] In the post-1950 period, which brought about a relaxation of hitherto militant secular policies, and changes in social relations, the impact of modernization on women and the family became subject to debate within the country's religiously conservative classes. For nationalist and Islamic intellectuals, who opened new discursive spaces for the creation of alternative identities for religiously conservative citizens, wearing Islamic outfits would bestow on Muslim women their real value; in turn, it was argued, this would mean that there should not be any restrictions on their participating in public places, such as schools, official ceremonies and concerts, unless they were marked by a religious ban.[8] Until the rise of identity politics in the 1980s, as more and more conservative women stepped out of their homes to enter public life, the Muslim women's public roles continued to be debated in Islamic circles.

The relationship betwen Islamic forces and the secular Turkish state followed a complex trajectory of interaction during which co-optation and reconciliation emerged at critical junctures of their confrontation.[9] As this interaction produced specific engagements between secular and Islamic actors, Republican secularism compromised with religious patriarchy on the terrain of gender politics in its quest for control of Islam.[10] To give one example, which is both as a manifestation and consequence of this compromise, criminalization of religiously ordained marriages without civil marriages has not been strictly enforced, leaving thousands of women vulnerable to injustices in the secular state within officially unrecognized but socially legitimized conjugal unions. Most notably, the male-dominated Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), a bureaucratic agency of the state, has failed to play a progressive role in defending Muslim women's rights to equal citizenship with men in the secular system. Instead, the Presidency upheld the sanctity of Islamic marriages and issued *fetwas* declaring the headscarf to be a religious requirement for all Muslim women.[11] In other words, the secular state's intervention into the conceptualization of religiosity has deepened the identity problem and citizenship predicament of religious women. In the Theology Faculties, several academics have produced arguments to prove that gender-biased restrictions and compulsory veiling for Muslim women were not part of the sacred Muslim texts. They have proposed to contextualize the rise of discriminatory practices and discourses during and after Prophet Mohammed. However, their views have not yet been accepted as the orthodox interpretation of Islam in both academia and within Diyanet.

Secularist modernization forced a "re-evaluation" of Islamic morality, which had regulated Muslim women's public life largely through the control of female sexuality and the separation of the sexes.[12] However, secularism also regulated gender relations through the control of women's bodies, sexuality and outfits. For example, as Republican reformism upheld women's moral superiority to men in terms of their supposed modesty, and self-sacrificing nature as mothers through the idealized image of modern female citizens as "honorable, enlightened and modest" in women's sexuality and femininity were suppressed.[13] In addition, social structures that support gender inequalities in the legal field resulted in a framework that is unconducive to promoting the cultural transformation needed to undermine the strongholds of public patriarchy in Turkey. This construction of the Republic's female citizens merely created an illusion of inclusion for women from modernizing sections of society. As for women from the masses of religiously conservative families, equal citizenship rights had no practical significance since they were also oppressed by class-based, sectarian, communal and tribal bastions of patriarchy.

Thus, both the Islamic and secularist patriarchy maintained a shared emphasis on nurturing roles for women in the homes, communities and the

nation.[14] This outlook ignored women's role conflict as mothers as public actors. Women's education and work were not valued for their intrinsic value for the individual female citizen but for their utility for the state, nation and community. Although Islamist politics managed to selectively "appropriate secular gender codes" by accepting equal legal rights in both civil life and the public sphere, it only tolerated them within a framework of Islamic norms.[15] In the context of this prevailing dualism of egalitarian legal norms to ensure gender equality and traditional Islamic values which prompted a defensive reaction to the spread of Westernized gender roles, the state's Prayer Leader and Preacher (Secondary) Schools (IHLs) became an attractive option for pious families to educate their daughters. Since the 1950s, their numbers have been consistently increased by conservative, right-wing administrations, as well as by the 1980 September military regime.[16] Girls' IHLs, which first opened in 1977 were also a popular option for those families who did not want to send their daughters to mixed-gender schools. In the 1980s, many young female students, graduates and professional women, who would resist the headscarf restrictions of the secular state's education system, emerged from these schools.

ISLAMIC WOMEN RECLAIMING THE PUBLIC SPHERE: FROM THE HEADSCARF MOVEMENT TO NEW FORMS OF PUBLIC VISIBILITY AND GENDER ACTIVISM

As the headscarves of female students were turned into symbols of Islamism in the clash between secularist and Islamic ideologies, Islamic women struggled for the expansion of citizenship rights of women in a secular state in the new veiling movement.[17] Already in 1981, a regulation by the Ministry of National Education had made unveiling compulsory for female students in mixed-gender IHLs.[18] As the headscarf restrictions were strictly enforced following the 28 February 1997 declarations of the military-dominated National Security Council, many headscarved students discontinued their education, while most of those who were able to finish their schooling despite huge difficulties returned home after graduation.

Headscarved students who engaged in civil disobedience were both reclaiming the public sphere in the 1980s and 1990s, also representing a quest for a new identity comprising "new and more enabling expressions of femininity as a contradictory form" in their encounters with modernity as pious women.[19] They often claimed that they felt emancipated with the headscarf, and that Islam itself could not be held responsible for the distorted practices which subordinated women in society and family.[20]

According to the Islamic populism of the Welfare Party (RP) (1984-1998), the headscarf ban was an act of oppression against female students.

Despite the political mobilization of RP women and the political experience they gained in the RP's Ladies Commissions, which gave them opportunities for empowerment,[21] women's exclusion from executive positions in the party ultimately created a "women's ghetto."[22] In this period, women's politicization was restricted both by male-dominated structures and the party's masculinist political vision. Thus, the RP experience was not able to promote political consciousnes in Islamic women. A case in point is the aborted parliamentary career of Merve Kavakçı, elected in 1999 as a parliamentary deputy for the banned RP's successor, the Virtue Party. She was unseated following an "unprecedented political lynching" by secular parties in the parliament, which resonated well with the strategy of the male Islamic elite to use headscarfed women as pawns in their confrontation with the secular establishment.[23]

It was towards the late 1980s that intellectual religious women first started to discuss and reflect on the position of women in Islam. In these discussions there was a shift in focus from truly believing women (*mumine*), whose religious identity and status were primarily defined by their home-based and community activities, to a new discourse on Islamic women in pursuit of reconciling religious identity with social and professional roles.[24] Meanwhile Islamic women intellectuals critiqued women's roles in the Islamic movement, which as a mirror image of Islamic gender politics, justified the presence of Islamic women in the male dominated religious-nationalist movements as "sisters."[25] At the time, Islamic women active in the headscarf protests did not sufficiently question this sister mentality of their male colleagues for pragmatic reasons to justify their public activism. Single-issue Islamic women's non-governmental organizations such as AK-DER and ÖZGÜR-DER were concerned with maintaining solidarity between men and women in their community, and they refused to see the headscarf problem as a feminist issue.[26] In the late 1990s, however, most of these organizations increasingly made contact with secular women's groups on transnational platforms, most notably, in the context of CEDAW (the UN Committee for the Elimination of All Sorts of Discrimination Against Women) civil society forums to document the inequalities faced by covered women, and to pressure the government to lift its headscarf bans. Increasing contacts and cooperation between Islamic and secular women on gender equality campaigns also made strategic sense as a means to gather the support of liberal feminists.

In the late 1990s, this associational activism of feminist Islamic women in pursuit of having covered women's rights seen as women's human rights represented the institutionalized phase of the quest for a new religious femininity by confronting both Islamic and secular patriachy.[27] The "consciousnes-raising" aspect of the new associational activism of Islamic women was significant in so far as they were extensions of the (first generation) Islamic

women's home-based gatherings that used to take place in the 1970s and the 1980s.[28] Women in these organizations channelled their intellectual engagement into introverted and low profile activities (such as revisiting the Islamic sacred texts), and some were heavily involved in charity work. All of them voiced Islamic women's demands for the elimination of the ban on various public platforms such as seminars and meetings. As echoed in the words of the chair of HAZAR Education, Culture and Solidarity Association, secularist restrictions and stereotypes had led to an outcry; "either we are not women or we are not citizens of this country."[29] Those Islamic women in associations with an exclusive concern with the headscarf issue such as AK-DER and those with a more conservative following such as HAZAR in Istanbul and İLK-DER (Knowledge, Principle and Culture Association) in Ankara were not particularly assertive in their criticisms of Islamic men compared to those women involved in the more intellectual activity of developing a feminist reinterpretation of the faith, such as the Capital City Women's Platform Association (BKP). Nevertheless, as pious women, all of them claimed to be primarily concerned with the quest for justice.[30] Their feminist outlook, which was both a result and part of their engagement with modernity, resulted in their critical engagement with the patriarchal distortions of the Islamic faith, particularly its sacred texts and practices, and efforts towards promoting an egalitarian interpretation of the religion.[31] The emancipatory message of feminism in terms of reclaiming the rights of women as the oppressed group in patriarchal society was particularly relevant for them.

With the rise of the AKP to power, another group of intellectual and professional (pro)feminist Islamic women was able to successfully realize their quest for professional accomplishment through a pious female identity in the media, politics, academia, publishing and in the private sector. Although the dominant secular discourse and traditional Islamic circles did not particularly notice their individual successes, they became "role models" for other young religious women.[32] Most of these women did not see headcovering as the sole manifestation or criteria for being pious. Rather, these second generation Islamic women acknowledged the significance of the Republic's reforms for women's equal citizenship and attached particular importance to the secular state's education system for enabling them to develop a critical outlook towards traditional gender socialization. They claimed that most of the cultural and social practices performed in the name of Islam were not Islamic at all, and they criticized Islamic men for not extending sufficient support to Islamic women's citizenship struggles in the past. They also held that Islamic men's prejudices regarding covered women confined the latter to a secondary status since, in their view, "for most religious men religiosity worked through women's veiling and their domination over their wives within the homes."[33]

The AKP's electoral victory provided Islamic women with a sense of relief and optimism which largely replaced their previous feelings of victimization.[34] The advent of conservative democratic governance was also significant for the prospects of transforming Islamic women's gender critiques into a feminist intervention into the gender politics of the Islamic male elite.

"CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRATIC" GOVERNANCE AND THE WOMAN QUESTION: THE AKP'S GENDER POLITICS

The AKP ruling period has been significant in terms of using the power of the patriarchal state to pass legal reforms to eliminate gender discrimination, but without making a sustained effort to transform the cultural and ideological forces underlying Turkish women's subordinate citizenship vis-à-vis men. Impressionistic evidence makes it clear that women across all social classes have provided significant electoral support for the AKP. However, this is not because the party has offered a distinct message for women; rather it stemmed from its success in projecting a message of empowerment for hitherto excluded groups without resorting to confrontational discourses. The AKP's center-right identity, projected on the basis of a "conservative democracy" understanding, denoted a "synthesis between tradition and change."[35] However, especially during its first term in office, the secularists perceived the AKP's pro-EU stand and its democratization reforms as a deceitful mask, hiding an "agenda of gradual Islamization."[36] As far as the secularists were concerned, the litmus test of the credibility of AKP's claims to have a democratic identity was its stand on the issue of religious freedoms and its gender politics.

Among the seventy founders of the party, there were eleven women, some of whom would serve in the highest executive organs of the party. The AKP integrated its covered and uncovered women members, supporters and activists into a robust organizational network at provincial and sub-provincial levels. As the most strongly active section of the party, its Women's Branches have become an effective forum for educating and socializing women, as well as for mobilizing their labor to maximize votes through propaganda and charity work.[37] Research indicates that women in the AKP's Women's Branches have come forward with a claim to participate in party politics autonomously, not as proxies to their male counterparts.[38] Meanwhile, the EU-led reform process became the major terrain through which the government integrated the gender issue into its democratization agenda, though without touching on the explosive headscarf issue; the new Criminal Code, together with amendments to the existing Domestic Violence Law in 2003 and in March 2012 represented significant steps toward the recognition of women's individual existence autonomous from the community, and the

protection of women's bodily integrity as citizens. The Constitutional changes of 2004, which vested the state with the task of ensuring gender equality, while accepting the superiority of international treaties over domestic law, extended further legal guarantees for gender equality.[39] In 2009, for the first time, a permanent Parliamentary Committee on the Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men (KEFEK) was established to promote the implementation of equality legislation.[40] Finally, the constitutional amendments of 2012 stipulated that special measures to enforce and realize gender equality could not be considered as violating the equality principle.[41]

However, what has compromised the transformative potential of the gender equality reforms by constraining the prospects for effective implementation was the AKP's conservatism which centered on the social significance of women's mothering roles. AKP officials underline the public visibility of women as a criterion of civility (medeniyet), however, this perspective restricted gender equality within the confines of an oft-quoted notion of "equality of opportunity" for women.

The party's religiously conservative reflexes and its moralistic attitude to gender issues first surfaced in September 2004 in its proposal to criminalize adultery while reforming Turkey's Criminal Code. This initiative was justified by the AKP's parliamentarians in terms of "respecting the values of the society" and "protecting women."[42] However, the government had to abandon the proposed amendment largely due to negative EU reactions on the eve of the onset of accession negotiations. Another example of the AKP's gender attitudes, which was also heavily criticized by women's organizations emerged in the 2007 draft for the new constitution which placed women in the category of children, elderly and handicapped citizens who were in need of special measures of protection.[43] The AKP's gender policy, based on the conflation of womanhood with motherhood, has in practice aided the reproduction of patriarchy through a "strategic combination of religious, conservative, nationalist and liberal value sets."[44] Reforms to the existing social security system and amendments to the labor code (in particular, the adoption of the principle equal pay for equal work and the extension of paid maternity leave for mothers) have done little to change women's marginalization and disadvantageous position in the workforce. Frequent references to the need to prevent the aging of the population, and the government's advice to women to produce "at least three children" has contradicted the discursive emphasis of the AKP on the need for women's empowerment in society and the family.

According to the conservative democracy understanding of the AKP, the family as the carrier of tradition is the pillar of the society that needs protection.[45] It is this centrality of the family which extends value to female citizens. The convergence of such appeals with the Islamic notion of gender complementarity has been obvious; this is also evidenced by the fact that members of the AKP's Women's Branches also consider Islamic values as an

important component of morality.[46] On many occasions, AKP government's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has underlined the complementary nature of the genders, forcefully claiming that supposedly innate and essential differences between women and men, such as women's naturally given nurturing capabilities and emotions, make it necessary that sexual equality means "equality in rights" which would make women equal citizens. Consequently, he declared that he did not believe in the feminist notion of gender equality, which alienated feminist women.[47] Finally, towards the 2011 elections, the government reorganized the institutional framework of the state's gender equality agencies by replacing the Ministry of Women and Family by a Ministry of Family and Social Policies. This also attracted considerable criticism from feminists across the ideological spectrums for subsuming women under the family.

Within the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), women's roles and how they should be interpreted has generally not been an issue in the context of the dominant orthodox Sunni Islamic stream. However, during the AKP's era, the Diyanet has taken a number of significant steps towards contributing to gender equality policies. First, it started to educate its staff to raise awareness about violence against women through a joint project with the Directorate General on the Status of Women. Diyanet's officials have stated that male violence was not Islamic. Second, there were substantial increases in the numbers of women personnel appointed, such as preachers, piety service experts and koranic course teachers.[48] The appointment of women vice-muftus for the first time at the provincial and sub-provincial levels in 2005 and 2006 respectively was hailed as a progressive step by both the Islamic and secular sectors.[49] The appointment of women vice-muftus aiming at raising the religious awareness of pious women and such policies suggested a transformation in the role of Diyanet in the sense of extending its role in gender policies. At the same time, however, public statements from Diyanet also advised women to organize their lives in accordance with the rules of religious morality promoted head-covering as a religious requirement for Muslim women.[50] Hence, far from demonstrating a mentality change that would transform the AKP's existing gender complementarity perspective, the Diyanet's new discourses ultimately aided the patriarchal state in fostering the ideological hegemony of egalitarian discourses embedded in the Islamic tradition, which is considered necessary to maintain the stability of the family structures. On the one hand, the Diyanet took the opportunity to highlight the significance of Islam's egalitarian messages for the sexes on International Women's Days, and placed a renewed emphasis on the essentially gender-egalitarian nature of Islam. On the other hand, on its official webpage on 8 March 2008 it denounced feminism as an ideology that undermines the family.[51] When the Diyanet initiated its project of "Women-friendly Mosques" including their spatial rearrangement to attract women and

make room for them, there was criticism from Islamic intellectuals and some conservative scholars. Hence the extent to which opening mosques to women can be sustained as a policy remains uncertain.[52] Furthermore, the exclusion of women from the positions of muftu, imam and vice- presidency of the Diyanet continues due to resistance from Diyanet itself, from Islamic circles and even secular circles. A genuinely reformist change in policy would obviously call for a re-visiting of its institutional traditions based on the orthodoxy of gender relations in Sunni Islam. That this was not possible under the male-dominated structure of the Diyanet became evident in 2009 when the head of the Women's Centre of the Diyanet Foundation, Ayşe Sucu, was unexpectedly removed from her post following a change in the Presidency. Sucu herself had established this center in 1996 to address the spiritual needs of both covered and secular women.[53] She had already attracted criticism from the Diyanet for her outspoken views on the veiling issue in the context of her attempt at a humanitarian re-interpretation of Islamic faith. Her removal from office did not resonate well in secular circles who held that she had been punished for her pro-secular position and her views regarding the headscarf, which challenged the orthodox Sunni interpretation upheld by the Diyanet. The Sucu affair thus indicates the limits of patriarchal tolerance to efforts to reinterpret the notion of piety to foster gender equality. Subsequently, the Women's Centre was renamed as the Centre for Women, Family and Youth under a new cadre of officials who shifted the focus of their activities in tandem with the latest twist in the Diyanet's gender perspective.

Secular women and feminists reacted to the penetration of sexist values into the bureaucracy and political system during the AKP period with apprehension and a sense of threat to their lifestyles. Intellectual Islamic women and civil society activists remained attentive to issues of gender in the context of the legislative and constitutional reform process. At the same time, they systematically problematized the fact that they encountered far more restrictions in the public sphere on the basis of their pious identity as covered women than Islamic men.

THE FEMINIST ISLAMIC WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE AKP'S GENDER POLICY

Significantly Islamic women contributors to the leading conservative dailies concentrated mostly on culture and literary issues after 1997. During the AKP period, the interests of these writers in moderately Islamic or conservative newspapers visibly shifted to a larger range of political issues, with a special emphasis on the dynamics of oppression of various groups. The number of covered Islamic women writers in these dailies also increased significantly. They addressed women's problems, most notably the headscarf issue,

seeing the ban on headscarves far more than their male counterparts as a violation of women's human rights.[54]

Most of these writers contributed to, or were directly involved in the gender activism of Islamic women's organizations, and some of them were also those affiliated with the AKP as party members. Two such prominent names were journalist and TV program producer Ayse Böhürler, and Fatma Bostan Ünsal, an active member of the Capital City Women's Platform, both of whom were founding members of the party. Böhürler was also, until recently, a member of the AKP Central Decision-Making and Executive Committee. Ünsal was formerly a vice chair of the party (in charge of human rights), and her husband served as a deputy during the AKP's first term in office. Because both of them were careful in maintaining some distance from their parties in their criticism of Islamic politics in general, and gender policies in particular, they did not offer direct and fundamental criticisms of the government's gender policies until the 2011 elections. In June 2009, Böhürler attracted considerable attention when she criticized Islamism over its betrayal of its principles (including especially its defense of the oppressed) over the course of its integration into power.[55] While addressing various issues of concern related to democratization and women's rights, she also criticized the sexual double-standards of Islamic men that ensured their domination of women, which they justified in the name of Islam, for example by invoking religiosity over women's veiling.[56] Böhürler also devoted some articles to the plight of headscarved women who had been excluded from education, work and electoral politics.[57] There was, nevertheless, a conspicuous absence of direct criticism of the AKP's male elite regarding women's issues, which in her view required political cooperation across and above parties and belief systems.[58] Ünsal remained the more outspoken and direct critic of state policies and double standards operating against women's interests mostly through her civil society activism and individual critical stand, which received occasional media coverage. For example, during the 2003 US operation against Iraq, when the AKP government was searching for civilian consensus on a possible Turkish cooperation with the US in this operation, Ünsal joined those who went to Baghdad as a live-shield to draw attention to the plight of the Iraqi civilians. At the time, similar anti-war sentiment was voiced by other Islamic women intellectuals, such as Sibel Eraslan, highlighting women's sufferings as mothers during armed conflicts.[59]

During both the second and third AKP governments, one can discern more direct criticisms from feminist intellectual women of Islamic men, and the male party elite specifically, for their insensitivity to "the negative discriminations" experienced by covered women.[60] Islamic writer Cihan Aktaş, for example, contended that the longstanding headscarf ban had itself encouraged other kinds of interconnected discriminations against pious women. For instance, marriage (including agreeing to be an Islamic man's second

wife) and homemaking were offered as the most attractive options for educated Islamic women who were not in a position to practice their professions due to headscarf restrictions. Feminist Islamic women like Aktaş criticized the mindset of Islamic men for being indifferent to the situation of covered women; in that pious men, and the male political and business elite who had been able to move upwardly in terms of social status and economic well-being during the AKP's dominance, continued to devalue covered Islamic women.[61] While engaging in social relations necessitated by modernity in their interactions with uncovered women in daily life, Islamic men remained comfortable in maintaining their traditional expectations of their covered wives.[62] Moreover, many Islamic men in the private sector have not been eager to employ covered women out of concern for competitiveness; even when they did employ them, they tended to exploit their labor by underpaying them. Islamic women active in feminist non-governmental organizations have therefore concluded that Islamic men's attitudes are no different from the sexist mindset of men across all social classes and ideologies in Turkey, arguing further that religious women are doubly oppressed by conservative men at ease with benefiting from such women's unpaid labor in the private sphere, and by these women's exclusion from the public sphere.

As the interviews conducted for this study suggest, Islamic women who remained frustrated with the government's headscarf policy attributed this to the fact that the government's gender policies, including the headscarf issue, had from the beginning lacked a clear-cut road map. A leading member of the Capital City Women's Platform Association in Ankara put this conviction in the following way:

> The AKP did not start out with a clear-cut, thought-out strategy regarding the women question. There has also always been a mental confusion regarding women's issues. At the same time, they have had difficulty in reconciling women's demands with their masculinist mentality. From the beginning, they have left the solution of most of the issues to the natural flow of time.[63]

In addition, the sexist double-standard held by the AKP's male political elite was underlined by feminist Islamists as the most important factor accounting for the weakness of implementation of progressive legal changes.[64] For example, the AKP government failed to act on the constitutional amendments of 2010, which opened the way for positive discrimination policies for women by institutionalizing its mechanisms. During this period, Islamic male intellectuals, most notably Ali Bulaç, from *Zaman* Daily, opposed positive discrimination for women on the grounds that reforms that failed to take into consideration the supposed complementarity of gender would ultimately lead to moral degeneration and social dissolution.[65] These views were severely

criticized by Islamic women writers like Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, Cihan Aktaş and Nihal Bengisu Karaca.[66]

Despite this criticism of the Islamic male elite's patriarchal mentality, most pro-feminist and feminist Islamic women could not present a united front that could offer fundamental criticisms of the gender complementarity perspective, which locates woman citizens' primary responsibility with her family and her children, advocated by government representatives. For example, most of the women interviewed for this study agreed with the complementarity argument of the government while claiming that the government ought to clarify further what it meant by equal rights. Others criticized this differentialist discourse for justifying the subordination of women to men.[67] Meanwhile, some Islamic women active in non-governmental organizations engaged in the defense of women's rights tried to reconcile the AKP's gender complementarity argument with an Islamic notion of justice. Thus, those feminist civil society activists who organized more conservative women, such as İLK-DER in Ankara, underlined the importance of educating religious women about the true teachings of religious texts untainted by masculinist distortions and manipulations. According to the chair of İLKDER, for example, Islam clearly does not position women inferior as to men; however, "in a secular state the greatest enemies of pious women become the male-dominated state and the husbands."[68]

Similarly, although these feminist Islamic women place significance on women's work outside the home, they have failed to produce a sufficiently critical response to claims by the government about the necessity of having at least three children. As mentioned in the preceding section, AKP officials, most notably Prime Minister Erdoğan, have made use of every opportunity in their public declarations to advise people, especially newlywed couples, to have "at least three children" out of concern about the potential aging of Turkey's population. The interviews for this study indicate that most of the educated Islamic feminist women overestimated the existence of women's free choice (across different socio-economic groups) regarding this issue. However, those interviewees holding a more markedly feminist standpoint tended to raise a more fundamental objection to the government's discourse, which they regarded as an ideological device to confine women to their homes.[69] It should also be noted that these Islamic women noticed that the government has so far failed to address the issue of providing daycare facilities and other social policies to lessen the burden of working women, but this criticism has not been publicly voiced as feminist demands during the AKP government's term.

Feminist Islamic women also tend to hold a pragmatic view of the AKP's period in office in terms of the possibilities of realizing gender equality, as well as its limits. In their view, the conservative identity of the party heavily shapes its approach towards women's issues. Regarding the recent legal and

constitutional reforms which introduced important guarantees for gender equality, the significant influence of international actors, particularly the EU accession process was emphasized to the extent that, as the chairwoman of HAZAR Association remarked, "the government's reformism has indeed exceeded its capabilities, will and mentality, by passing a series of progressive reforms on the issue of women despite themselves."[70]

Feminist Islamic women have tended to use several channels to make their voices heard by government representatives and female AKP politicians. They have occasionally contacted male and female politicians and participated in signature campaigns to pressure the government on critical reforms issues at both a personal and institutional level. For example, the annual Women's Meetings, organized by conservative women's associations across the country, have invited female government ministers. The Ankara-based Capital City Women's Platform seems to be well-connected to the government with several AKP members in its ranks and occasional contacts with both male and female politicians. The leading members of this organization attribute female politician's submissivenes in the AKP to the male leadership in a party structure where "everything turns around the central party organization." They also criticize the government for by-passing women's organizations while formulating gender equality policies. This has been often due to a perceived "tug of war" between the government and women's organizations, which makes the government resort to a strategy of continually postponing action in response to the demands of women's organizations, even when it has regarded such demands favorably, due to concerns of being overshadowed by women.[71] Regarding the lack of assertiveness of female parliamentary representatives of the government, all the feminist Islamic women interviewed place a shared emphasis on the male-dominated hierarchical party structures which, they believe, stifle the voice of female politicians.

At the beginning of the AKP's ruling period, Islamic women had conveyed their criticisms and demands to the State Ministry and the Presidency of Religious Affairs regarding women officials' marginalization within the latter.[72] They even demanded the appointment of a woman as one of the vice presidents of the Diyanet, and in the aftermath of the military memorandum of 28 February 1997 Diyanet cadres had become the most important route for employment for most female graduates of Theology Faculties because these women were allowed to work with headscarves as government employees. The new policy of creating more space for women within Diyanet showed that the government had grown more responsive to the demands of educated Islamic women. However, Islamic women intellectuals and feminists also criticized the Diyanet administration for not making a sufficient effort to include women and to deal with women's problems, demanding the continuation of this policy and the appointment of women section heads.[73] The

Diyanet was credited for several other initiatives such as opening the mosques to women, and as the İLK-DER chair pointed out, it was up to pious women to make use of these steps to take their place alongside men.[74] Feminist Islamic women's criticisms were more directed towards the policies of the new administration following the change in presidency in 2009. They regarded some of the initiatives taken by the new administration with concern because they believed that genuinely reformist voices were becoming silenced while more orthodox views on women became prominent. For example, the dissolution of the Choir of Women Preachers under the new administration might have a symbolic significance, as evidence of the government's growing gender conservatism as perceived by feminist Islamic women.[75] According to them, the Diyanet also ignored interpretation of the sacred texts and early Islamic practices which were gender-egalitarian, thereby perpetuating the status quo in its institutional view of women's rights. A case in point, which was raised by the Capital City Platform Association (BKP), was the practice by Muslim women to maintain their maiden names after marriage in Islam's early history (during the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammed).[76] It should be noted, however, that despite these criticisms, and the widely-shared view of Islamic women that the Diyanet is incompatible with a secular state, there also remains an ambivalence about how Diyanet could be used as a base to transform Islamic and secular patriarchy. Islamic women did not support Ayşe Sucu, or criticized her removal from office, since they kept a distance from her activities because their views of religiosity diverged from hers. That is, they have looked at her as a figure who had maintained secular concerns within the Diyanet, so they interpreted her removal from office as an ordinary event by disregarding the general context of the growing conservatism they were simultaneously criticizing regarding other policies of the Diyanet.[77]

ISLAMIC WOMEN AND THE GOVERNMENT'S INCREMENTAL AND CAUTIOUS APPROACH TO THE HEADSCARF PROBLEM

In 2001, at the time of the AKP's establishment, eleven out of seventy founding members were women, including covered women, and the party had also made room for headscarved women in its administrative organs. After coming to power in 2002, the AKP declared that resolving the headscarf problem was not a priority for the new government. At the same time, however, the new government projected an anti-establishment image by, among other things, showing a visible preference in cabinet appointments for politicians with headscarved wives. Thus, the AKP's male political elite continued to uphold the symbolism of the headscarf as an object of oppression through appeals to the victimization of covered women.

Likewise, the AKP government publicly defended the headscarf in the context of individual rights and freedoms, while stressing the need to promote a national consensus for its solution. During its first term, the message given to Islamic women was that the agenda was overloaded with other political and economic issues. The AKP's headscarved members remained overwhelmingly present in its Women's Branches and most of these women also emphasized the need for a solution through social consensus without accentuating social polarization.[78] In retrospect, those feminist Islamic women affiliated with the party supported this stand since, "it (the government) did not define itself on the basis of Islam and did not use Islamic references for a long time and it took a broader perspective on freedom without an exclusive focus on the headscarf."[79] In time however, pious women who were excluded from education and employment, became increasingly frustrated with this cautious approach. Islamic women also grew uncomfortable with the polarizing atmosphere surrounding the headscarf controversy, especially before, and in the aftermath of the constitutional amendment of 9 February 2008, passed by the government majority in the parliament. Neither secular nor Islamic groups were content with the government's approach to lift the ban through a constitutional amendment, and civil and political society were deeply divided on the process.[80] Secular women, for their part, feared a prospective backlash from Islamic actors towards uncovered women, which could pressure female students in schools to cover themselves.[81] During these intense discussions, educated headscarved women expressed their discontent with these debates, as well as with the government's approach toward the issue in an internet declaration which quickly found its way into major media organs. The manifesto, "If the question is freedom, nothing is detail," was signed by hundreds of headscarved academics, journalists, writers and civil society activists during a press conference on 18 February 2008. Covered women complained that their libertarian stance in defense of the expansion of freedom for all oppressed sections of society was overshadowed by their headscarved identities in public opinion. This manifesto also included a call for a new civilian-made constitution to form the basis of a new libertarian order. It was followed by other public declarations in the same year by Islamic women, which were also supported by liberal sectors of the women's movement to emphasize the message that headscarved women and uncovered women were not polar opposites confronting each other through identities defined by the patriarchal system; rather, they would remain united in their opposition to all gender discrimination until "they could together walk arm-in-arm in the public sphere."[82]

The tug of war between secularist and Islamic elites resulted in the annulment by the Constitutional Court of the government's amendment to Articles 10 and 42 of the Constitution in June 2008, which had aimed at lifting the restrictions on the headscarf in universities. Subsequently, on March 14,

2008, the Chief Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals opened a closure case against the AKP for "violating the irrevocable principle of secularism." Although the AKP narrowly escaped closure, the prospect of resolving the headscarf question was thrown into another period of uncertainty.

By the elections of 2011, restrictions had in effect been lifted in universities, largely through the policy of the new administration of the Higher Education Council. Nevertheless, Islamic women continued to reflect on and document the impact of the ban on their psychological well-being, and its cost in terms of their access to basic citizenship rights.[83] Despite the dismantling of such barriers in schools, the prevailing legal restrictions on headscarves for government employees, and their exclusion from much of private sector employment continued the marginalization of educated women in professional careers.[84] Feminist Islamic women therefore voiced their frustration more strongly because, although the headscarf had ceased to be an obstacle for those willing to uncover their heads in work and schools, others remained at home or were unjustly exploited in the private sector jobs. Islamic women writers also challenged the government's strategy of resolving the situation through creating a new status quo based on the visibility of headscarved women in universities.[85] After the AKP's completion of two terms in office followed by another electoral victory, Islamic women's criticism turned to its failure to find a conclusive solution to the problem which would also allow covered women to work in the public sector. Most of them attributed the current impasse and protracted uncertainty about the issue to the psychological impact on the AKP government of the Welfare Party coalition government's earlier confrontation with the secularist elite.[86] This made them understand the AKP government's delicate position with some degree of empathy. At the same time, however, they felt that the government's cautious policy had had grave consequences for educated and professional pious and covered women. Moreover, as the current head of the BKP claimed in an interview, the exclusion of covered women posed the risk of a growing masculinization of the public sphere that would ultimately work against both covered and uncovered women:

> when headscarved women are excluded from the workplace it is automatically masculinized because the remaining uncovered women are also controlled through male control over their bodies, in the name of honor; on the other hand, if covered women were present alongside them, exclusion would not take on such a large scale.[87]

Following the 2011 elections, the quest for interparty consensus on the draft of a new constitution has resumed. In this context, feminist Islamic women's expectations have centered on a legal framework which would take up the headscarf question as a struggle against all kinds of discriminations, which

they consider as essential for institutionalizing constitutional citizenship. To contribute to this process, Islamic women's organizations, like other civil society organizations, sent their views and proposals to the Parliament. Clearly, the de facto opening of universities to headscarved students has not satisfied feminist Islamic women because of their continued exclusion from the public sphere due to long-standing misconceptions surrounding Islamic women's subjectivity constructed in the secular-Islamic polarization.

WOMEN'S MARGINALIZATION IN POLITICS, ISLAMIC WOMEN'S POLITICAL RECRUITMENT AND RECENT DEBATES ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

Not unlike other parties, the AKP has paid lip service to the problem of women's marginalization from politics, and provided some limited room for women through recruiting them as founding members, delegates, members and party officials at every level of the party organization. The recruitment of fifty women deputies (thirty of whom were elected on AKP lists) in the 2007 elections contributed to the highest rates in decades for women's parliamentary representation (9.1 percent). Male as well as female party representatives and members credited the AKP for being the party with the highest numbers of female members. However, this strength of numbers comes from the membership in its Women's Branches in 81 provinces, 892 subprovinces and 169 localities below the sub-provincial levels.[88] The AKP has not claimed to represent covered women categorically in party politics either as founding members, officials or deputies. On the contrary, it recruited uncovered women as deputies, not all of whom were necessarily religious.

Feminist Islamic women, especially those attached to the AKP politically (as members and party officials), tend to emphasize women's mobilization in the party as an impressive success story in the male-dominated Turkish political party system in terms of the relative increase in the number of women involved in party affairs.[89] This was largely attributed to a "de facto quota" endorsed by Prime Minister Erdoğan to ensure the presence of women in both provincial and central party organization and its Central Decision-Making and Executive Committe currently standing at 10 and 20 percent female respectively. Moreover, Women's Branches have been integrated into the policymaking process of the party through their participation in the meetings of male-dominated provincial organizations and central party administrative organs, in stark contrast to the other Turkish parties including the AKP's predecessor. Access of the provincial level Women's Branches to the physical and financial resources of the party organization was promoted gradually by the determination of the central party organization. They were hampered by the male-dominated provincial organization, especially in the early peri-

od, but in time these difficulties were overcome, and facilitating the integration of Women's Branches into the general party structure has attracted more and more women to the party. Women in these branches have also come to have a say in the finalization of candidate shortlists, since potential candidates are also expected to get the backing of the Women's Branches.[90] Despite this optimistic picture however, the AKP has also continued to reproduce home-based roles of women in politics through women's activism heavily concentrated in the Women's Branches with very few members recruited to elected parliamentary or ministerial positions. It also made only limited room for covered and uncovered women among its party executive organs.

The AKP has, so far, not responded positively to debates over electoral quotas for women, which was proposed by secular feminists as a major instrument to increase women's parliamentary representation. Already by the elections of 2007, it was clear that the government was not concerned with taking the necessary steps to adopt positive discrimination through specific electoral quotas. However, Islamic women writers were not particularly assertive at the time on the issue of electoral quotas. Instead, feminist Islamic women focused on the significance of the AKP leadership's personal commitment and determination to integrate women into the party's administration and promote them as electoral candidates. They attached overriding importance to the implementation of a "de facto quota," albeit without legal endorsement. As a result of this policy, the nominations of female candidates for the latest municipal elections constituted one-third of the shortlists, thanks to Prime Minister Erdoğan's personal initiative. However, Islamic women criticized the fact that the government had consistently appointed only one female minister to its cabinets, and had failed to select any female head for its provincial and sub-provincial organizations. They evaluated this situation in the broader context of Turkey's male-dominated party politics, in which male politicians in local party networks act as powerful gatekeepers hindering aspiring women. The conservative worldview of the AKP was also noted as another significant factor constraining women's inclusion in electoral politics. It should also be noted that, beyond the commonly-held positive view of the electoral quotas among feminist Islamic women, the effectiveness of electoral quotas for women, in terms of making a genuine difference in representation, was viewed with some skepticism; it was claimed by some of them that quotas could only make possible the election of specific groups of women. Overall, Islamic feminists have felt considerable ambivalence regarding gender quotas in the electoral process, which could be the major reason why they have not raised their voice publicly so far regarding the issue, even when it was raised by secular women's groups who believe that positive discrimination is needed to promote women's presence in politics. The interviews indicated that some feminist Islamic women believe that

quotas may be useful as a temporary measure, although they could serve to perpetuate the belief in women's subordinate position in politics.[91]

By the 2011 elections, the issue of the nomination of headscarved women was not raised by the AKP's male and female political elite. Although there was no legal obstacle to the nomination and selectability of headscarved women, the internal regulations of the Turkish parliament still did not allow women to enter plenary sessions wearing headscarves. Islamic women had grown more critical and impatient of the government's position on the political recruitment of headscarved women. There was also a growing pressure from local party organizations for a headscarved woman candidate, with several women coming forward as prospective candidates. When the party organization ignored this demand, some covered women came forward as independent candidates, and then in March 2011, three months prior to the parliamentary elections, a declaration was made on behalf of headscarved women, "No Headscarved Candidate, No Vote." Women who were well-known through their civil society activism for women's rights and human rights, and other journalists and writers directly confronted the AKP leadership by demanding the nomination of covered women. The AKP founding member Fatma Bostan Ünsal took the initiative by applying for nomination from the party's list. As Ünsal recounted, back in October 2010, during an "exchange of opinion meeting" of the party, she had already raised the necessity of fielding a covered female candidate in the elections on the grounds that the majority of women in Turkey were covered. According to her, depriving these women of their rights to stand as party candidates (through the selection mechanism of the party) restricted the citizenship rights of the majority of women in Turkey.[92] During the municipal elections of 2009, there were headscarved women candidates for positions in municipal councils, but they were forced by the party to withdraw. In the previous elections, some headscarved women had applied for nominations with wigs. Prior to the 2011 elections, however, there was pressure from the party for aspiring religious women to come forward uncovered to be nominated, meaning that headscarves automatically disqualified aspiring women. In Ünsal's opinion, this strategy was unethical.[93]

The manifesto, "No headscarved candidate, no vote" urged all political party leaders to be sensitive about the political rights of covered women, and demanded that headscarved candidates be nominated for electable positions in the candidate short-lists. Otherwise, headscarved women would withdraw their support from the political parties to which they had hitherto extended their unconditional support "due to their sensitivity toward democratization." These women claimed that, since there was no legal ground to deny headscarved women their electoral rights, this exclusion was not compatible with any claim to represent "the national will." They also criticized the fact that women in the AKP were largely confined to the party's Women's Branches

and, as such, they were not allowed to contest elections on an equal footing with men; rather, their efforts were being used to support the election of men.[94] This manifesto was, in fact, an outcry against the failure of the government to resolve the headscarf problem. The government was quick to respond, claiming that the demand was untimely and the initiative "inappropriate." According to Ünsal, the government's reaction demonstrated that Islamic men were used to considering headscarved women "as passive objects over which they could always exercise power." [95]

For Islamic women the election of covered women would have primarily symbolic significance, as they conceded that political representation in Turkey had turned into a shallow mechanism. According to journalist Hilal Kaplan, who supported the campaign, the parliamentary representation of headscarved women was of critical importance because the next parliament would produce the new constitution.[96] In this campaign, pro-feminist and feminist Islamic women for the first time directly confronted the male political class, attracting publicity and support from both secular and Islamic women (though not all). However, even the existing AKP female deputies did not support the campaign since they considered it to be premature. Other pro-feminist Islamic women affiliated with AKP ranks supported it, but they also conceded that the tone of the campaign sould be somewhat less antagonistic because they attributed the government's policy to a perceived need for taking caution to avoid social tensions.[97]

Some Islamic writers saw this demand as an initiative which would contribute to the aims of "conspirational circles" to weaken the government, considering that the party had almost been closed a few years ago due to its support of the headscarf. One of the proponents of this view was Ali Bulaç, notorious among feminist Islamic women for his sexism. He accused headscarved women of taking advantage of the symbolism of their victimhood for "gaining status, positions, and even contracts from the local and central government," while large groups of ordinary headscarved women were struggling with the real problems stemming from their exclusion. In response, covered writer Nihal Bengisu Karaca claimed that Islamic men with distorted notions regarding the individuality of headscarved women extended only a limited role for headscarved women, namely serving male power holders and applauding their exercise of power. [98]

Similar criticisms from Islamic women intellectuals and feminists followed in the period after the elections in which no covered women were nominated. A case in point was Islamic feminist Hidayet Sefkatli-Tuksal's criticism of the instrumentalist and opportunistic approach of the party's male elite, which in her opinion "facilitated the rise of uncovered women in politics through the efforts of covered women." What precipitated this criticism was the government's rejection of a proposal from the Kurdish-nationalist Peace and Democracy Party to add the headscarf to the proposed

changes to internal regulations of the Turkish Parliament to relax the dress code for female deputies.[99]

Islamic women's gender activism obviously promoted a recognition of other issues as problems faced by women in Turkish society and politics beyond their parochial concerns due to their pious identities. Women in Islamic organizations continue to criticize government policies and provide input whenever needed to initiatives taken on gender equality issues, as in the case of the latest legislation on the new Domestic Violence Act, passed by the government on 8 March 2012. The Ministry of Family and Social Policy had integrated many social partners into the process of reforming the existing law by requesting the views and suggestions of both Islamic and secular women's organizations. Islamic women overall credited the new law for compensating the shortcomings of the previous law and for providing a solid framework for the prevention of male violence against women. At the same time, however, they were, like secular feminists, uncomfortable with the reduced emphasis on women in the title of the new law, the Law on the Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence Against Women. Likewise, they also criticized the replacement of women by the family under the new name of the Ministry that reflected the government's new mentality.[100]

In his address to the general congress of the AKP Women's Branches in May 2012, the Prime Minister claimed that he regarded "our lady sisters not simply as a reservoir of votes, but as equal individuals of this nation and first-class citizens of the country." In the same congress, he provoked another controversial public debate on the issue of abortion-on-demand by claiming it was necessary to amend the existing law. Rather unexpectedly and in a provocative manner, he argued that abortion was tantamount to "human slaughter."[101] Both secular and Islamic women reacted strongly to this statement which they considered as a violation of the right of women to exercise their free will on such a controversial and private issue with all its ethical implications. For feminist Islamic women, a careful distinction had to be made between the religious, ethical and legal aspects of the argument. That is, they did not let their subjective views on abortion based on their Islamic beliefs interfere with their views on the responsibility of the state to protect female citizens' right to choose. They drew attention to the fact that abortion had never been strictly forbidden in Islamic discourses. They were therefore completely against any prospective changes to the existing law that would constrain women's abortion rights, claiming that ultimately these discussions indicated patriarchal state policies that failed to recognize women citizens' individuality because it saw them as wives and mothers.[102]

It should be noted that the approach of the government on the gender equality issue in the context of a new citizenship framework to constitute the basis of a new constitutional order has retained its fuzziness. The demands of

Islamic women towards ending the headscarf restrictions in universities (which for the most part have, as mentioned earlier, been eroded in practice) and in the workplace were communicated to the parliament. Some of these Islamic women's organizations (such as Capital City Women's Platform and AK-DER) prepared their proposals or reports for the issues to be drafted in a new constitution which would focus on women's right to access to education without restrictions on the basis of clothing.[103] Aware of the danger that covered women's citizenship rights would once again become the object of a political and ideological power conflict among the male-dominated political parties, feminist Islamic women insisted on the institutionalization of a constitutional order which would outlaw all kinds of discrimination, and which would address the issue of women's clothing within the realm of women's human rights. Besides amending the Constitution, they also stressed the need to amend all other relevant legislation (in particular, the political parties law) that shape the institutional political framework in such a way to maintain the subordination of women, as well as other minorities.

Besides these criticisms and concerns of feminist Islamic women in civil society, Islamic women writers in the conservative dailies continue to consider the AKP as the major political force to complete Turkey's democratization, notwithstanding its mistakes and deficiencies.[104] The AKP currently holds a sufficient majority to dominate the constitution-making process. Islamic women also consider the government as the major actor to resolve the headscarf issue. As the interviews demonstrated, the perception that there is no alternative to the AKP to achieve this also influences their expectations. However, the recognition that the conservative electoral support base of the party and its populism,which, to cater to the needs of this conservative base, work against the transformation of the existing gendered citizenship, remains a source of pessimism. Despite this, they maintain the conviction that the solution to the headscarf problem will ultimately empower them in the second round of their citizenship struggle, to confront the remaining discriminations within women's own homes.

CONCLUSION

In secular Turkey, the construction of women's equal citizenship with male citizens in the legal terrain has negated their individuality. The gendered citizenship regime derived its strength from the identification of women with the private sphere; it was contextualized by moralistic approaches that defined her public and private roles. The Islamic and nationalist movements, which produced the Republic's counter–elites, not only compromised with the institutions of secular patriarchy but also confronted them over female citizens' identities and roles. The rise of the pro-Islamic AKP as a new

political force in Turkish party politics and its subsequent success in establishing its political and electoral dominance, has had significant repercussions for its gender politics. The AKP's male elite was, at first, a source of optimism, if not empowerment, for Islamic women, emerging as a novel institutional channel to integrate them into politics. Pro-feminist and feminist Islamic women had already come to the conclusion that the major reason for their exclusion from the public sphere was their female identity. Hence, during the AKP period, their evaluation of the government's responsiveness to their grievances has been marked by an awareness that their headscarves were an object of a politicized controversy in the power struggle between the Islamic and secular forces. During its first two periods in government, the AKP kept a relatively low profile regarding the headscarf issue, although feminist Islamic women considered it as a major hindrance to their full citizenship. Meanwhile, the government promoted the public visibility of covered women without faciliating their rise to positions of real power. The headscarf issue has led to an acute sense of gender injustice on the part of feminist Islamic women, confronted as they are by ongoing discriminations and standards in both the public and private sector.

It can be contended that although the denial of Islamic women's citizenship rights due to the headscarf controvery has been an important force behind their transformation into agents challenging the dominant gendered citizenship regime, the headscarf issue has also compromised these women's potential to confront other forms of patriarchal oppression in the institutions and discourses of both secular and Islamic patriarchy. It was perhaps due to this fact that rising societal polarization during the government's ill-fated attempt at amending the Constitution in 2008 to outlaw headscarf restrictions in the universities created a sense of urgency for pro-feminist and feminist Islamic women to overcome the dominant construction of their subjectivity through the secularist-Islamic conflict. This was also necessary to give credibility to the demands of Islamic women from the government for a more inclusionary citizenship for all excluded social groups.

The AKP administration turned the feminist argument of difference on its head by committing itself to an "equality in rights" discourse, which restricted the practice of citizenship for all women, refraining from taking any concrete steps to institutionalize positive discrimination for women. In its third term in office, the pro-Islamic AKP's male elite resorted to the strategy of creating a de facto situation to allow headscarves in the public sphere. The recent manifesto of "No Vote Without Headscarved Women" was the latest response to the growing sense of powerlessness among Islamic women. However, they have not raised their voice particularly over the resistance of the male political elite to the adoption of gender quotas in politics. Meanwhile, the role of the Presidency of Religious Affairs as a stronghold of Islamic patriarchy in the secular state has gained prominence. While Islamic

women criticized the Diyanet's orthodoxy on gender relations, they tend to see it as an institutional base for transforming Islamic patriarchy. Most Islamic feminists have criticized these new faces of patriarchy in power indirectly through questioning the mindset of Islamic men generally. Clearly, then, they diverge from the gendered citizenship conception of the "conservative democratic" government; nevertheless, they still face the challenge of articulating a more powerful discourse beyond the focus on their specific deprivations stemming from the headscarf restrictions, which would enable them to realize a broader feminist intervention into the gender politics of Turkey's conservative male elite.

NOTES

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2. Margaret Abraham, Ester Ngan-ling Chow, Laura Maratou-Alipranti and Evangelia Tastsoglou, "Rethinking Citizenship with Women in Focus," in *Contours of Citizenship: Women, Diversity and Practices of Citizenship*, ed.M. Abraham et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010),12.
3. Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 199.
4. Yeşim Arat, "The Project of Modernity in Turkey," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. Reşat Kasaba and Sibel Bozdogan (Seattle: University of Washington Press,1997), 99.
5. Nilüfer Göle, "Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14 , no.1 (2002): 185
6. Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, "From Forbidden Modern to Hybrid Patterns," in *Mahremin Göçü*, (Istanbul: Hay Kitap, 2011),221.
7. Cihan Aktas, "Cemaatten Kamusal Alana Islamcı Kadınlar" Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce, (İletişim, Istanbul, 2006), 826.
8. Such as *Büyük Doğu* publications; Aktaş, 827.
9. Ümit Cizre-Sakallıoğlu, "Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 28,(1996): 231-51.
10. Berna Turam, *Between Islam and the State* (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 2007), 142.
11. Beyza Bilgin, *Islamda Kadının Rolü, Türkiye'de Kadın* (Ankara: Sinemis, 2005), 136-38.
12. Nilüfer Göle, "The Quest for the Islamic Self Within the Context of Modernity," in Rethinking Modernity, 86.
13. Ayse Kadıoğlu, "Women's Subordination in Turkey: Is Islam Really the Villain?" *Middle East Journal*, 48, no.4 (Autumn 1994):645-60.
14. Turam, *Between Islam and the State*, 124.
15. Ayşe Saktanber, "Whose Virtue Is this? The Virtue Party and Women in Islamist Politics in Turkey" in *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists Around the World, ed.* Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power (London: Routledge, 2002), 73.
16. The IHLs were re-opened in 1951 under the Democratic Party Government. M Ali Gökaçtı, *Türkiye'de Din Egitimi ve Imam Hatipler* (Istanbul: İletisim,2005), 236-37.
17. Yeşim Arat, "Gender and Citizenship in Turkey," in *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, ed., Suad Joseph (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 284-86.
18. Cihan Aktas, *Türbanın Yeniden İcadı* (Kapı Yayınları, İstanbul, 2006), 340.

19. Deniz Kandiyoti, "Some Awkward Questions on Women and Modernity in Turkey," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 283.
20. Yıldız Ramazanoğlu, "Cumhuriyetin Dindar Kadınları," (The Pious Women of the Republic) *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: Islamcılık*, Vol 6, 808.
21. Yesim Arat, *Political Islam in Turkey and Women's Organizations,* (Istanbul: TESEV, 1999), 35.
22. Ruşen Çakır, "Dindar Kadının Seruveni," *Birikim* (September 2000), 32.
23. As Kavakcı later reflected in a published interviewed, the then Istanbul Mayor of Recep Rayyip Erdoğan, a major figure of the RP, had warned her against the likelihood that her candidacy could be politically manipulated and that her party would not stand behind her; www.sabah.com.tr, 13.June.2004. For an analysis of the Kavakçı affair, see: Kim Shively, "Religious Bodies and the Secular State: The Merve Kavakçı Affair," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*,1, no.3 (fall 2005), 45-72.
24. Cihan Aktaş, *Türbanın Yeniden Icadı*, 343; Burçak Keskin, "Confronting Double Patriarchy: Islamist Women in Turkey," in *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists Around the World*, ed. Paulo Bacchetta and Margaret Power, (London: Routledge,2002),250.
25. Cihan Aktaş, "Bacıdan Bayana," *Birikim,* (September,2000),36-43
26. Ayşe Kadıoğlu, "Civil Society and Democracy in Turkey: A Study of three Islamic non-governmental organizations," *The Muslim World*, 95, no.1 (January 2005), 32, 37.
27. Barbara Pusch, "Stepping into the Public Sphere: The Rise of Islamist and Religious-Conservative Women's Non-Governmental Organizations," in *Civil Society in the Grip of Nationalism,* ed. Stefanos. Yerasimos, Gunter, Seufert and Karen Vorhoff (İstanbul: Orient Institute, 2000), 585; Canan Aslan-Akman, "Challenging Islamist and Secularist Patriarchy: Islamic Women's New Activism in Turkey," *Journal of Levantine Studies*,1 no.1-2,(winter 2011),103-24.
28. Nazife Şişman, *Kamusal Alanda Başörtülüler: Interview with Fatma Karabıyık Barbarasoglu* (Istanbul: Timaş, 2004),160.
29. Interview with the founder and chair of HAZAR Association, Ayla Kerimoglu. Istanbul, 28 April 2009.
30. Interviews with AK-DER members, Fatma Benli and Neslihan Akbulut, Istanbul 28 April 2009.
31. As such, Turkish Islamic feminists share many commonalities with Islamic feminism elsewhere in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, notwithstanding contextual differences; see: Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences,* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009).
32. Metin Sever, *Türban ve Kariyer* (İstanbul: Timaş, 2006).
33. Sever, 156.
34. Göle, *Mahremin Göçü,* 102.
35. Muzaffer Akdogan, *Ak Parti ve Muhafazakar Demokrasi*, (Istanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2004), 15. For a brief analysis of the AKP's political identity, see: Ergun Özbudun "From Political Islam to Conservative Democracy: the Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey," *South European Society and Politics* 11, no3-4 (September- December, 2006):543-557.
36. Murat Somer "Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey: Implications for the World: Muslims and Secular Democracy," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no.7 (2007):1271-1289.
37. Ayşe Ayata and Fatma Tütüncü, "Party Politics of the AKP and the Predicaments of Women at the Intersection of the Westernist, Islamist and Feminist Discourses in Turkey," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35, no.3, (2008), 370.
38. Zana Çıtak and Özlem Tur, "Women Between Tradition and Change: the Justice and Development Party Experience in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44, no.3 (2008), 457.
39. Articles 10 and 90 respectively.
40. KEFEK Activity Report,(Ankara: TBMM): June 2011
41. *AK Parti İktidarinda Kadın (Women Under the AKP Governance)*. www.akparti.org.tr.

42. Pınar İlkkaracan, "How Adultery Almost Derailed Turkey's Aspiration to Join the European Union," in *Deconstructing Sexuality in the Middle East*, ed. P. İlkkaracan (Aldershot: Ashgate,2008),42.

43. http://eski.bianet.org/anayasa onerileri_kadin-platformu_071204.doc (24 January 2009) Article 9 of this draft stipulated that precautions to be taken in protection of these groups would not be considered as violating the equality principle in the Constitution.

44. Simten Coşar and Metin Yeğenoğlu, "New Grounds for Patriarchy in Turkey? Gender Policy in the Age of AKP," *South European Society and Politics*, 16, no. 4, (2011),558.

45. Akdogan, *AK Parti ve Muhafazakar Demokrasi, 50.*

46. Çıtak and Tur, 465.

47. "Kadınla Erkek Eşit Olamaz," *Vatan* Daily, 18 July 2010.

48. Fatma Tütüncü, "The Women Preachers of the Secular State: The Politics of Preaching at the Intersection of Gender, Ethnicity and Sovereignty in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46, no.4, (July 2010),595.

49. Leyla Pervizat, "Presidency of Religious Affairs in New Turkey: An Ally on the Road Towards Women's Rights?," (Paper Presented at the 12th Mediterranean Research Meeting, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Montecatini Terme, Italy 6-9 April 2011.).

50. Yeşim Arat, "Religion, Politics and Gender Equality in Turkey: Implications for a Democratic Paradox," *Third World Quarterly*, 31, no.6 (September 2010), 875.

51. "Feminism ahlak dersinden kaldı" http:/bianet.org/biamag/bianet/105540-feminism-ahlak-dersinden kaldı. 13 March 2008. (3 January 2011)

52. As mentioned by the women from the BKP, some Islamic male intellectuals claimed that women's participation in the prayers in the mosques was an imitation of the West, and some even argued that women, especially young women at the mosques would be a cause of social disorder.

53. Author's interview with Ayşe Sucu, Ankara, 31 July 2012.

54. Sebnem Cansun, "Toplumsal Cinsiyet Sorunlarının Türk Köşe Yazarlarınca Algılanışı: Yeni Şafak Gazetesi Örneği," *Fe Dergi: Feminist Eleştiri*, 1, no.1. 2009: 3.

55. "Eski Islamcılar," *Yeni Şafak* Daily. 20 June 2009.

56. "Olduğum Gibi Görünme Hakkı İstiyorum," 20 January 2008 and "Tecavüzden Korunma, Dini Tavsiyeler,"*Yeni Şafak* Daily, 19 February 2011.

57. "Başörtülü Kadınlar Milletin Bir Ferdi Değil mi?" *Yeni Şafak*, 26 March 2011, "Başörtülü Milletvekili" *Yeni Şafak*, 19 March 2011.

58. "Başörtüsü Üzerinden Siyaset,"*Yeni Safak,*7 March 2009.

59. "Savaşı Seyretmek de Suç," (Interview with Sibel Eraslan), *Aksam* Daily 13.January 2003.

60. Cihan Aktaş, "Taraf Negatif Ayrımcılık Her Yerde," *Taraf*, 9.08.2010.

61. Selin Ongun, *Türbanlı Erkekler*, (Istanbul, Destek Publications, 2010), 87.

62. Şisman, 176.

63. Interview with the former chair of the the Capital City Women's Platform Association (BKP), Nesrin Semiz, 27 June, 2012.

64. Interviews.

65. Ali Bulaç, "Positif Ayrımcılık," *Zaman* Daily, 28 April 2010.

66. "Replies from Headscarved Writers to Zaman Author," http://www.gazeteciler.com/turbanli-yazarlardan-zaman-yazarina-yanit-0-20503p.html.(20 June 2012) and Aktaş, "Negatif Ayrımcılık Her Yerde,"

67. Interview with the Capital City Women's Platform Association (BKP) representatives. 10-15 May 2009 and 27 June and 2 July 2012.

68. Interview with İLK-DER Chair. 4 September, 2012.

69. Interview with the current chair of BKP, 2 July 2012, Ankara.

70. Interview, 19 June 2012, Istanbul.

71. Interviews with the BKP women.

72. As was indicated to me by HAZAR Association representatives in Istanbul, they demanded amendments to the Diyanet's Organization Law in 2002.

73. Hidayet Şefkatli-Tuksal, "Diyanet İyi Niyetli ama Gayretli Degil," *Yeni Safak*, 6.December. 2005.

74. Interview with ILK-DER chair, Ankara 4 Sept 2012.
75. This was raised during my interview with a HAZAR member who was also an official in Diyanet as a Koranic course teacher. (June 2012).
76. Interview with Fatma Bostan Unsal Ankara. 2 July 2012.
77. This view was shared by almost all the women interviewed by the author.
78. Çıtak and Tur, 458.
79. Interview with Ayşe Böhürler, İstanbul,19 July 2012.
80. "Mevzubahis Türbansa Mutabakat Teferruattır," *Radikal*, Daily, 4.February.2008.
81. "Kadınlardan Uyarı" *Milliyet*, 20 January, 2008.
82. "Birbirimize Sahip Çıkıyoruz" http://bianet.org/bianet/toplumsal-cinsiyet/110318 (15.02.2009).
83. For example, a large-scale survey administered by ANAR Research Company which was organized and published by HAZAR, *Türkiyenin Örtülü Gerçeği* (2007).
84. Dilek Cindoğlu, *The Headscarf Ban and Discrimination: Headscarved Professional Women,* (Istanbul, TESEV, 2010).
85. Hilal Kaplan, "Başörtüsü Yasağı Sadece Uygulamada Çözülemez," *Taraf* Daily, 13.Oct 2010.
86. Interviews. June and July 2012.
87. Interview. Ankara, 2 July 2012.
88. In his address to the 2012 general convention of the Women's Branches, Erdogan stated that there were 2.591 women members, http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2012/05/26/basbakan-erdogan-konusuyor 26 mayıs 2012.
89. For example, Ayşe Böhürler who was a member of the AKP central decision-making executive committe until its recent convention in September 2012.
90. Interview with Ayşe Böhürler, Istanbul.19 July 2012.
91. Interviews with BKP women and the HAZAR Chair.
92. Interview with Fatma Bostan Ünsal, Ankara 2 July 2012.
93. This strategy was adopted by the Nationalist Action Party which nominated covered candidates in the previous elections, yet they entered the parliament without headscarves.
94. "Başörtülü Aday Yoksa Oy da Yok" http://www.cnnturk.com/2011/turkiye/03/21/basörtulu.aday.yoksa.oy.da.yok/610665 (27.Oct.2011).
95. Interview, 2 July 2012, Ankara.
96. Kaplan, "Başörtülü Vekil Isteriz" *Taraf*, 16.03. 2011.
97. Interviews with HAZAR women and Ayse Böhürler.
98. http://www.timeturk.com/tr/2011/04/03/basortulu-aday-yoksa-oy-da-yok-kavgası.html (27.Oct.2011).
99. Hidayet Şefkatli-Tuksal, "Keşke Siz de Zerdüşt Olsaydınız," *Amargi* Feminist quarterly, Winter 2011.
100. Women from the Capital City Women's Platform Association interviewed for this study in particular were of the opinion that there was an urgent need for a separate Ministry for Women and separate sections on women under the roof of individual ministries.
101. http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2012/05/26/basbakan-erdogan-konusuyor, 26 May 2012.
102. "AKP Kurucusu Fatma Bostan Ünsal'dan Manifesto Gibi Açıklama: Kürtaj Konusunda Kadına Otonomi Vermek Gerek," http://t24.com.tr/haber/akpnin-kurucu-uyelerinden-fatma-bostan-unsal-da-kurtaja-karsi/205932 , 9 June 2012; Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, "Her Çocuk icin Maaş verin sonra Üç Çocuk İsteyin," *Akşam* Daily, 6. June. 2012, "Uludere"de Kürtaj Yok, çocuk Cesetleri Var," *Radikal*, 06, June 2012.
103. AK-DER's report, "Sivil Anayasa Taslağında Eğitim Hakkı ile İlgili Tartışmaların Değerlendirilmesine İlişkin Genel Rapor"(no date) and the Capital City Women's Platform Association's proposal were integrated into the report of the Committee on the Equality of Opportunity Between Women and Men: *Toplumsal Cinsiyet Açısından Anayasa Konulu Komisyon Raporu,* June 2012; 99-106.
104. Kaplan, "AK Parti'nin Demokratlığı," *Yeni Şafak*, 30. July 2012.

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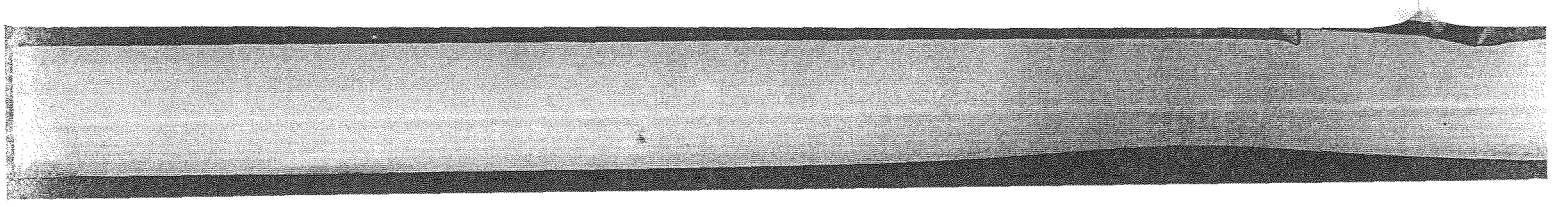

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