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Selen\(^1\) is a 21-year-old high school graduate wearing a headscarf. She sells scarves and *tesettür* clothing in Denizli, a city in the Western part of Turkey famous for its textile production. She tells me about her previous search for jobs over a cup of tea in the small kitchen at the back of the store where she works. As a young woman who donned the headscarf at the age of 17, during years of the headscarf ban in university and public sector jobs in Turkey, her brief history of “trying to become someone” (in her own words) through education and employment is permeated with continuous negotiations revolving around her headscarf. She has been working in this store for a year from 9:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. and says it is better than staying at home, which she finds depressing. This job is a far cry from her dream job though; she tells me how badly she wanted to become a policewoman. I ask her whether it is because of the headscarf ban that she could not enter the police force. “No,” she says, “I was more than ready to take off my headscarf for that job,” but she failed in the exams. After that she started working in a private security company, for the job resembled the “power and status” she associates with being in the police force. She had to take off her headscarf for that job as well. Her first mission was to provide security in a local football match. “But,” she says, “It soon became clear to me that the job was not worth uncovering: Low wage, long working hours, no job security, crowds of people pushing you around.” After quitting the security company, she donned back her headscarf and applied for a sales position in this *tesettür* store, where she was immediately hired. “Here the wage is similar, social benefits are similar, and of course it is OK to work
with a headscarf. So why should I make a concession and take off my headscarf?” “Don’t misunderstand me though,” she declares. “I am not trading religiosity for a job. But if I will make a conces-
sion, I should at least be able to say that I gave up on the headscarf for something important.” Then she adds, “We are not of those people who think that religiosity is in the headscarf, anyway. It is in the inside.”

Elmas is a 28-year-old divorced woman selling household appliances in Kayseri. After a bitter divorce eight years ago, she had to take on the responsibility to support her child and sick mother on her own, for everyone in the extended family dis-
approved her divorce and shunned her. She had no savings, no university degree, and no previous work experience; she started to wait tables in different cafés and restaurants. These jobs could not be permanent though; each time she quit because of “harass-
ment problems.” She feels very lucky to have found her current job at the household appliances store and to be working with her current bosses, who, in the words of Elmas, “are religious and nice people.” She emphasizes that her bosses and their wives treat her like family “and never like a worker,” which is very important for her as she has been feeling socially and financially vulnera-
ble since her divorce. When she started this job, Elmas was not wearing a headscarf unlike her coworkers and the customers who frequented the store. She says this led to “negative perceptions” about her. She does not question but rather normalizes these “negative perceptions.” Covering her hair was a decision that she took after a year in her current job: She was looking in the mirror and suddenly felt ashamed of her knee-length skirt and eye-catching hair, so she ran to a tesettür store after work and came back with a headscarf and new tesettür clothes the next day. Her bosses and coworkers celebrated her decision. She says the headscarf brings her peace and comfort. Since then, she explains, “almost all customers are like family, like friends, their negative perceptions about me have altogether disappeared. They see me like one of them.” She takes pride in the close relations she has developed with the customers, as well as her ability to keep a stable, secure job for six years in an unstable and insecure job market.

Selen and Elmas are among many women with headscarves entangled in continuous negotiations involving aspirations for
higher status jobs, longing for social and financial security, and concerns with patriarchal notions of modesty. This book traces the continuously negotiated meanings of the headscarf among lower middle-class, non-university-educated women working in a private sector labor market in Turkey. It focuses on the world of retail sales, a sector marked by insecure employment and a particular politics of appearance. Much has been written about the social and political implications of the headscarf in Turkey among middle-class, educated, Islamic activist women and the struggle they have waged against the homogenizing imaginaries of secular, Westernized “Turkish woman” in the public sphere. Yet, how the meanings and roles of the headscarf unfold in the negotiations for security in insecure, low-status private-sector jobs hardly count among the concerns of public and academic debate regarding women, Islam, and headscarves in Turkey. Neither does the debate attend sufficiently to how the meanings of the headscarf are situated within the lives of lower middle-class, less-educated women. In other words, whereas scholarship takes the experiences of middle-class, university-educated women with headscarves as “the dominant storyline” there is rarely a discussion about how the connotations of the headscarf shift across cleavages of class and status among women wearing it. Instead, the headscarf is typically portrayed as a symbol of Islamic identity, a “cover” that brackets social stratifications other than those based on a supposed “clash of identities” in society in Turkey.

This book arose out of my concern about the deep fault line that the headscarf has come to represent in Turkey. This fault line figures as a major theme in portrayals of society as polarized between two sections: Islamic and secular. I am uncomfortable with the widespread portrayal of a woman with a headscarf as representing one of those “worlds” mainly for two reasons. First, this portrayal is symptomatic of the tendency to analyze society in Turkey through culturalist lenses at the expense of folding issues of social inequality into cultural difference-based social stratification. Second, the headscarf gets to be loaded with essential connotations: Women with headscarves are attributed a fixed and reified identity, marked as being the representatives of one lifestyle pitted against the other.

The book revolves around two major discussions. First is about the (over)emphasis on cultural difference, identity, and
its recognition in studies of Islam, women, and headscarves in Turkey. The post-1990 period especially witnessed the surge of academic studies that locate the predicaments of women with headscarves within a critique of the Kemalist modernization project. What was particularly criticized was the ways in which this project excludes Islamic cultural difference from the public sphere and imagines a homogeneous, uniform identity for the “Turkish citizen.” The headscarf, especially the predicaments of women with headscarves who were excluded from the secular, modern imagination of “Turkish woman,” became almost a litmus test exposing the limits of homogenizing aspects of Kemalist modernization project. The necessity to acknowledge, include, and recognize differences and particularities, especially the necessity to recognize Islamic lifestyles and cultural codes, was emphasized through the theme of the excluded and stigmatized women with headscarves. This critique was a valuable attempt that opened avenues to challenge the homogenizing imagination of “the Turkish citizen.” However, the scholarly debate on the headscarf focused almost exclusively on middle-class and university-educated women and their struggle to gain recognition to Islamic identity in the state-monitored public sphere, especially universities and public sector employment. I argue that this framework captured the headscarf issue within the parameters of a culturalist outlook, reducing women’s problems to issues of Islamic cultural difference, identity, and recognition. In turn, the problem of cultural difference and identity has been insulated from the problem of unequal access to resources and related inequalities in the private sector labor market, increasingly insecure for unqualified woman workers.

The second major issue concerns the reification of Islamic group identity as a coherent, clearly bound source of belonging. This reification is related to the imagination of society in Turkey as sharply divided into cultural poles, where the “secular” and “Islamic” figure as two strictly separate, oppositional cultural sources of identity. The sharp distinctions drawn between “secular” and “Islamic” women preclude a comprehensive feminist vision that would encompass common problems of women in Turkey, such as encroachments of patriarchy in the labor market. They also lead to expectations conferred upon women with headscarves. Women with headscarves are expected to set
examples of how to lead an Islamic life, abide by modesty codes of *tesettür* in both appearance and attitude, and make their choices in life so as not to contradict the message that the headscarf is supposed to convey. In other words, they are expected to remain within the limits of the imagination of an immutable, coherent identity marked by the headscarf. What remains unseen is how lower middle-class women respond to these rather heavy expectations of displaying an immutable “coherent identity” in the reality of their lives marked by continuous negotiations for financial and social security.

This study distinguishes itself from previous research on women, Islam, and headscarves by looking into the lower middle-class women with headscarves in the context of private sector employment where unqualified, less-educated women workers find themselves in insecure and precarious working conditions. The study focuses on retail saleswomen in five urban centers of Turkey: İstanbul, Ankara, Denizli, Gaziantep, and Kayseri. Drawing on data from focus groups, in-depth interviews, and participant observation, the study pushes the headscarf debate in Turkey into new territory by questioning the culturalization of the headscarf and by pointing out the significance of class and gender stratification in shaping the meanings and roles of the headscarf. The book suggests analysis combining the cultural recognition problem with the problems of social inequality and gender stratification, particularly as they pertain to the position of lower middle-class, non-university-educated women in the private sector labor market. In previous research, the headscarf had been discussed overwhelmingly in a context defined by the headscarf ban in universities. Therefore the focus has remained on the predicaments of “misrecognition” of identity in the state-monitored public sphere and the transformative search for recognition vis-à-vis the exclusionary practices of the state. However, how the headscarf plays out in the private sector labor market, among lower middle-class, less-educated women remains out of discussion. Exploring the context of employment in the private sector labor market makes it possible to demonstrate how the visibility of the headscarf is managed, to what extent and in which contexts exclusion prevails outside the intervention of the state. This book digs into that territory and raises questions such as: What does it mean to wear a headscarf for
lower middle-class women trying to make a living in an insecure labor market? In what ways do they negotiate their status in the labor market, and how does the headscarf figure in those negotiations? How does the established perception of society in Turkey through lenses of “identity” as divided into “Islamic” and “secular” enclaves translate into the practices and perceptions of a labor market so invested in marketing visibilities?

The findings of the research reveal the precarious position of women with headscarves working in retail sales jobs and their negotiations for security and status in the labor market. The headscarf is a central component of these negotiations, and the research uncovers a tendency among its participants to formulate the practice of wearing the headscarf as a continuously negotiated practice. These negotiations are embedded in patriarchal bargains as well as aspiration for higher status jobs. The meanings of the headscarf are formulated as contingent upon class and status cleavages, instead of an ineluctable component of religiosity and identity. Moreover, the narratives reveal the participants’ discursive strategies to distance themselves from the missions loaded on the headscarf, such as the mission to display a coherent Islamic identity. These discursive strategies involve constructing blurred lines between covering and uncovering, decoupling the meaning of the headscarf from religiosity, and keeping open the possibility for negotiations of covering, uncovering, and re-covering.

The research also demonstrates the politics of appearance with regard to the headscarf in the retail sector: Women with headscarves are excluded from employment in chain stores selling globally or nationally reputable brands, whereas they are employed in small-scale retailers and tesettür chain stores. They are categorized as a labor force more inclined to settle for insecure, precarious, dead-end employment. This categorization is intermeshed with the perception that women with headscarves are more likely to be “family girls” suitable to blend in the world of local, traditional marketplaces and small shops, less likely to be “intimidating” to customers in terms of class and gender. In order to formulate and legitimize this categorization, employers make use of the portrayal of the headscarf as the indicator of a fixed and stable identity: It is upon this portrayal that women with headscarves are assigned to jobs catering to consumers with whom they are supposed to share that identity.
The case of saleswomen with headscarves demonstrates the entanglement of issues of “cultural misrecognition” with the problems of unqualified woman workers in insecure employment. The study analyzes this entanglement through questioning how the connotations of Islamic identity attributed to the headscarf unfold in private sector employment for unqualified women workers. Unlike the dominant focus on the Islamic/secular divide in the analysis of exclusion of the headscarf from the public sphere, understanding the categorization of women with headscarves as a specific type of labor force requires a comprehensive view that accounts for the problems of workplace democracy and encroachments of patriarchy at work.

**Dominant Patterns in Previous Literature**

The dominant themes and theoretical frameworks through which the headscarf issue has been analyzed in Turkey have been developed especially during the 1990s, within the context of the increasing influence of Islam in social and political terms. The discussion on women and Islam in Turkey took a turn in this decade along with the rising popularity of the headscarf discussion. As opposed to the portrayals of Islamic influence on social life as bound to wither away in the course of modernization, the increasing acknowledgment of the coherent social “ethos” that Islam provides in Turkish society (Mardin, 1986) moved religion to a more central position in social science research in Turkey. This inspired a new academic sensitivity to the potential of Islamic culture in terms of producing new discourses and ways of life in interaction with modernity.

This academic sensitivity, along with the rising interest in the increasing visibility of young, urban, educated women with headscarves in urban public spaces, inspired a line of research orientation regarding women who displayed an Islamic identity in the 1990s. This orientation was invested in countering the views that denounce the headscarf as the “evidence” of Islamist political manipulation, sign of false consciousness, or patriarchal oppression. Against these arguments, the headscarf increasingly started to be taken as a declaration of authentic identity challenging the difference—blind, homogeneous, and exclusionary public sphere as well as the hegemony of Westernization on
lifestyles on the one hand and the traditional docile Muslim woman image on the other hand.\(^4\)

This scholarly interest culminated in a series of influential studies in the 1990s focusing on the roles and meanings of the headscarf in the lives of young, urban, educated women (Göle, 1993; İlyasoğlu, 1994), the predicaments they face due to the headscarf ban in state-monitored public sphere (Özdalga, 1998), and the significant role of religious Muslim women within the quest to create an Islamic, urban, middle-class lifestyle (Saktanber, 2002). One of the pioneering and most influential studies published in the early 1990s is Nilüfer Göle’s *Modern Mahrem* (The Forbidden Modern), which exemplifies the contours that dominated the headscarf discussion in Turkey for many years to come. In this study, Göle argues that the Kemalist modernization project endorsed Westernization as a civilizing mission and traces the significant role of shaping lifestyles, tastes, gender relations, and clothing in accordance with Western norms in the course of realizing this mission. She locates the headscarf issue within this context and contends that the headscarf among urban, young, educated women symbolizes the claim of offering alternatives to the Western connotations attributed to civilization and modernity. Accordingly, urban headscarf connotes the will to assert difference against the universality claim of Western modernity.

In succeeding studies, Göle (1997a, 2000a, 2000b) developed arguments that highlighted the role of urban, educated women with headscarves in terms of suggesting possibilities of non-Western modernities, and pointed out that these women, engaged in a practice formulated as “new veiling” by Göle, are seeking recognition to a modern identity they assert through accentuating cultural difference made visible by the headscarf (Göle, 1997b, 2003). In other words, “new veilers” are argued to have a claim to redefine modernity by engaging in a language of transformation. According to this portrayal, they are not only resisting the exclusionary aspects of the secular and Westernized public sphere; they are also claiming to redefine and transform the public sphere to become more inclusive by asserting their religious and/or Islamist identity.

In parallel to Göle’s line of argumentation, in the 1990s and early 2000s, the scholarly debate on the headscarf revolved
around the theme of asserting Islamic identity as against the established hegemony of Western lifestyles in Turkey (İlyasoğlu, 1994, 1998; Saktanber, 1994, 2002; Özdalga, 1997, 1998, 2006; Çayır, 2000; Suman, 2000; Kentel, 2008; Özçetin, 2009). In this debate, it is possible to observe a remarkably strong emphasis on Islamist politics of difference and the emancipatory potential of this politics of difference for women who would define themselves as religious Muslims. The headscarf has been located in an almost central position within this emphasis on the politics of difference against the grain of the homogeneous and exclusionary secular public sphere.

**Headscarf Ban and the February 28 Process**

Indeed, the exclusion of the headscarf from universities and the struggle of young, urban, educated women with headscarves against the headscarf ban have been substantially influential in defining the social and political context of the scholarly orientation outlined above. The headscarf ban, defining the course of the headscarf discussion throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, had been exhausting the public and political agenda since the early 1980s through “inconsistent regulations” swinging the “policy pendulum back and forth, either to allow the wearing of headscarves or to ban it in universities” (Elver, 2012, p. 18). The ban triggered a series of protests and demonstrations, pulling young women with headscarves into political activism, engendering the advent of a group of intellectual, activist Muslim women (Göle, 1993; Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu, 2008).

The confrontation between the state and women with headscarves became harsher as a result of the February 28, 1997, process (popularly referred to as the “soft coup” or the “post-modern coup”—the military’s intervention to hamper political Islam. In the wake of February 28, the military pushed for a stricter implementation of the headscarf ban in the universities. Women working in public sector jobs were also targeted and investigated on the basis of violating regulations, and many women with headscarves were either expelled or forced to resign from their jobs (Cindoğlu, 2010). Moreover, even the employment of women in private companies was hampered through arbitrary processes. Many private companies, including Islamic
ones, took advantage of headscarved women’s loss of options in working life and employed them for much lower wages than they paid other employees (Özipek, 2008; Cindoğlu, 2010).

While women with headscarves were suffering the harsh effects of the February 28 process, the headscarf issue spilled over to the parliament in May 1999 when Merve Kavakçı, a newly elected member of parliament (MP), entered the parliament with her headscarf on. The moment of her entrance, facing high-volumed protests by several MPs banging on their desks, was “the biggest confrontation between the state and the covered women that the Turkish society has witnessed” (Saktanber and Çorbacioğlu, 2008, p. 527).

Following the February 28 process, the headscarf became perhaps the tensest issue, the most loaded symbol in a clash between secularism and Islamism which disseminated into both the political and the social life in Turkey. Especially educated women with headscarves who wanted to pursue their existence in the public sphere found themselves vulnerable and excluded. Expelled from university, public employment, and even private employment in some cases, they were frustrated not only with formal bans but also with the Islamist men for abandoning them and sidelining the headscarf issue. This frustration is evident in published interviews with Islamist women (Çakır, 2000; Sever, 2006; Ongun, 2010), in Islamic literature (Çayır, 2008), and stories of injured identity by victims of the headscarf ban (Şışman, 1998).

It was against this backdrop that the image of the student with the headscarf struggling against exclusion to protect her right to modern education became the paradigmatic case pointing out the exclusionary, homogenizing aspects of the state-monitored public sphere. This case was especially significant for it laid bare the shortcomings of imagining a uniform, homogeneous “citizen” and exhibited the ways in which a visible assertion of Islamic difference and identity carried the potential to democratize the homogenizing public sphere in such a way to address and embrace “differences.” Women with headscarves, who were actively engaged in a democratizing political struggle, also invoked a discussion on the transformation of gender relations among the Islamic population, with special emphasis on how this active religious woman figure challenged the widespread portrayal of women with headscarves as oppressed
docile wives and mothers without agency. The tendency was to locate the headscarf within broader debates of alternative and hybrid forms of modernity challenging the Western-based definitions of modernity, as well as the discussions on the democratizing potential of politics of difference.

The JDP Years and the Changing Context

The social and political context defining the course of the headscarf discussion has profoundly changed during more than a decade of single-party government by the Justice and Development Party (JDP) which comes from an Islamist background. The JDP first came to power in 2002, and abolishing the headscarf ban was among its major promises to its electorate. Even though the party shied away from taking action in its first term, and faced serious backlash from the Constitutional Court while trying to abolish the ban through a constitutional amendment in 2008, it succeeded in its effort to abolish the headscarf ban in universities in 2010. In the JDP’s third term as the single governing party, the ban on headscarves in public sector jobs was also lifted in 2013. As of today, women with headscarves are employed in public office, with the exception of the judiciary, the army, and the police force. Moreover, with a 2014 amendment to the dress code regulation of the Ministry of Education, the headscarf has also been allowed in secondary education and high school education, which means that students as young as 11 years can attend school with headscarves. The headscarf is no longer an issue of confrontation in the parliament; in June 2015, 21 newly elected parliamentarians took their oath with their headscarves on. Among them was Merve Kavakçı’s sister Ravza Kavakçı, who, in a symbolically loaded gesture, wore the exact same headscarf Merve Kavakçı had on when she had entered the parliament 16 years earlier. Only this time, there was no one banging on the desks or shouting “Out, out.”

Meanwhile, the social connotations of the headscarf have also been changing along with its increasing visibility in the everyday life (Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu, 2008). The popularization of the headscarf and its wide dissemination among daughters of Sunni Muslim conservative families has been accompanied with a loss of its identity component (Çakır, 2000) and its
“counterhegemonic potential” (Cindoğlu and Zencirci, 2008). In other words, the connotation of the headscarf as a subversive symbol of Islamist identity has been losing its grip (Kuran, 2010). This process was also marked by the surge of the Islamic bourgeoisie and the concomitant popularity of “tesettür fashion” which fragmented the political and collective identity symbolized by the urban headscarf (Kılıçbay and Binark, 2002; Genel and Karaosmanoğlu, 2006; Sandıkçı and Ger, 2007).

The scholarly literature responded to the transformation in the connotations of the headscarf mainly by shifting the focus from declarations of collective identity toward investigations of individualization among women with headscarves in the 2000s. These investigations of individualization mainly unfolded in two strands. The first strand accentuates women’s potential to improvise hybrid forms of modernity (Göle, 2000d) and a self-reflexive identity (Çayır, 2000) through the effort to reconcile the dictates of Islam with their individual transformation. Here, individual transformation is taken to be an outcome of Islamist political activism, modern education, and professional life (Azak, 2000; Çayır, 2000; Göle, 2000d). The second strand focuses on the transformation of consumption patterns among women with headscarves, and it is argued that this transformation brings about a transformation from “pious women” toward new subjectivities, especially as “modern consumers” (Sandıkçı and Ger, 2001, 2007, 2010; Kılıçbay and Binark, 2002; Navaro Yashin, 2002; Genel and Karaosmanoğlu, 2006; Gökarıksel and Secor, 2009, 2010; Kömeçoğlu, 2009). Yet, the focus of research still remains on young, urban, middle/upper middle-class, educated women, highlighting the refined taste of urban middle/upper middle-class women with headscarves. The locus of resistance attributed to women with headscarves this time shifts toward a Bourdieun struggle in the realms of consumption and taste. Accordingly, the middle-class consumers of luxurious tesettür fashion are challenging the Westernized, secular women’s monopoly on “being middle class” and tasteful.

To put in a nutshell, previous scholarly debate on the headscarf relies on a body of research focusing almost exclusively on middle-class and/or university-educated women with headscarves, their predicaments in the state-monitored public sphere, their modern assertion of identity, and/or their
transformation toward modern individual consumers. Indeed, the focus on the politics of difference and the struggle in the realm of cultural identities made a significant contribution to the studies on women and Islam, by highlighting the exclusionary aspects of the so-called difference blind public sphere and questioning the stereotypical imaginaries of victimized, oppressed, or manipulated Muslim woman identity. However, this literature leads to the construction of a “paradigmatic story of the headscarf” in Turkey, depicting women with headscarves as either politically subversive and resistant subjects or middle-class consumers who transform the Islamic cultural codes from the “periphery” to the “center.” In this “paradigmatic story,” the modern, urban headscarf remains an ineluctable part of religiosity and identity of the “conscious Muslim” women.

This paradigmatic story continues to be widely influential and resilient even though the social and political context defining the experiences related to wearing the headscarf has transformed drastically, resulting in gaps and silences in the literature in terms of responding to the current context. Fisher Onar and Müftüler-Baç (2011) criticize the literature regarding religious women’s experiences in Turkey for overusing the “multiple modernities” framework and for celebrating “modernist Islamist imaginaries” at the cost of “glossing over the privileging of patriarchal norms and practices in patriarchal contexts to the detriment of women” (p. 380). I share this concern. Moreover, I think that the multiple—and/or alternative—modernities framework also freezes the meanings of the headscarf at a specific moment in the social and political history of Turkey. That is the moment when wearing the headscarf itself carried a political “counter-hegemonic potential” (Cindoğlu and Zencirci, 2008) and a strong identity-assertion component against the exclusionary practices in the public sphere supported by a staunchly secularist state. When the meanings and roles of the headscarf are frozen at that moment, we are left with questions about how those roles and meanings change in the process when the headscarf ban in universities and public sector jobs have been abolished, when the class and status distinctions among women with headscarves have become much sharper, and at a time when the “headscarf experience” can no longer be idealized in the storyline of educated, middle-class women’s struggles to get state recognition to an excluded identity.
Relevance of the Study

Before conducting this research, I was motivated by an academic curiosity about the experiences of lower middle-class, non-university-educated women with head scarves who leave their houses each day to earn a living in private sector jobs, and the roles and meanings of the head scarf in their lives as working women. In order to look beyond the paradigmatic images of women with headscarves outlined above, this research focuses on lower middle-class, non-university-educated women with headscarves to explore their experiences in the context of work. The majority of the participants do not hold a university degree and almost half of them also do not hold a high school degree. Among the 86 participants who gave information about their income, 42 earned the minimum wage or less. The group of respondents includes women of different marital status and age groups, which makes it possible to account for the relational norms of “acceptable womanhood” that differ among age groups and married, single, or divorced women. Second, this research focuses on women working in private sector retail jobs, unlike many previous studies that located the headscarf issue within the discussion on the state-monitored public sphere, such as universities and public sector jobs. By looking into a private sector labor market, this study explores the perceptions of the headscarf in private sector jobs, how these perceptions translate into working women’s lives, and the negotiations that revolve around the headscarf in this context.

The findings of the research uncover dynamic, contingent connotations and negotiations revolving around what it means to wear a headscarf. These contested, negotiated, and continuously shifting meanings do not resonate with the approach affiliating the urban headscarf with a strong commitment to politically and/or culturally loaded resistance and subversion (i.e., women with headscarves as resistant subjects). The findings also do not support the idea that the movement of middle/upper middle-class women with headscarves from the periphery to the center encapsulates the gist of the story of the urban headscarf. Instead, the participants of this research are narrating a fundamentally different set of experiences—experiences of dealing creatively with an insecure, dead-end, and also exclusionary job market as
unqualified woman workers with headscarves, as well as scruti-
nizations of the “coherence” of their identity both from Islamist
and secularist circles.

This book does not claim to develop a comprehensive expla-
nation of what wearing the headscarf means in contemporary
Turkey. Quite to the contrary, I argue that such a comprehensive
explanation would be misleading, for there is not a single story-
line that can explain the multiple experiences with the headscarf.
Rather, throughout the book I look into the intricate negotiations
and contestations through which the participants of this research
seek ways of being in the world, remaining sensitive to where they
stand in terms of class and status.

The field of research is the world of retail sales due to two rea-
sons. First, sales jobs do not require a university degree, and the
employees have mostly been from among middle-class women
since the birth of modern retailing (Benson, 1986). More often
than not, these jobs are also low status, insecure, dead-end,
and temporary, especially in small-scale retailers. Second, sales
jobs are essentially “visible” consumer contact jobs, making the
appearance of workers a part of the image of the brands being
marketed as well as the relations established with the customers.
These aspects make the retail sales settings a fruitful field to trace
the ways in which the headscarf and its connotations play out in
the process of job search, in working life and in direct relations
with the customers.

Methodological Concerns

The study is based on the findings gathered from qualitative
research in five cities of Turkey: İstanbul, Ankara, Gaziantep,
Denizli, and Kayseri. In these cities, 13 focus groups and
30 in-depth interviews were conducted with saleswomen wear-
ing headscarves and five in-depth interviews were conducted
with employers. The research also includes extensive participant
observation in different retail settings of each city and over 70
short informal interviews with saleswomen and employers in
retail.

During the research process, the foremost methodological
concern was to do justice to the complexity of women’s experi-
cences with the headscarf and attain an in-depth understanding
of the negotiations revolving around the headscarf in the context of work life. Therefore, a qualitative approach would be the most appropriate. Qualitative researchers, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 3) assert, “attempt to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” The methods of in-depth interview and focus group were utilized to explore and make sense of the experiences of saleswomen with headscarves. Participant observation in retail settings made it possible to understand the context in which those experiences are formed and enabled me to avoid the drawbacks that may arise from excessive reliance on experience (Scott, 1992a; Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1994) or “excessive subjectivism” (Göker, 1999) such as the risk of taking experience at face value.

In the effort to “work with experience” as Scott (1992a) suggests, focusing on retail workers made it possible to contextualize the experiences related to the headscarf with regard to the negotiations, aspirations, disappointments, constraints, and possibilities revolving around jobs in a low-status, insecure labor market. During the field trips to retail settings, several short informal interviews were conducted with saleswomen and their employers in order to understand the specific aspects of their working settings.

Extensive participant observation in different types of retail settings served to provide the research with depth in terms of (1) observing differences among retail settings across and within different cities and distinguish their unique characteristics, with particular regard to how those characteristics shape and influence saleswomen’s work lives; (2) giving insight about the kinds of retail settings where women with headscarves are employed and the social texture of these settings; (3) giving the opportunity to observe the role of the headscarf in influencing the relations within the workplace, including employer–employee relations as well as relations with customers; and (4) giving insight about the set of requirements of the employers in their decisions of employment in different retail settings.

_A Brief Story of the Field_

This book is based on my doctoral dissertation submitted to the Bilkent University Political Science Department in 2014. The
research process started with a research proposal I wrote to fulfill the requirements of a research methods course at Bilkent University’s political science PhD program. In the proposal, my questions revolved around lower middle-class, working women and their experiences with the headscarf. My professor, who later became my thesis supervisor, Professor Dr. Dilek Cindoglu, suggested that I should focus on the retail sales sector, in which she had worked on previously and which would have provided a comparative perspective for my research. Thanks to the invaluable guidance and supervision of Professor Cindoglu and Professor Asli Ciraçman, the “assignment” evolved into a 12-month research project titled “Turban in the Marketplace: Exploring Patriarchal Bargains through Veiled Saleswomen” (code: 108K204) funded by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK). I worked as a research assistant under the supervision of Professor Cindoglu and Professor Ciraçman during the whole course of the research project in 2009. It was through this project that I obtained substantial experience and insight. Professor Cindoglu and Professor Ciraçman graciously gave me permission to use this data collected for the TUBITAK project as a base for my own independent research. I proceeded with my own self-funded fieldwork which took another two years, further cultivating my research questions which form the backbone of this book.

The research focuses on five cities: İstanbul, Ankara, Denizli, Gaziantep, and Kayseri. İstanbul and Ankara, as the two most populated and commercially vibrant cities of Turkey, were essential for this research. Denizli, Gaziantep, and Kayseri are among the Anatolian cities popularly referred to as “Anatolian Tigers.” These cities have witnessed considerable economic growth especially since the 1980s due to the liberalization of economy. The economic liberalization process provided opportunities for Anatolian capital to connect to the global markets through an export-oriented strategy. The Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) data demonstrates the substantial growth of the services sector in these three cities, as well as a surging percentage of women workers joining the sector (TURKSTAT, 2012). Moreover the retail settings in these three cities provide a lively and fruitful environment for research. In all the five cities, it is possible to find an abundance of small-scale retailers as well as
shopping malls and chain stores of well-known brands. Last but not the least, the selection of these cities is sensitive to regional diversity.

Recruiting participants for focus groups and in-depth interviews in five different cities proved to be a challenging task. It became even more challenging due to the shortage of leisure time in the sales sector. The saleswomen usually work for very long hours and have only one day off every week or every other week. Saleswomen start working in the early hours of the day and seldom leave the workplace any earlier than 7:00 P.M.\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, especially those working in small-scale retailers do not go out for lunch: They usually have only 15–20 minutes to grab a bite in a room at the back of the shops or behind the counter.

The initial attempts to gather focus groups failed because, understandably, saleswomen did not find enough motivation to spend hours of their valuable free day—which many of them only had once in two weeks—for the research. Therefore, during the funded part of the research, the participants were given an honorarium.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, an important part of the funds was used to tap into the networks of local research companies operating in five different cities. When I proceeded with my own fieldwork, I did not have funding so I reached respondents through personal relations and relations acquired during many field trips.

Previous research suggests that recruiting employees through the gatekeeping of their employers creates a perception that participation in the research is an order by the employers and locates the researcher in an authoritative position, widening the gap between the researcher and the researched (Lal, 1996, p. 194). Therefore, special attention was paid in order to contact saleswomen directly and not through their employers.

Combining the methods of focus groups and in-depth interviews proved fruitful in terms of obtaining rich and relational data (Michell, 1999). Focus groups provide the researcher with the advantage to observe group interaction in which the participants compare and discuss their experiences (Morgan, 1988; Morgan and Krueger, 1993; Krueger, 1994; Wilkinson, 1999; Raby, 2010), whereas in-depth interviews enable digging deeper into individual storylines and “getting at subjugated knowledge” (Hesse Biber and Leavy, 2006, p. 123). In both focus groups and
in-depth interviews, semistructured question forms with open-ended questions were used. The priority was to trace stories and discussions that offered a particularly rich insight, rather than rushing to complete a rigid list of questions. All focus groups and all but a few in-depth interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed by me afterward. In the focus groups, which hosted 4 to 14 participants, marital status was controlled for. Considering that marriage in Turkey is regarded as a crucial phase of socialization into adult life (White, 1994), and the fact that single women are usually referred to as “young girls,” which implies a transition period between childhood and adulthood, the perceived difference of status among married and single women could lead to the inhibition of self-disclosure. Controlling for marital status also helped to understand the different patterns of negotiations that working single and married women engage in. During focus groups and in-depth interviews, participants were asked to fill in a brief questionnaire in order to learn about their age, income, and level of education.\textsuperscript{17}

Whereas focus groups and in-depth interviews were mostly conducted outside the shops, in cafés, or in meeting venues of hotels or local research companies, a considerable amount of time was spent visiting different shopping settings ranging from shopping malls to busy central marketplaces and small-scale neighborhood shops.\textsuperscript{18} During these visits, we gave brief information about the research and talked to the saleswomen and their employers whenever they were available in the midst of a heavy working day. In line with Jorgensen’s suggestion (1989, p. 88) that the informal interviews during participant observation study should be similar to casual and free-flowing conversation, open-ended questions were posed which would reveal the dynamics of working as a saleswoman in that particular city and that particular shopping setting.

During the visits to the shops, saleswomen were remarkably welcoming. On the other hand, there have been many occasions in which the shop owners or managers seemed to be concerned with the possibility that we may be journalists and sometimes directly asked us whether this research would be published in newspapers with the names of their shops. We assured them that their anonymity would be protected and that the data would only be used for academic purposes.
Establishing Dialogue with the Respondents

There is a plethora of questions and issues concerning the relation between the researcher and the researched in the process of qualitative research. How are the differences between the researcher and research participant negotiated? Do these differences influence the tone of the answers given? How should the researcher situate him/herself vis-à-vis respondents?

It is essential to acknowledge at this point that I do not wear a headscarf. Considering the fact that the focus of the research was on how the headscarf is experienced in retail work, this could potentially situate me as an “outsider.” It is indeed debatable whether the social differences between the researcher and the researched end up in helpful or adversarial results to the research. Whereas some (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999, p. 14) argue that differences based on the identity, dress, accent, and behavior may potentially influence the data collected, especially if the participants of the research are brought together on the basis of shared characteristics different from the researcher’s, others (Waterton and Wynne, 1999; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) suggest that such differences may be utilized creatively toward exposing tensions and relationality of perspectives.

During the course of this research, the researcher/participant relation more often than not unfolded in productive ways that exposed different perceptions related to the practice of covering as well as to work. The mutual exchange of experiences related to marriage, relations with in-laws, the common experience of being working women, and topics related to motherhood served to moderate the perception of social differences. There were instances in which the participants praised me for my “modest clothing” and attitude. I would usually be dressed in trousers, shirts, jackets, and low-heel shoes, which is not different from my everyday clothing style. On some occasions, the remarks praising “my modesty” evolved into expressions of “complaints” about “other” women with headscarves. For example, one saleswoman in Gaziantep working in a home textile store said that I would not attract men’s attention with my clothes even though I did not have a headscarf, whereas “there were covered girls working in the shops around, who attract a lot of attention with their make-up and clothes.” This comment among many similar comments pointed out and exposed a pattern of displeasure among covered
women regarding the way some “other” covered women dress or conduct themselves.

Another point of difference was related to work and education. I was a PhD student working as a research assistant at a university. Many research participants explained that they really wanted to get a university education but they could not due to various (and not mutually exclusive) reasons. Some had to start working full time at young ages, some were discouraged by their families, some got married early and could not pursue their education, and some said they were discouraged because of the headscarf ban in the universities which was in effect until 2010. Most participants thought that the lack of a university degree meant that they would never find higher status jobs which they formulated as “desk jobs.”

Actually my position as a PhD candidate trying to complete a project (a big homework, as one participant put it) usually generated sympathy among the research participants. For example, one young saleswoman in Istanbul said she was working as a saleswoman in order to support her two sisters through their education and offered me further help with the research because “she liked to help students, especially girls like her sisters, trying to achieve something.” Yet, there were also a few occasions on which tensions related to the headscarf ban in the universities surfaced. In one of the focus groups, which we conducted with my two professors, one participant asked our opinion about the ban and said she wondered “whether we, like others, discriminated against students who wanted to wear a headscarf in the universities.” In this instance and few similar others, I expressed briefly and clearly that I did not find this ban fair. Acknowledging the debate over whether qualitative researchers should disclose their opinions and respond to questions by participants, I maintain that mutual dialogue is essential to establish a relation in which research participants actively contribute to the production of knowledge instead of feeling like passive objects, provided that the “dialogue” does not turn into a patronizing monologue by the researcher.

Chapter Overview

The next chapter, Chapter 2, is devoted to a further critical analysis of the post-1990 literature on women and Islam in
Turkey through a theoretical discussion on the critique of politics of difference, identity, and recognition, that is, the conceptual framework within which the headscarf issue has been captured.

Chapter 3 glimpses at the retail landscapes in Turkey. Following a historical review of the retail market in Turkey, particularly as it pertains to the socially loaded distinctions between large- and small-scale retailers, the chapter provides a detailed ethnographic description of different retail settings and guides the reader through marketplaces, small shops, and tesettür stores, paying special attention to variations in social texture and social relations pervading these retail landscapes.

Building on the background context of retail landscapes, Chapter 4 focuses on the different norms of visibility and conduct that dominate different retail settings and uncovers demarcation lines between settings that do and do not employ saleswomen with headscarves. Which different norms of visibility and conduct prevail in the retail settings where women with headscarves are and are not employed? Which discourses are employed to “justify” these demarcation lines in retail? The chapter addresses these questions by exploring the connotations loaded on the headscarf in the retail labor market and suggests that whereas women with headscarves are generally excluded from large-scale retailers selling global brands, they are categorized as a specific kind of labor force “naturally fit” to work either in tesettür stores or small-scale retailers catering to lower middle-class clientele. The chapter also points out that the exclusion of the headscarf from certain portions of this private sector labor market is being normalized and naturalized by formulating the employment process as an exclusively “private,” apolitical, managerial process.

In Chapter 5, “Great Expectations: The Meanings Loaded on the Headscarf,” I delineate the web of assumptions and expectations that women wearing the headscarf find themselves subjected to. With the aim of analyzing this web of assumptions and expectations, the chapter defines three different discursive frames: (1) the headscarf skeptic frame, which assumes that women with headscarves are either under direct patriarchal pressure or manipulated by Islamist politics, (2) the Islamist frame, which assumes that the headscarf is exclusively indicative of deeply rooted piety, and (3) the “politics of identity” frame, which assumes that the headscarf is a modern assertion
of identity and that it bears a loaded statement of subversion and resistance against the Kemalist ideal of a Westernized, secular woman. The chapter suggests that it is not only the headscarf skeptic frame that engenders stereotypical imaginaries of women with headscarves; discourses prescribing the headscarf a normative meaning of deeply rooted piety, as well as discourses that frame the headscarf as a modern assertion of identity and difference also produce them. Women wearing the headscarf find themselves surrounded and marked by an abundance of assumptions, as a result of which they are supposed to “prove” their piety or undertake the mission to display a coherent identity marked by religious difference. The chapter also investigates how the research participants respond to these assumptions.

Chapter 6, “The Desire to be Unmarked: Distancing from the Essentialized Meanings of the Headscarf,” traces the patterns of how the participants of this research negotiate the meanings of the headscarf. The chapter uncovers the fragmented, relational, and contingent narratives of the headscarf and reveals intricate negotiations revolving around the practice of wearing the headscarf vis-à-vis opportunities of finding high-status employment and concerns related to the patriarchal notion of modesty. The respondents’ narratives particularly highlight a tendency to unload the headscarf from the essentialized meanings attributed to it through underlining that wearing the headscarf is a contingent, negotiable practice that is not necessarily inseparable from piety and/or identity. One salient thread in the narratives is to explain the practice of covering as a graded practice that makes it possible to avoid making a strong statement, whether it be about a deep commitment to religion, or the defense of cultural and religious difference. For instance, a majority of participants refer to their own practice of covering as “half covering” and distinguish themselves from those they call “fully covered,” meaning they themselves are not trying to declare and assert a religious identity. Another way is to refer to the headscarf as an “exterior” practice that cannot define the “inner” religious conviction and piety of a woman. Yet another way is to question the boundaries between the states of “being covered” and “being uncovered” by referring to them as blurred and porous. These narratives render the headscarf a negotiable practice and overflow the rigid frames of meaning built around it, raising significant questions
about portrayals of cultural polarization along the lines of Islamic versus secular in Turkey.

The concluding chapter provides a discussion of the findings and comments on the theoretical implications of this study toward developing perspectives sensitive to the intricate links and intersections among multilayered issues of identity and social inequality in Turkey.
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