

# Eroding the symbolic significance of veiling? The Islamic fashion magazine *Âlâ*, consumerism, and the challenged boundaries of the “Islamic neighborhood”

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## Abstract

Islamic fashion and lifestyle magazines enable the global circulation and consumption of newly emerging images of, narratives about, and discourses on Muslim women across the globe. Such magazines also trigger debates by making visible the language of commodification and consumerism that is increasingly shaping Muslim subjectivities. In particular, *Âlâ*—the pioneering Islamic fashion magazine in Turkey—has been the target of extensive criticism by Islamic intellectuals and columnists. This study contextualizes these criticisms within the broader debate on veiling fashion and Islamic consumerism in the context of 2010s Turkey, a context in which the Islamic bourgeoisie has been strengthened and class cleavages among veiled women have been further sharpened. The study analyzes the opinion columns focusing on *Âlâ* published in the Islamic, pro-government newspaper *Yeni Şafak*, as well as the responses of *Âlâ*'s editors and producers to such criticisms. The findings demonstrate that the magazine is criticized for making visible the surge of consumerism among the Islamic bourgeoisie, for blurring the boundaries between Islamic and secular identities, and for fragmenting an idealized imagination of Islamic collectivity by emphasizing class cleavages among veiled women. I argue that these criticisms of *Âlâ* in Islamic circles reflect a concern with the erosion of the symbolic connotations of veiling in Turkey, particularly in terms of marking the boundaries that define the imagination of an Islamic collectivity.

Keywords: *Veiling fashion; headscarf; Turkey; Islamic/secular divide; consumerism*

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## Introduction

In a televised debate on Turkey's CNN Türk channel in 2012,<sup>1</sup> the late television host and journalist Mehmet Ali Birand hosted Ebru Büyükdag, the young editor-in-chief of *Âlâ* magazine, an Islamic fashion magazine that had only begun publishing in 2011 but had already stirred debate in both secular and Islamic circles. On the show, Büyükdag, a young woman in her twenties dressed in chic veiling fashion, confronted two elderly figures well known in Islamic circles: the veiled author Emine Şenlikoğlu and the theologian Ali Rıza Demircan were invited to comment on whether veiling fashion was “acceptable” according to Islamic precepts. While the camera panned over Büyükdag's body from head to toe, Birand asked Şenlikoğlu and Demircan whether the young woman met the modest Islamic dress code and whether they approved of her clothing and make-up. Şenlikoğlu and Demircan did not seem pleased as they examined Büyükdag. They emphasized how God's commands cannot be negotiated or changed, meaning that the concept of “fashion” is irreconcilable with Islamic commandments about veiling. Demircan even took a piece of paper from his pocket from which he read a list of eight rules regarding proper ways of covering up, and he made the point that these rules are not susceptible to change under the concept of “fashion.” Büyükdag defended her position by arguing that *Âlâ* magazine does not prescribe ideal norms for covering: “All we want to do,” she said, “is to show covered women what they can find on the market.”

The veiling fashion industry has been growing across the globe for decades now, transforming the appearance of religious Muslim women in the process. Data from 2013 show that Turkey leads in terms of consumption, with a yearly 39.3 billion USD spent on veiling fashion, followed by the United Arab Emirates (22.5 billion USD), Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria.<sup>2</sup> This industry is also supported by a “new genre” of media<sup>3</sup> that includes Islamic fashion and lifestyle magazines circulating images of “Islamic fashionistas” across the globe and generating new connotations for Islamic dress that are articulated in the language of global consumer capitalism. *Âlâ* magazine, which was published monthly from 2011 to 2016,<sup>4</sup> served as the leading example of such

1 Mehmet Ali Birand, 32. *Gün: Tesettürün Modası Olur mu?* CNN Türk Television, December 13, 2012.

2 “‘Türkiye, İslami Giyim Harcamasında Lider’,” *BBC Türkçe*, July 30, 2015. [http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/07/150729\\_tesettur\\_turkiye](http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/07/150729_tesettur_turkiye).

3 Reina Lewis, “Marketing Muslim Lifestyle: A New Media Genre,” *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 58–90.

4 The last issue of *Âlâ* magazine that I was able to reach was published in March 2016 following the *Âlâ* Fashion Fest organized in Istanbul. The magazine's Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/aladergi>) continued to be active through October 2016. The account still has more than 16,000 followers, and questions by followers concerning whether the magazine would be published again and the reasons for its closure have thus far been left unanswered.

magazines in Turkey, and was later followed by other, similar magazines such as *Hesna* and *Aysba*. Defined by *The New York Times* as the “Vogue of the Veiled,”<sup>5</sup> *Âlâ* catered to wealthy women consumers of veiling fashion in such a way as to guide them about the latest trends in style and to introduce expensive outfits and accessories produced not only by veiling fashion brands, but also by such global brands as Hermes and Louis Vuitton.

The content of *Âlâ* magazine builds on plural and contingent discursive practices installing “regimes of truth”<sup>6</sup> that aim to reconcile consumerism with an Islamic way of life. Since its initial publication, *Âlâ* has been harshly criticized both by the mass media, particularly Islamic newspapers, and in social media. Criticisms reached a peak in 2014, when the September issue of *Âlâ* was published with a cover showing a young model in a headscarf looking directly at the spectator with her lips half open: the magazine was subsequently accused of sexualizing the veil.<sup>7</sup> Also controversial was a “girls’ party” that was organized by the magazine in 2014. Planned for the ballroom of a branch of the Sheraton Hotel in İstanbul, with VIP Lounge tickets being sold for 3,000 TL, the event was eventually cancelled in response to a social media campaign.<sup>8</sup> The magazine was not only criticized by scholars of Islam and older “authority figures” like Demircan and Şenlikoğlu for transforming the appearance of veiled clothing, but it also hit a nerve among a younger generation of pro-Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) intellectuals and columnists who objected by critiquing consumerism and its impact on the imaginations of the “Islamic collectivity” in contemporary Turkey.

For over two decades, Islamic intellectuals in Turkey—and particularly female cultural critics like Cihan Aktaş, Fatma Barbarosoğlu, Yıldız Ramazanoğlu, Nazife Şişman, and Ayşe Böhürler—have been debating and problematizing the relationship between capitalism, consumerism, Islam, and veiling fashion.<sup>9</sup> The discussions among such intellectuals regarding veiling

5 Dan Bilefsky, “A Fashion Magazine Unshy about Baring a Bit of Piety,” *New York Times*, March 29, 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/29/world/europe/a-turkish-fashion-magazine-ala-is-unshy-about-showing-some-piety.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/29/world/europe/a-turkish-fashion-magazine-ala-is-unshy-about-showing-some-piety.html?_r=0).

6 Carol Bacchi and Jennifer Bonham, “Reclaiming Discursive Practices as an Analytic Focus: Political Implications,” *Foucault Studies* 17 (April 2014), 174.

7 See, e.g., “Ala Dergisinden Skandal Kapak,” *Timeturk*, August 28, 2014. <http://www.timeturk.com/tr/2014/08/28/ala-dergisinden-skandal-kapak.html>. For an analysis of *Âlâ*’s cover shoots, see Sertaç Sehliskoğlu, “The Daring *Mahrem*: Changing Dynamics of Public Sexuality in Turkey,” in *Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures*, ed. Gül Özyeğin (New York: Routledge, 2016): 235–253.

8 “Tepkiler Üzerine Ala’nın Partisi İptal,” *Timeturk*, June 10, 2014. [http://www.timeturk.com/tr/2014/06/10/tepkiler-uzerine-ala-nin-partisi-iptal.html#.U\\_8j2zLV-Q4](http://www.timeturk.com/tr/2014/06/10/tepkiler-uzerine-ala-nin-partisi-iptal.html#.U_8j2zLV-Q4).

9 For this broader debate, see Cihan Aktaş, *Tesettür ve Toplum* (İstanbul: Nehir, 1992); Fatma Barbarosoğlu, *İmaj ve Takva* (İstanbul: Timaş, 2009); Nazife Şişman, *Sınırsız Dünyanın Yeni Sınırı Başörtüsü* (İstanbul: Timaş, 2011); and Ayşe Böhürler, “Dindarlaşıyoruz Derken Uzlaşmaz Çelişkilerimiz,” *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* 287 (November 2014): 16–19.

fashion, commodification of the veil, and the erosion of the veil's religious "substance" go at least as far back as the initial fashion shows organized by the headscarf (*tesettür*) brand Tekbir in the 1990s.<sup>10</sup> The scholarship on veiling fashion and its consumers has extensively focused on such discussions, revolving especially around the ethical and aesthetic questions of situating the veil within a context of rising consumerism.<sup>11</sup>

However, the debate surrounding *Âlâ* magazine has something of a unique significance for several reasons. Firstly, this debate demonstrates growing political concern among the AKP's intellectual hinterland concerning the rising visibility of class cleavages among the party's constituency. Secondly, the debate also reflects concerns about the blurring of boundaries between the Islamic and secular upper middle classes through consumerism and converging consumption patterns, which became more pronounced in the increasingly neoliberal landscape of 2010s Turkey.<sup>12</sup> Thirdly, the globalization of veiling fashion and the growing capacity of the global "consumerist logic" in terms of integrating the discourses of consumer choice and "the right to consume" into the articulation of Muslim identities adds yet another layer to the significance of the *Âlâ* debate, as fashion and lifestyle magazines like *Âlâ* "are indeed part of this formulation, contributing to a model of identity through consumption."<sup>13</sup>

Within this context, the loss of the symbolic significance of the veil represents a new turn that challenges the boundaries of an Islamic collectivity as drawn up by politically loaded imaginations. This study argues that the *Âlâ* debate reveals concerns among pro-AKP intellectuals with the erosion of the symbolic connotations attributed to the veil and to veiled women in terms of marking the boundaries of an imagined Islamic collectivity and distinguishing it from "the secular." In other words, this debate provides a glimpse of the moment in Turkey where the significance of the veil as the unifying symbol of an imagined Islamic collectivity begins to erode. In making such an argument, this study does not intend to claim that there is or ever was any single Islamic

10 Alev Çınar, *Modernity, Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places and Time* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) and Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002): 78–115.

11 Özlem Sandıkçı and Güliz Ger, "Aesthetics, Ethics and Politics of the Turkish Headscarf," in *Clothing as Material Culture*, ed. Susanne Kuechler and Daniel Miller (Oxford: Berg, 2005): 61–82; Özlem Sandıkçı and Güliz Ger, "Constructing and Representing the Islamic Consumer in Turkey," *Fashion Theory* 11, no. 2/3 (2007): 189–210; and Banu Gökankırsel and Anna Secor, "Even I Was Tempted: The Moral Ambivalence and Ethical Practice of Veiling Fashion in Turkey," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 102, no. 4 (2012): 847–862.

12 Erol Balkan and Ahmet Öncü, "Reproduction of the Islamic Middle Class in Turkey," in *The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey*, ed. Neşecan Balkan, Erol Balkan, and Ahmet Öncü (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2015): 196–199.

13 Lewis, "Marketing Muslim Lifestyle," 62.

identity or coherently bound Islamic collectivity devoid of class cleavages. However, as has previously been argued, *imaginings* of such an idealized collectivity have long been pronounced by Islamic political parties,<sup>14</sup> including the AKP,<sup>15</sup> with the veil being situated as one of the foundations of such a collectivity. The *Âlâ* debate is important inasmuch as it reveals gendered discussions occurring in the inner circles of the AKP, discussions that emerge more into the open in the face of challenges against such imaginings.

This study asks both how *Âlâ* represents a certain kind of consumer of veiling fashion and what part of these representations are labelled unacceptable by Islamic columnists. What do the criticisms targeting *Âlâ*'s promotion of consumerism reveal about the contestations revolving around the imaginings of an Islamic community in Turkey? How are we to understand these criticisms in respect to the meanings attributed to veiling in the political and sociocultural context of Turkey?

The study analyzes criticisms of *Âlâ* as found in the opinion columns of the pro-government daily newspaper *Yeni Şafak* between 2011 and 2015, along with the responses of *Âlâ*'s editors and producers to criticisms leveled against the magazine. While there are many other Islamic-oriented publications and Islamic intellectuals other than those writing for *Yeni Şafak* who criticize veiling fashion in general and *Âlâ* in particular, here the focus is on *Yeni Şafak* because this particular newspaper captures the views and debates held within the inner circles of the AKP. The newspaper is well known for its organic ties with the AKP and with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Having supported Erdoğan "throughout his political career, even before the establishment of AKP in 2001,"<sup>16</sup> today the newspaper is owned by the Albayrak family of which Erdoğan's son-in-law is a member. Due to these ties, *Yeni Şafak* has been categorized as an "ultra pro-government newspaper,"<sup>17</sup> İbrahim Karagül, *Yeni Şafak*'s editor-in-chief, calls the newspaper the predominant actor "filling in the intellectual field of the social dynamic in Turkey, which now governs the country," and emphasizes how what distinguishes *Yeni Şafak* is how it has identified itself with the AKP from the very beginning.<sup>18</sup> Previous research, for

14 Haldun Gülalp, *Kimlikler Siyaseti: Türkiye'de Siyasal İslamın Temelleri* (İstanbul: Metis, 2003), 44. See also Ayşe Buğra, "Labor, Capital and Religion: Harmony and Conflict among the Constituency of Political Islam in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 2 (2002), 189.

15 Seda Demiralp, "White Turks, Black Turks? Faultlines Beyond Islamism vs. Secularism," *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2012): 511–524.

16 Esra Özcan, "Women's Headscarves in News Photographs: A Comparison between the Secular and Islamic Press during the AKP Government in Turkey," *European Journal of Communication* 30, no. 6 (2015), 703.

17 Metin Gürçan, "Theory or Attitude? A Comparative Analysis of Turkish Newspaper Articles on Turkish Foreign Policy, June 2008–June 2011," *Turkish Studies* 14, no. 2 (2013), 354.

18 İbrahim Karagül, "Yeni Şafak Sürprizlere Hazırlanıyor," *Yeni Şafak*, July 13, 2016. <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ibrahimkaragul/yeni-afak-surprizlere-hazirlaniyor-2030334>.

instance, suggests that *Yeni Şafak* acted much like a “representative of the AKP” in its coverage of the general elections of 2002, thereby verifying Karagül’s argument.<sup>19</sup> Due to these organic ties going back to the party’s very early days, *Yeni Şafak* contains a strong potential of reflecting the AKP’s intellectual hinterland.

In the opinion columns of *Yeni Şafak*, *Âlâ* is criticized on three primary grounds. Firstly, the magazine formulates its readership as “consumers” engaging with the world of fashion and consumption in order to fulfill continuously shifting desires. This, secondly, exposes patterns of conspicuous consumption among the Islamic bourgeoisie, thus bringing to the foreground the class cleavages that exist among the constituency of Islamic politics. And finally, *Âlâ* is criticized for blurring the symbolic distinctions between what are marked as “Islamic” and “secular” identities in Turkey. Such criticisms of *Âlâ* uncover the ways in which an Islamic community, the Islamic/secular divide, and the metaphor of an “Islamic us” vs. “secular others” are imagined and narrated in opinion columns. The criticisms thus manifest a concern about how to preserve the distinctions between what marked “Islamic” and “secular” identities in Turkey, as well as about how the conservative religious population can maintain a convincing discourse of an identity-based collectivity despite ever widening class cleavages. The columnists bestow the duty of preserving the distinction and collectivity of the “Islamic neighborhood” on women and on the symbolic power of the veil, while simultaneously avoiding a broader critical engagement with the longstanding “symbiotic relationship”<sup>20</sup> between Islamic capital and the global capitalist market in Turkey.

### Narratives of the “Islamic neighborhood”

The debate on *Âlâ* magazine was embedded in contesting narratives of Islamic identity, the Islamic/secular divide, and the symbolic connotations attributed to the practice of veiling in Turkey. Such contestations have been shaped over decades marked by the rising influence of Islamic political parties, the Islamic bourgeoisie, and the surging visibility of an Islamic lifestyle and Islamic consumerism. The post-1980 coup d’état era witnessed an increasing influence of Islamic political parties that ultimately resulted in the rise of the AKP to power in 2002. The economic liberalization of post-1980s Turkey, integration into networks of global business, and post-Fordist trends toward “flexible,” insecure, cheap labor all benefited the rise of medium-scale Islamic capital in

19 Eda Çağlayan, “Media, Politics and Slanted News Coverage during the Election Periods: Case Study of News on AKP,” *Kültür ve İletişim* 5, no. 2 (2007), 77.

20 Özlem Sandıkçı and Güliz Ger, “Veiling in Style: How Does a Stigmatized Practice Become Fashionable?” *Journal of Consumer Research* 37, no. 1 (2010), 32.

Anatolian cities.<sup>21</sup> This process was further consolidated by the neoliberalization of capital accumulation in the AKP period,<sup>22</sup> which resulted in diversification among the Islamic bourgeoisie. It has been pointed out how Islamic capital in Turkey “followed in the footsteps of the laic bourgeoisie in creating a world after the image of the global neoliberal bourgeois culture.”<sup>23</sup> However, it was to a great extent the AKP’s support of the lower classes that led to the party’s continuing success.<sup>24</sup> The AKP has a history of consolidating its cultural hegemony over a “strategically significant” conservative bloc of supporters<sup>25</sup> through a narrative that underlines differences between Islamic conservative and secular Westernized lifestyles in Turkey. This narrative was crystallized in the “black Turk/white Turk” distinction after, in 2003, Erdoğan stated, “In this country, there is a segregation of Black Turks and White Turks. Your brother Tayyip belongs to the Black Turks.”<sup>26</sup> What he meant was that Turkey’s religious Muslims represent the unprivileged and repressed in Turkey.

This narrative uses a “language of social disadvantage”<sup>27</sup> to keep together different segments of the constituency—such as newly emerging entrepreneurs and marginalized rural-to-urban migrants—and it is still utilized to construct an idealized “Islamic neighborhood,”<sup>28</sup> asserting the existence of a community unified by religiosity, Islamic identity, and practices that are fundamentally different from those found in the inherently opposing “secular neighborhood.” It is a narrative that veils and renders invisible the class cleavages among the bloc of supporters whom the AKP targets. Despite this narrative, however, the

21 Gülalp, *Kimlikler Siyaseti*, 46.

22 See Ayşe Buğra and Osman Savaşkan, *Türkiye’de Yeni Kapitalizm: Siyaset, Din ve İş Dünyası* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2014) and Balkan and Öncü, “Reproduction of the Islamic Middle Class,” 176–177.

23 *Ibid.*, 199.

24 For an analysis of the constituency of Islamic political parties in Turkey, see, e.g., Gülalp, *Kimlikler Siyaseti*, 59. For an analysis of how the AKP initially responded to the demands of the urban poor, see, e.g., Cihan Tuğal, “The Islamic Making of a Capitalist Habitus: The Turkish Sub-Proletariat’s Turn to the Market,” in *Comparing European Workers Part A: Experiences and Inequalities*, ed. David Brady (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing, 2011): 85–115 and Evren Hoşgör, “The Question of AKP Hegemony: Consent without Consensus,” in *The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey*, ed. Neşecan Balkan, Erol Balkan, and Ahmet Öncü (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2015): 201–235.

25 Hoşgör, “The Question of AKP Hegemony,” 215.

26 Deborah Sontag, “The Erdogan Experiment,” *New York Times*, May 11, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/11/magazine/the-erdogan-experiment.html>. For a detailed analysis of the multilayered imaginations behind the “white Turk-black Turk” distinction, see Demiralp, “White Turks, Black Turks?”

27 Ayşe Buğra, “Labor, Capital and Religion,” 189.

28 “Neighborhood” is a metaphor that is widely used and circulated in Turkey’s popular discourse to connote the political and social polarization along Islamic/secular lines. It evokes imaginary spatial boundaries that both separate and define Islamic and secular identities as if they existed in rigidly distinguished categories (and, for that matter, actual neighborhoods). I use this concept because it has a metaphorical power that reflects well the intricacies of identity politics in Turkey while also concisely conveying the concerns and arguments inherent to the debate surrounding *Âlâ*.

AKP's neoliberal policies have placed substantial costs on the already unprivileged<sup>29</sup> while simultaneously supporting the rise of an Islamic bourgeoisie.<sup>30</sup> Such a context makes it more difficult to maintain a narrative that underlines the unity of the "Islamic neighborhood" and its "ineluctable difference" from the secular in two ways. Firstly, class cleavages among the AKP constituency become more pronounced: the emerging Islamic—as well as secular—"new rich" differentiate themselves from other sections of the middle class via new lifestyles, consumption patterns, and spatial separation.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, there emerges a convergence between Islamic and secular upper middle classes in terms not only of lifestyles and consumption patterns, but also of shared neoliberal values and aspirations.<sup>32</sup>

### The symbolic significance(s) of veiling in Turkey

The symbolic meanings attributed to the veil and to veiled women have played a major role in maintaining the narrative of Islamic difference and the boundaries of the "Islamic neighborhood." These symbolic meanings were shaped particularly in the 1990s, in the context of Islamism's rise as a political movement on the one hand and, on the other hand, increasing consumerism and the articulation of Islamic identity in terms of a language of lifestyle and consumption.

Much of the literature on veiling in the 1990s and early 2000s emphasized how the veil no longer connoted a traditional belonging, but rather corresponded to a political identity associated with Islamism as a political movement, thereby marking a political statement.<sup>33</sup> For example, Nilüfer Göle distinguishes Islamist veiling as a novelty distinct from "Muslim" veiling: "One can be born Muslim, but one becomes an Islamist by personal choice and political engagement [...] Such a transformation from Muslim to Islamist is the work of a countercultural movement."<sup>34</sup>

At the same time, alongside the rise of the Islamic bourgeoisie in the context of the 1990s and 2000s, Islamic consumption patterns have emerged in the form of statements of an Islamic identity articulated not through the language

29 Hoşgör, "The Question of AKP Hegemony," 216–218.

30 See Buğra and Savaşkan, *Türkiye'de Yeni Kapitalizm*.

31 Balkan and Öncü, "Reproduction of the Islamic Middle Class in Turkey," 196–199.

32 Ibid.

33 Nilüfer Göle, *Modern Mahrem: Medeniyet ve Örtünme* (İstanbul: Metis, 1991); Nilüfer Göle, "The Voluntary Adoption of Islamic Stigma Symbols," *Social Research* 70, no. 3 (2003): 809–828; and Alev Çınar, "Subversion and Subjugation in the Public Sphere: Secularism and the Islamic Headscarf," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 33, no. 4 (2008): 891–913.

34 Göle, "Voluntary Adoption," 815. For a critique of this approach, see Feyda Sayan-Cengiz, *Beyond Headscarf Culture in Turkey's Retail Sector* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 36–54.



of an Islamist movement but rather through lifestyles. In this context, consumptionscapes figured as a battleground between Islamic and secular identities.<sup>35</sup> The rising Islamic bourgeoisie and its new consumption patterns have largely been analyzed with an approach that emphasizes the role of upscale consumption in the recognition of an upper-class Islamic identity that goes against the grain of the hegemony of secular identity in Turkey. According to this approach, the Islamic way of life—which used to be perceived as a signpost of “backwardness,” lack of education, and the inability to urbanize—was reconfigured via consumption as a way of life that was urban, modern, sophisticated, and high status.<sup>36</sup> In a Bourdieusian sense, new Islamic patterns of consumption were framed as the means by which Islamic middle and upper middle classes attempted to acquire cultural capital and carry their identity from the periphery to the center.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, not only was the rise of the Islamic bourgeoisie a process that was embedded in capitalism and consumerism, but Islamic identity also asserted, shaped, and articulated itself *through* consumerism.

This Islamic struggle to gain recognition and cultural capital became crystallized in the image of the urban, middle-class, and educated veiled woman. The increasing popularity of urban and stylish veiling among young, educated, middle-class women figured as perhaps the most significant symbol of the rising influence of Islamic lifestyles and consumption patterns.

Although class and status formed very central components in the process of the popularization of the urban, middle-class veil, in the discourse of Islamic political parties the veil has figured as a heavily loaded symbol serving to unite such parties’ constituencies under the banner of defending the Islamic lifestyle against the Kemalist project of Westernization, in this manner working to blur and obscure emergent class cleavages among such constituencies.

In regards to the AKP in particular, the party keeps its constituency together not only through material promises to the different segments of that constituency, but also by establishing a cultural hegemony through the use of symbolisms aimed at maintaining a united bloc of supporters.<sup>38</sup> Within

35 See, e.g., Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*, 78–115 and Esra Özyürek, *Modernlik Nostaljisi: Kemalizm, Laiklik ve Gündelik Hayatta Siyaset* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınevi, 2008).

36 See Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*, 78–115.

37 See, e.g., Sandıkçı and Ger, “Constructing and Representing”; Sandıkçı and Ger, “Veiling in Style”; Mücahit Bilici, “İslam’ın Bronzlaşan Yüzü: Caprice Hotel Örnek Olayı,” in *İslamın Yeni Kamusal Yüzleri*, ed. Nilüfer Göle (Istanbul: Metis, 2000): 216–237. For the seminal study that argues for the significance of the center-periphery framework in understanding politics and society in Turkey, see Şerif Mardin, “Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?” *Daedalus* 102, no. 1 (1973): 169–190. For a critique of this framework, see Güllalp, *Kimlikler Siyaseti*, 42–44.

38 Hoşgör, “The Question of AKP Hegemony,” 213.

this context, the veil has long figured as a powerful symbol that can resonate with different segments of the party's bloc of supporters. This became especially apparent in relation to the headscarf ban: the ban—which now is no longer in place—excluded veiled women from universities and public sector jobs.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, though, the ban served to amplify the symbolic significance of veiling in at least two ways. Firstly, veiled women figured as the embodiments of the boundaries drawn up between “the Islamic” and “the secular,” as a result of which they were assumed to be bearers of the responsibility of representing Islamic identity; this assumption then became ossified within both Islamic and secular circles.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, the ban enhanced the imagination of an “Islamic collectivity,” and thereby enabled the veil to be conceptualized as a symbol of Islamic collective identity, in the process covering up, blurring, and indeed rendering invisible the class cleavages extant among the conservative religious population.

In a post-headscarf ban context, the political connotations and symbolic significance of the veil have been further punctured through multilevel diversification and heterogeneity among both veiling styles and veiled women.<sup>41</sup> In this manner, veiling fashion paved the way for negotiation in terms of defining the boundaries of religious dress, rather than perpetuating the situation wherein veiling style and veiled women would simply abide by the predefined codes presumed by theologians. Research on veiling fashion firms in Turkey demonstrates how the meaning of “Islamicness” and what makes a commodity “Islamic” is impossible to fix in this sector: rather than fixing meanings for their commodities, firms pragmatically delegate this “responsibility” to the consumer.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, both veiling fashion firms and consumers alike enlarge and transform the meanings and boundaries of what constitutes Islamic modest dress and what motivates one to adopt such dress. Through veiling fashion and its emphasis on the appeals of new and continuously changing styles,

39 In 2008, the AKP government proposed a constitutional amendment that would abolish the ban for university students but was taken to the Constitutional Court (*Anayasa Mahkemesi*) and found guilty for undermining the constitutional principle of secularism. However, the country's Higher Education Council (*Yükseköğretim Kurulu*, YÖK) declared in 2010 that enjoying a university education while wearing a headscarf should be considered a basic right to education. Following this declaration, the headscarf ban as it related to university students ceased to be implemented, with the headscarf ban in public sector jobs being subsequently abolished in October 2013.

40 Sayan-Cengiz, *Beyond Headscarf Culture*, 99–126.

41 See Özlem Sandıkçı and Güeliz Ger, “In-between Modernities and Postmodernities: Theorizing Turkish Consumptionscape,” *Advances in Consumer Research* 29, no. 1 (2002): 465–470 and Banu Gökankınel and Anna Secor, “New Transnational Geographies of Islamism, Consumerism and Subjectivity: The Veiling Fashion Industry in Turkey,” *Area* 41, no. 1 (2009): 6–18.

42 Banu Gökankınel and Anna Secor, “What Makes a Commodity Islamic? The Case of Veiling-Fashion in Turkey,” in *Islam, Marketing and Consumption: Critical Perspectives on the Intersections*, ed. Aliakbar Jafari and Özlem Sandıkçı (New York: Routledge, 2016): 123–139.

“it becomes more difficult to identify what motivates a woman to wear veiling fashion and it becomes impossible to identify pure intentions, be they religious, aesthetic, or social.”<sup>43</sup>

### Islamic fashion magazines as spaces of compatibility between Islam and consumerism

Islamic values have been found to intersect with neoliberal values, such as those that promote consumerism, entrepreneurship, productivity, economic rationality, self-government and self-help language. The view that frames global capitalism and consumerism as being in contradiction with Islam<sup>44</sup> is challenged by research<sup>45</sup> that uncovers the “spaces of compatibility”<sup>46</sup> between Islam and global capitalism. Research on Muslim entrepreneurs in Turkey<sup>47</sup> and elsewhere, for instance, emphasize the presence of processes of “embedding economic practices within a framework of ethics and moral responsibilities deemed to be ‘Islamic’.”<sup>48</sup> This line of research thereby delineates the ways in which Islam and global capitalism intermingle in various forms and in different contexts.

The merging of consumerism and religious identities has been well examined in the scholarship on the veiling fashion industry. The research shows that producers and marketers of veiling fashion claim to serve religion by increasing the appeal of veiling, reformulating it in terms of Islamic beauty and taste<sup>49</sup> and encouraging women to “consume to spread faith.”<sup>50</sup> What is more, consumers of veiling fashion further complicate the sharp distinctions drawn up between consumerism and Islam by creatively mediating between a pursuit of individual choices and desires and the language of piety and religious devotion.<sup>51</sup>

43 Gökarksel and Secor, “New Transnational Geographies,” 15.

44 See Bryan Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

45 See, e.g., Salwa Ismail, “Islam, Islamism and Identity Politics,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004), 623 and Daromir Rudnyckij, “Spiritual Economies: Islam and Neoliberalism in Contemporary Indonesia,” *Cultural Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (2009): 104–141.

46 Mona Atia, “A Way to Paradise’: Pious Neoliberalism, Islam, and Faith-Based Development,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 102, no. 4 (2012), 811.

47 See Emin Baki Adaş, “The Making of Entrepreneurial Islam and the Islamic Spirit of Capitalism,” *Journal for Cultural Research* 10, no. 2 (2006): 113–137.

48 Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella, “Muslim Entrepreneurs in Public Life Between India and the Gulf: Making Good and Doing Good,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 1 (2009), 202.

49 See Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*, 78–115; Sandıkçı and Ger, “Constructing and Representing the Islamic Consumer in Turkey”; Gökarksel and Secor, “New Transnational Geographies.”

50 Sultan Tepe, “Serving God through the Market: The Emergence of Muslim Consumptionscapes and Islamic Resistance,” in *Handbook of Islamic Marketing*, ed. Özlem Sandıkçı and Gillian Rice (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011), 377.

51 Gökarksel and Secor, “Even I Was Tempted.”

The globally flourishing magazines<sup>52</sup> that market veiling fashion and Muslim womanhood lifestyles demonstrate how the discourses woven around Islamic identity intermingle with a language of consumerist choice and a discourse of “self-making and – remaking.” Research on Islamic fashion and lifestyle magazines in both Western<sup>53</sup> and non-Western<sup>54</sup> contexts demonstrates that, notwithstanding their individual differences, in general these magazines struggle to mediate between debates concerning how a Muslim woman looks (or should look) and the images popular within the fashion industry. In Indonesia, for example, the Islamic fashion media—such as *Noor* magazine—promote concepts of “the pious feminine” and “spiritual beauty” in order to counter anxieties produced by a dominant understanding that any concern with image and beauty is antithetical to religious values.<sup>55</sup> In Britain, *Emel* magazine displays full bodies and faces only when the picture in question is of a named individual: photos of unnamed fashion models, by contrast, are cropped so as to exclude faces and thereby ostensibly avoid objectification.<sup>56</sup>

### **Âlâ, consumerism, and the “loss of Islamic identity”**

Along lines similar to those touched upon above, *Âlâ* magazine also works to reconcile piety, modesty, and beauty.<sup>57</sup> However, as compared to the aforementioned *Noor* and *Emel*, *Âlâ* is more professionally ambitious in its fashion shoots, using professional models—typically from Eastern European countries—who work longer hours for less pay and, allegedly, make for better photos.<sup>58</sup> In the images found in *Âlâ*, women in confident poses and full make-up wear chic veiled clothing and look straight into the eyes of the spectator.

The editors and producers of *Âlâ* emphasize the magazine’s mission as being to connect producers of veiling fashion with consumers interested in and

52 Among these magazines, the best known are *Emel*, *Sisters*, *Azizah*, *Muslim Girl*, and *Saverah* in Britain; *Muslim American Girls Magazine* in the United States; *Noor* in Indonesia; *Hayati* in Nigeria; and *Âlâ* and *Aysha* in Turkey. There are also exclusively online magazines such as *Aquila* and fashion blogs such as *Hautehijab*, *hijabtrendz*, *Amenakin*, and *Hana Tajima*.

53 Lewis, “Marketing Muslim Lifestyle.”

54 Carla Jones, “Materializing Piety: Gendered Anxieties about Faithful Consumption in Contemporary Urban Indonesia,” *American Ethnologist* 37, no. 4 (2010): 617–637.

55 Ibid.

56 Lewis, “Marketing Muslim Lifestyle,” 76.

57 Cüneyt Dinç, “Veiling and (Fashion-) Magazines – ‘Âlâ Dergisi’ Magazine as a Case for a New Consumer Image of a New Devout Middle Class in Turkey,” *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 34, no. 7 (2014): 650–665.

58 Sehlikoğlu, “The Daring *Mahrem*,” 243.

able to afford luxury brands and designers. *Âlâ*'s CEO Gülsüm Çiçekçi outlines the magazine's mission as follows:

Our readers have purchasing power. Years ago, when they visited the stores of expensive brands, they used to think those outfits were too revealing for them. In our fashion pages, we show them how they can combine those clothes with other pieces and make them look covered. The fashion industry sees the potential here. A lot of big brands are very eager to work with us.<sup>59</sup>

While the magazine emphasizes how it addresses itself to women pursuing a conservative lifestyle, this "conservative lifestyle" seems to reside primarily in the models' headscarves and in visual references to an Ottoman past that evoke a kind of imperial splendor. Arranged before views of old (Ottoman) İstanbul, the models, while indeed wearing headscarves, nevertheless pose in luxurious items of veiling fashion and high-heeled shoes.<sup>60</sup>

The magazine constructs its readers as consumers in need of guidance in their attempts to remodel and care for themselves by following the most fashionable patterns of consumption. Each issue, for instance, features interviews with fashion designers focusing particularly on how to put together a stylish appearance; the "in" styles, accessories, and colors of the season; and advice on how to "remodel" the self. Such advice is typically accompanied by encomiums praising shopping as a rehabilitating and indeed almost spiritual experience.<sup>61</sup>

This construction of consumerist agency permeating *Âlâ*'s content is combined with an individualized conceptualization of the process of adopting Islamic clothing. The aforementioned Ebru Büyükdağ, *Âlâ*'s one-time editor-in-chief, formulates the process of adopting the veil as a "journey" marked by the individual management of one's self and one's *nafs*; that is, one's material and bodily desires. Emphasizing the fact that she is "not a theologian," Büyükdağ pronounces that the magazine's mission is to help women in their individual journey not by rigidly prescribing Islamic norms of veiling, but rather

59 Elçin Poyrazlar, "Âlâ Dergisi: Kuran'ı Uyarlamıyoruz, İslam'ı Kurtarma Misyonomuz Yok," *T24*, October 24, 2014. <http://t24.com.tr/haber/ala-dergisi-kurani-uyarlamiyoruz-islami-kurtarma-misyonomuz-yok,242524>.

60 For previous analyses focusing on the written and visual content of *Âlâ* and similar magazines in Turkey, see, e.g., Dinç, "Veiling and (Fashion-) Magazines"; İlnur Meşe, "İslami Bir Moda Dergisi Örneğinde Moda ve Tesettür: Ne Türden Bir Birliklilik?" *Fe Dergi* 7, no. 1 (2015): 146–158; Gamze Toksoy and Esra Erdoğan, "Geçmişle Bugünün Mübadelesi, Gelenekle Modernin Müzakeresi Bağlamında İslami Modanın Dergisi: *Âlâ*," *Toplum ve Bilim* 130 (2014): 155–175; and Semiray Yücebaş, "Türkiye'de Muhafazakarlığın Gündelik Yaşam Estetiği," *İnsanbilim Dergisi* 1, no. 2 (2012): 62–80.

61 Yücebaş, "Türkiye'de Muhafazakarlığın Gündelik Yaşam Estetiği," 70–71.

by offering a range of style choices for consumption. Such individualization is, for instance, implicit in the motto of one particular article contest organized by the magazine: "My way, my choice, my life, my right" (*Benim yolum, benim tercihim, benim hayatım, benim doğrum, benim hakkım!*).<sup>62</sup> In explaining veiled women's search for beauty, Büyükdag resorts to the concept of *fitrat*, a concept widely employed in Islamic discourse to connote a person's natural disposition and, simultaneously, the naturalized and essentialized differences between male and female. She argues that women are "inclined to beauty due to their *fitrat*," and thus it is only natural that they want to reflect beauty in their appearance.<sup>63</sup>

This manner of framing veiling locates the practice close to the ground of a particular variety of consumer's style choices, and to an alleged natural female urge to remodel one's self according to normative standards of beauty. Indeed, it is reminiscent of the variety of so-called "self-help" language that emphasizes individual responsibility in the practice of managing one's self by remaining true to one's own individual choices.<sup>64</sup> This formulation also works to free the magazine from any obligation to give direct guidance concerning Islamic morality or to preach the norms of Islamic modesty. Merve Es, the assistant manager of *Âlâ*, puts this aptly in an interview:

I am no theologian or expert on the matter, but the magazine has no such mission as rescuing Islam. We are not addressing ourselves to those who live a life of piety, nor are we taking anything from the Qur'an and implementing it here. [...] This magazine does not deprive anyone of their faith. This magazine cannot harm Islam or change people's political views or ideologies. This is just a magazine where women who have been hitherto ignored can find themselves today.<sup>65</sup>

By way of contrast, one columnist influential in the pro-government media, Hilal Kaplan,<sup>66</sup> articulates her discomfort with *Âlâ* magazine and other Islamic fashion magazines for imitating glossy lifestyle magazines catering to secular

62 Sezen Yalçın, "Modanın Muhafazakâr Hali," *Feminist Politika* 22 (2014): 32–33. It should be noted that the word *hakk* in the contest's motto has a double meaning in Turkish, as it can signify both "right" and, if capitalized, "God."

63 Birand, 32. *Gün: Tesettürün Modası Olur mu?*

64 Jeffrey T. Kenney, "Selling Success, Nurturing the Self: Self-help Literature, Capitalist Values, and the Sacralization of Subjective Life in Egypt," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 4 (2015), 669.

65 Poyrazlar, "Âlâ Dergisi: Kuran'ı Uyarlamıyoruz."

66 Hilal Kaplan transferred from *Yeni Şafak* to the pro-government daily newspaper *Sabah*, where she continues to write regular columns. She also regularly contributed political commentaries to two different television shows on TVNET, a pro-government national news channel belonging to the Albayrak Media Group, which also owns *Yeni Şafak*.

women. In a 2011 column in *Yeni Şafak* entitled “From beautiful morals to a beautiful lifestyle” (*Güzel ahlâktan güzel yaşam tarzına*), she takes issue with Islamic fashion magazines’ attitude of appealing to both secular and Islamic readers. In the column, Kaplan argues that magazines like *Âlâ* are nothing more than an attempt to reduce and blur the difference between Islamic and secular segments of society:

Isn’t that the objective? To imprison our differences in a sterile word like “lifestyle” and try to downplay whatever difference is left over. To reinforce the perception that “we are all the same, there are no differences among us” [...] And when the women in the photos are a little more covered, the difference is already “covered,” too, right? As the difference vanishes, the boundary between what is and is not Islam gets blurred. In the end the difference is reduced to something shallow, like preferring grapes to wine. In this way, the religious population—which the nation-state was unable to “melt in the same pot” despite decades of effort—themselves start volunteering to melt in that pot. And so we learn once again that capitalism is the ideology most successful at penetrating the codes of existence, and consumerism emerges as the most coherent subjectivity.<sup>67</sup>

Here, Kaplan rather succinctly presents the “problem” with *Âlâ* as at least enabling, if not actually causing, the erosion of the Islamic difference by means of capitalism and consumption. *Âlâ* is, of course, a part of the fashion industry and so acts according to the rules of this industry; in that sense—as Kaplan correctly observes—the magazine produces much content that is in fact very similar to the content found in secular fashion magazines.<sup>68</sup> However, what is especially striking in Kaplan’s column is that, while she avoids direct critical engagement with the rise of Islamic entrepreneurs who play by the rules of a capitalist market, she nevertheless places the onus of steering clear of consumerism on a fashion magazine and its consumers. Furthermore, her position is quite symptomatic of the assumptions that get loaded onto veiled women: veiling should not be only a signifier of personal religious conviction, but also a socially loaded statement aimed at differentiating oneself profoundly from the secular. Hers is in fact *not* an expression of the idea that capitalism and consumerism are at odds with Islam: instead, she locates her objection amidst discussions of the social faultlines in Turkey, and particularly that which divides the Islamic from the secular. In doing so, Kaplan loads *Âlâ* magazine and its readers with the mission to embody the manifestations of an “essential”

67 Hilal Kaplan, “Güzel Ahlâktan Güzel Yaşam Tarzına,” *Yeni Şafak*, July 10, 2011. <http://www.haber7.com/yazarlar/hilal-kaplan/762293-guzel-ahlaktan-guzel-yasam-tarzina>.

68 Dinç, “Veiling and (Fashion-) Magazines,” 662.

and ahistorical Islamic identity and difference, one untouched by any history of a “symbiotic relationship”<sup>69</sup> between Islamism and global capitalism in Turkey.

Along similar lines, Ayşe Böhürler—a columnist and television producer who was among the first founders of the AKP and who took an active role in the party administration from 2001 to 2012—insinuates that *Âlâ*'s understanding of the Islamic way of life is utterly superficial, displaying a broad and widespread confusion about what religiosity actually is. In a 2011 *Yeni Şafak* column criticizing *Âlâ*, she clarifies her argument by contrasting *Âlâ* with *Emel*, the aforementioned Muslim lifestyle magazine published in Britain. Referring back to a 2009 interview she had conducted with the editor of *Emel* magazine, Sarah Joseph, she points out how, in that earlier interview, Joseph had explained *Emel*'s mission as being to represent the Islamic lifestyle as a holistic way of life, one that people embrace in order to give meaning to their lives, rather than being simply a two-dimensional construct consisting of religious rituals and political aspirations. According to Joseph, this holistic way of life includes a conceptualization of veiling as being less about covering the body than about liberating women from the grip of the hegemonic discourses woven around the commercialized concept of “beauty.” Joseph also gives *Emel* magazine an ethical mission through reference to labor rights and environmental concerns: “What we wear,” she had said, “is not important. What is more important is whether what we wear has been produced in workshops where labor is exploited, whether this production is harmful to the environment or not.”<sup>70</sup>

Based on such statements, Böhürler contrasts *Emel* with *Âlâ*, arguing that whereas the former thus declares a clear mission informed by values and an intellectually articulated Islamic identity—despite being published within a Christian-majority society—*Âlâ* lacks these virtues:

I could find no similarity between *Emel* and *Âlâ* magazines. Neither could I decide how to define or categorize *Âlâ*. *Âlâ*'s high circulation numbers show that this lack of definition and confusion are in demand among religious people in Turkey. *Emel*, published in a Christian society, clearly conveys an identity, whereas *Âlâ*, published in a Muslim society, markets a religiosity without identity [...] *Âlâ* starts a blog crying “Veiling is beauty” (*Örtünmek güzelliktir*) while Sarah Joseph says “Veiling is freedom” (*Örtünmek özgürlüktür*).<sup>71</sup>

Böhürler thus sets up certain expectations as to what *Âlâ* ought to be representing. Accordingly, if a given magazine declares—as does *Âlâ*—that it is

69 Sandıkçı and Ger, “Veiling in Style,” 32.

70 Ayşe Böhürler, “Mualla Alışverişte,” *Yeni Şafak*, November 5, 2011, accessed August 3, 2017, <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/aysebohurler/mualla-aliverite-29668>.

71 Ibid.



addressing a conservative religious readership, then it must necessarily evince a critical and subversive stance with regard to consumerism and to notions of beauty defined in the marketplace. Furthermore, this critical stance, as well as the values that generate it and the meanings produced through engagement with it, are implicitly formulated by Böhürler as the core of Islamic identity. Her discourse also reflects a certain degree of disappointment about the fact that *Âlâ* has a large readership: according to her discourse, *Âlâ*'s popularity exposes how the sheer number of veiled women who are supposedly rather clueless about the core and the boundaries of what their own identity should "naturally" consist of is by no means to be underestimated.

The underlying common thread between Kaplan's and Böhürler's critiques of *Âlâ* and its readership is the expectation that wearing the veil, as well as promoting it, should naturally imply a deeply grounded and intellectually articulated understanding of Islamic identity and difference. Exactly what that identity entails appears to be, according to Kaplan, the declaration of an irreconcilable difference between Turkey's Islamic and secular elements and, according to Böhürler, an opposition to capitalism and consumerism. Both columnists express their disappointment with the readers of *Âlâ*, suggesting that women who follow the magazine fall short of fulfilling the expectations generated by their headscarves, most importantly the expectation that veiled women must symbolize, embody, and substantiate the assumed boundaries between "the Islamic" and "the secular" in Turkey.

### Metaphors of neighborhood, class cleavages, and trendsetting *ablas*

Besides blurring the contours of Islamic identity through consumerism, veiling fashion also brings with it an emphasis on class and status differences among veiled women. As aptly pointed out by Özlem Sandıkçı and Güliz Ger, "As wealth began to accumulate among the Islamic upper classes, the classificatory and discriminatory potential and uses of consumption began to become more prominent than its homogenizing and equalizing uses."<sup>72</sup> In other words, consuming veiling fashion no longer represents a claim to be a relatively anonymous part of a broad and homogeneous Islamic identity, but rather has come to serve as a way to differentiate oneself from "other"—less well-off, less urbanized, and perhaps less educated—women with headscarves.

*Âlâ* magazine, for its part, has been criticized for visualizing and indeed bringing to the fore the surging class and status differences that exist among the religious population. Models displaying various combinations of luxury brands are represented as wealthy urban women spending their leisure time in urban

72 Sandıkçı and Ger, "Constructing and Representing the Islamic Consumer in Turkey," 198.

public spaces, such as glamorous cafés, shopping malls, offices, or touristic destinations in İstanbul. This emphasis on wealth is visible not only in the promotion of such luxury brands as Hermes, Gucci, and so on, but also in the magazine's featured interviews with veiled professional women and the wives of politicians (usually from the AKP). The interviews revolve primarily around shopping and consumption habits, in addition to issues related to children and motherhood. For example, one wealthy businesswoman interviewed for *Âlâ* uses the following words to express how shopping rejuvenates her: "I set aside special time for shopping. On occasion, I even go abroad just for the shopping. It is like therapy to me."<sup>73</sup>

Such an example as this and others like it provide hints concerning the wealth and consumption habits of the readership targeted by *Âlâ*. These habits are not limited to the enjoyment of stylish outfits, but come to signal how consumption is made into a ritual of relief, a priority in the organization of time. Such interviews with women talking at length about how they enjoy their stylish, urban outfits in the midst of their professional lives as active, affluent, and aspiring women have prompted little appreciation in Islamic intellectual circles. To the contrary, in these circles, the images and interviews have triggered concerns about the resentment they may foster among lower-class veiled women and the harm they may do to the Islamic collectivity that veiled clothing is supposed to symbolize.

In one of his columns, İsmail Kılıçarslan—an Islamic poet, television scriptwriter, and columnist for *Yeni Şafak*<sup>74</sup>—analyzed and criticized at length *Âlâ*'s editorial for the September 2014 issue. This editorial—written by *Âlâ*'s CEO, the aforementioned Gülsüm Çiçekçi—is a rather typical fashion magazine text inasmuch as it celebrates the arrival of autumn, encouraging readers to "organize a nice evening with friends" and assuring them that *Âlâ*'s September issue will help them put together the most fashionable autumn style:

Summer is over. September has already arrived. Who would not want to meet close friends before the busy days begin? Obviously, this will be a

73 Kübra Ceylan, "İş Hayatında Stil Gereklidir," *Âlâ*, February 2012, 112.

74 İsmail Kılıçarslan is a popular figure known for the television show *Meksika Sınırı*—which was followed by not only Islamic but also secular youth—as well as for his columns, which have occasionally created controversy among pro-AKP circles. See, e.g., İsmail Kılıçarslan, "Korkuyu Beklerken," *Yeni Şafak*, December 26, 2017. <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ismailkilarlan/korkuyu-beklerken-2041713>. Currently, Kılıçarslan is the editor-in-chief of *Cins* magazine, owned by the aforementioned Albayrak group that also owns *Yeni Şafak*. *Cins* claims to be a conservative-Islamic alternative to left-liberal culture and literature magazines such as *Ot*, *Kafa*, and *Bavul*, and also asserts that it is fighting against the "given language of cultural hegemony"; see <http://www.cins.com.tr/hakkimizda/>. For a critical discussion of *Cins* and İsmail Kılıçarslan, see Tuna Kiremitçi, "Meksika Sınırı Şimdi Neresi?" *Afli Filintalar*, October 12/13, 2015. <http://www.aflifilintalar.com/meksika-siniri-simdi-neresi>.

lovely meeting. Should we organize a nice evening at home? Or should we all go out together? What should we wear for a meeting indoors? What should we wear for an outing? Invite your friends already and stop worrying about your style! The various style tips in this issue will be your guide.<sup>75</sup>

In his response to this, Kılıçarslan complains about *Âlâ*'s resemblance to "an average secular magazine marketing secular women's happiness for cash," further articulating his criticism in the following terms:

Up until recently, we used to be the kind of people who would visit their neighbors, not people who would "organize a nice evening." What happened to us? [...] How do we relate to this sociological profile, which has kept this sleazy magazine alive since 2011? [...] Because of the trends set by this sleazy magazine, the [...] women who throw "baby showers" for their unborn babies, who pay 11,800 Turkish liras for an overcoat (oh sorry, I mean trenchcoat), who do their wedding shopping in one of the "capital cities of fashion" like Paris or Milan—all these carry a substantial sociological weight [now]. And within this sociological weight, there are the veiled wives and daughters of a significant number of prominent bureaucrats, politicians, businessmen. Once upon a time, one of the trendsetting sisters (*abla*) of this group told me on the phone: "They pick on us because they're very jealous of us." What she implied was: "You're poor; that's why you're criticizing us." Long story short, when it comes to vanity and pretentiousness they easily compete with the country's "whites."

I am not naive. The fact that this sleazy magazine called *Âlâ* has been publishing for three years shows us that it is not a cause but a consequence [...] *Âlâ* is the published form of the new conservative pretentiousness that says, "My money, my decision" [...] It's about time we stopped this pretentiousness. Tomorrow will be too late.<sup>76</sup>

What is especially striking in Kılıçarslan's discourse is the way he conveys the idea of an "Islamic neighborhood" as a kind of collectivity threatened with being punctured by newly rich veiled women and their newly formed habit of

75 Gülsüm Çiçekçi, editorial, *Âlâ*, September 2014; quoted in İsmail Kılıçarslan, "Pek Âlâ Değil, Hatta Gayetle Çirkin," *Yeni Şafak*, September 2, 2014. <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ismailkilicarslan/pek-l-degil-hatta-gayetle-cirkin-55656>.

76 Kılıçarslan, "Pek Âlâ Değil."

conspicuous consumption. Accordingly, these newly rich veiled women are, he states, becoming similar to the “white Turks”—a concept that is widely used to mock and criticize the secular, upper middle-class, urban, educated, and Westernized population for being privileged, arrogant, and exclusionary. When Kılıçarslan says, “We used to be the kind of people who would visit their neighbors” and then asks, “What happened to us?” he is emphasizing how he conceives of Turkey’s “Islamic community” as a kind of modest neighborhood with closely knit social relations, a neighborhood where people act from and in line with a sense of togetherness and collectivity. *Âlâ*’s readership, however, is claimed as a deviation from the social norms of this neighborhood in favor of a convergence with “secular women” (Turkey’s “whites”) by buying into Western consumer culture and habits of conspicuous consumption. Posh veiled women who “organize nice evenings,” throw baby showers, and shop in Milan and Paris are presented as harmful to the cozy idealized unity of the “Islamic neighborhood” because they flaunt their wealth and subtly, if not directly, scorn less well-off members of “their” community. Kılıçarslan calls these women *abla*, which literally means “elder sister” and further highlights the metaphor of community and neighborhood in contradistinction to its deviant, *nouveaux riches* members. He portrays *Âlâ* and its readership, the “trendsetting *ablas*,” as harmful to the idealized imagination of an Islamic community, claiming that this harm is done through an emphasis on class difference. In other words, by employing the concept of the “white Turks” and evoking a sense of a cozy and unified Islamic neighborhood, Kılıçarslan is thereby drawing up the boundaries of Islamic community, defining what is “normal” and what is “deviant” for those who would identify themselves as religious Muslims.

What is more, the boundaries that are thus constructed are built as gendered boundaries. Discussing interactions between Islam and capitalism, Charles Tripp argues that, “Muslim intellectuals construct a ‘guarded sphere’ and “treat women as the terrain for the symbolic expression of a certain kind of identity.”<sup>77</sup> Although Turkey has now witnessed many years of the process of neoliberalization and a consequent cross-fertilization of Islamic values and global capitalism, these broader processes *themselves* do not receive the kind of direct criticism that has been used to target *Âlâ* magazine and its readers. This, therefore, hints at the gendered expectation that women are expected by some in Islamic intellectual circles to protect their own and by extension “their” community’s identity in a manner that is unencumbered by the influences of global capitalism and consumer culture.

77 Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy: The Challenge of Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 167–168.

## Conclusion

The connotations of the concepts of a/the “Islamic way of life” and a/the “Islamic consumer” are continuously contested. Likewise, the connotations of the practice of veiling are also constantly shifting in alignment with new meanings and images associated with these concepts as they circulate about within the context of global consumer capitalism. Islamic fashion magazines provide fruitful ground for tracing how Muslim subjectivities become articulated within a discourse of consumerist desires. Furthermore, these magazines also trigger discussions about the changing meanings and symbolisms of Islamic dress, particularly the veil, and how the new meanings thus generated can be accommodated within an already existing nexus of religious and political discourses. The debate surrounding *Âlâ* magazine sheds light on how we can grasp the contestations over the changing meanings and symbolisms of the veil in Turkey at a moment when class cleavages among the constituency of Islamic politics are becoming much more pronounced.

In analyzing the criticisms targeting *Âlâ* magazine, this study has found reflections of discomfort in Islamic circles toward *Âlâ*'s language of consumerism, which is posited as eroding the boundaries between Islamic and secular lifestyles, as well as toward the supposed fragmentation of an alleged Islamic collectivity achieved via an articulation of class cleavages among veiled women. These lines of critique tap deeply into the particular configuration of the headscarf issue in Turkey, a configuration that had initially been formed within a narrative of the collective struggle of the Islamic periphery against the cultural hegemony of a secular, Westernized, urbanized center. The exclusion of the Islamic periphery from the secular center was once quite starkly epitomized by the headscarf ban, which served to emphasize and amplify the discourse of collectivity. Islamic political parties in Turkey, particularly the AKP, have tapped into the discourse of exclusion and collectivity several times in their history, utilizing this discourse as a cement to keep the electorate base together despite this base's ever increasing class cleavages.

Along with the rise of the Islamic bourgeoisie and Islamic politics in Turkey throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the changing consumption patterns of this rising economic and political elite—such as the consumption of veiling fashion, luxury holiday resorts, and so on—figured as means of breaking the cultural hegemony of the secular, Westernized elite and changing the stereotypical portrayal of conservative Muslims as uneducated, lower class, and rural. While the rise of the Islamic bourgeoisie reached its peak during the advanced neo-liberalization process of the 2010s, the popularity of the headscarf surged among the younger generation of the Muslim conservative population, and the ban implemented on the headscarf for universities, middle and high schools,

public sector jobs, and parliament was abolished. The growing industry of veiling fashion enabled the proliferation of diversified styles that catered to individual tastes and desires while also targeting upper-class covered women who wished to reflect their distinguished taste and status through their personal consumption patterns. As a result of this development, the symbolic power of veiling as a signifier of Islamic collectivity began to weaken.

*Âlâ* magazine is a product of this context, and its content serves as an insightful way of revealing the discursive shifts occurring in the conceptualization of upper-class veiled women as consumers seeking to fulfill individual and worldly desires to be beautiful, stylish, and classy by consuming luxury items. This conceptualization was and remains at odds with the conceptualization of veiling as being a strong public statement of Islamic identity and a way of emphasizing allegedly irreconcilable differences from secular women. The criticisms made against *Âlâ* by Islamic columnists reflect this dissonance between an idealized Islamic collectivity, epitomized by the “neighborhood” metaphor, and the emerging Muslim subjectivities made visible by *Âlâ*.

These criticisms also reflect the attribution of an essentialized identity to veiled women in Turkey in two ways. Firstly, veiled women are supposed by such critics to be uniformly invested in a concern to differentiate themselves from “others”—meaning women who do not articulate their life choices according to Islamic norms—and to manifest this difference through their consumption practices. Secondly, they are expected to embody a collective and uniform Islamic identity, one that, it is argued, stands beyond any class cleavages among those who would define themselves as religious Muslims.

This study has demonstrated Turkey’s contemporary contestations over how to define Muslim subjectivities within the contemporary context of ever sharpening class cleavages among the Islamic population and of the blurring boundaries of Islamic identity. The implications of this research suggest that these class cleavages and the flourishing consumerist discourses among Islamic communities—as well as the political, social, and cultural tensions that these create in the context of contemporary Turkey—are in need of further scholarly research. These tensions are indeed highly gendered, and this study has therefore delineated how an ahistoricized and idealized Islamic female identity has been made central to efforts to preserve the polarizing discourse of the “Islamic neighborhood” as opposed to the “secular neighborhood.” How changes in gender identities as well as class configurations will further shape political discourse in the future, and whether there will be a divergence from the dichotomizing and polarizing discourse of Islamic vs. secular neighborhoods, remains to be seen.

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