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**ABSTRACT ONLY – WORK IN PROGRESS**

“Assessing the Role of Women Preachers in the Democratization  
of Turkish Sociopolitical Culture”

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After the politicization of Islam in Turkey in the 1980s, which became mostly visible by the protests of the veiled young women in front of the universities, the most fruitful activity for the veiled young women was preaching. As the famous Islamist woman intellectual Cihan Aktaş underlines “the whole 1980s were the years of preaching” because all passionate young Islamist women seeking religious knowledge digested whatever was available in written texts, including the original authentic sources, and began preaching whenever the time and situation was suitable. These eager and voluntary preaching activities paved the way for a new type of woman preacher, as preaching was monopolized by religious *ulema* (scholars) for generations. The male-dominated preachers of former generations were asked why they did not voice the political dimension of Islam, and why they traded their religious knowledge such as reading the Qur’an for money or profit. This paper explores whether the new preachers have disseminated a democratic and egalitarian discourse as opposed to the one previously taught by generations of preachers who were the interlocutors of an obvious authoritarian and sectarian discourse. It also examines whether the autonomous status of the new preachers would create a culture of tolerance and respect among divergent groups in Turkey, whose political culture is based upon a harsh division between secularism and Islamism. And finally, it concludes by highlighting whether new preachers who aim to empower ordinary Muslim women in the everyday life of the modern capitalist order would bring about a dialogue with feminist groups, which, in turn, would nurture democracy and equality in Turkey.