SECULARISM AND ISLAMISM IN TURKEY: THE MAKING OF ELITES AND COUNTER-ELITES

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There is an inherent power conflict between secular modernist elites and Islamist elites in Turkey today, which is fueled by two different worldviews and life-styles. However, because of the inclusionary nature of Turkish politics, the opportunity for social mobility, and the prevalent freedom of speech, Islamist movements have developed their own educated, technical and intellectual elites which resemble the secular modernist elites they criticize and oppose. This process of elite formation in turn leads to de facto secularization, independently from the intentions of the actors, as religion and professional careers follow separate and distinct paths.

This article is an attempt to understand the contemporary debate between Islamism and secularism from the perspective of the formation and circulation of elites and counter-elites. The concept of elite is used here to refer to those new social groups such as intellectuals and the technical intelligentsia (engineers and technicians) which, through secular and modern education, have acquired a “cultural capital,” namely, a universal

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2. In the analysis of French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu, there are different forms of capital that give strength, power and profit to their owner. Among these, Bourdieu distinguishes “economic capital” (convertible
scientific language and professional skills. “Islamism” indicates the reappropriation of a Muslim identity and values as a basis for an alternative social and political agenda (to that of the state). “Muslim” is not synonymous with “Islamist,” in the sense that the first expresses a religious identity and the latter implies a political consciousness and social action. Accordingly, Islamist counter-elites can be both actors in the Islamist movements and professionals and intellectuals aspiring for political power. Islamism, however, does not only denote membership in an Islamist political organization, but also suggests a sense of belonging and a group identity.

The Turkish experience allows for an in-depth analysis of the conflict between secularists and Islamists. The reason is that Turkey has had a very long tradition of ruling elites which, since the end of the 19th century, have been engaged in reforming, modernizing and secularizing Turkish society while Islamists have challenged this essentially Western model of change. Since the establishment of an Islamist party, the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party) in 1970, Turkish Islamism has been incorporated into the political system and legitimated by the parliamentary system. This party, known today as the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP), is currently the senior partner of a coalition government formed in July 1996.3

Turkey is a unique example in the Middle East where such a radical political change in the nature of the governing elites can take place peacefully and by democratic means. Democracy has been successful in Turkey; it has been internalized as a set of shared values by Turks and has become the norm of political behavior. Furthermore, the liberal administration of President Turgut Özal (1983–91) introduced the institutions of a market economy and the privatization of the mass media. As a consequence, civil society and associative life have expanded, and non-governmental organizations have proliferated.4 These developments have taken place amid a lively public debate on issues of religious and ethnic identity, national unity, secularism and democratic pluralism. In short, the debate between the secularist Kemalists5 elites and the religious Islamist counter-elites on the direction of social and cultural change in Turkey is taking place in an environment accustomed to electoral politics and public debates that shape public opinion and influence

into money), from “cultural capital” (conferred by educational credentials and institutions), and “social capital” (achieved social connections and group membership), from “symbolic capital” (legitimated capital, source of prestige). Pierre Bourdieu, La Noblesse d’Etat. Grandes Ecoles et Esprit de Corps (The Nobility of the State. The Big Schools of Public Administration and their Esprit de Corps) (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1989).

3. This process of legitimation did not take place gradually; the military interventions of 1960, 1971 and 1980 interrupted this process. But after each military coup, a return to democracy took place, and the same political parties were re-established under different names but with the same leaders and organizations. In 1970, the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party, NOP) was established by those who left the center-right Adalet Partisi (Justice Party). After being banned by the military coup in 1971, the NOP was re-established in 1972 as the Milli Selamet Partisi (National Salvation Party) which participated in two coalition governments from 1974–75. With the military coup of 1980, political parties were banned once again. This time, the Islamist party, which was legalized a second time in 1983, has continued to exist under the name of Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP). In the last municipal elections of 27 March 1994, the RP increased its share of the total votes to 19.09 percent, and in the last general elections of 25 December 1995, received 21.3 percent of the total national votes.


5. Those who believe in Kemal Atatürk’s ideas.
government policies. In other words, the existence of alternative political parties and the freedom of speech and organization provide the best guarantee against authoritarian rule and totalitarian practices.

This article discusses four major propositions: first, that secularism, as a non-Muslim way of life, has contributed to the making of the politically dominant Kemalist elites; second, that since secularism is often implemented by authoritarian elites in Muslim countries, there is a potential conflict of interest between democracy and secularism; third, that although Islamism as a political movement challenges the secular state, secularization has shaped the identities and practices of the new Islamist actors; and fourth, that it is in the widening of the public sphere of debate between Islamists and secularists that the basic principles of democracy are defined. Disputes over life-styles, exposure of the self, expressions of art—in short body-politics—have become central to the political debate between the two groups.

SECULARISM AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERNIST ELITES

Secularism and positivism are the two pillars of the Turkish modernization experience that began in the 19th century and reached its institutional and ideological peak in 1923. Although positivism and secularism are the product of Western concepts of science and politics, they have acquired different meanings and roles in non-Western, Muslim contexts. Positivism is a universal model only when it serves to dissociate Western modernity from a particularistic culture or religion and is perceived to be a rational mode of thinking and acting applicable to all societies. Positivism served to legitimize the Turkish Republican elites' modernization attempts. From the "Young Turks" onwards, the secular vision of history shaped by the positivism of Auguste Comte provided the frame of reference for reform for progressive Turkish elites. Social engineering, seen as a corollary to positivism, became the reformist elites' model for a rational reconstruction of Turkish society. The positivist motto of "progress and order" mirrored the views of the Turkish modernizers for a national order, without which, according to them, secularization could not be achieved in a Muslim country. Rather than Anglo-Saxon liberalism, French Jacobinism, with its highly centralized model of change, became the prototype for reform of Turkish modernists. Hence, secularization itself became part of that process of social engineering rather than an outcome of the process of modernization and societal development.

Although Turkish secularism is inspired by the French "laïcité," or the separation of church and state, religious affairs in Turkey are regulated by the state. Furthermore, the

6. The Young Turks were a group of constitutionalists, exiled in France who founded a committee called İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Committee of Union and Progress) and began publishing the journal Mesveret (Consultation) in 1895. The leading figure of this movement, Ahmad Riza, was a radical secularist and positivist. See Erik J. Zürcher, Turkey: A Modern History (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 1993), pp. 90–137.
8. The Turkish political concept laiklik is closer to the French word "laïcité" than it is to the word "secularism." For a comparison of secularism in France and Turkey, see "Laïcité/Laklik: Introduction," in
state is not impartial towards all confessional groups because Sunni Islam remains implicitly the state religion, a concept that is being challenged today by the Alevis.9 It is only on the issue of taking religion out of the public sphere that French and Turkish secularism are similar. The headscarf dispute, which took place both in France, "l'affaire du foulard," and in Turkey, the "türban" issue, indicates the parallel between the two cases, and reveals the centrality of both the question of education and that of women in the debate on secularism. In France, the veiling issue was related to questions of immigration and multi-culturalism, and was basically limited to high schools. The demands of Muslim girls to cover their heads, in accordance with Islamic precepts, while attending public schools, provoked a vigorous reaction from secularists in both countries, who viewed these demands as a threat to secular public education and women’s rights.

Secularization and the disappearance of religious symbols and practices from public places, such as the removal of crosses from schools and courts, is a significant aspect of French secularism which took place gradually during the Third Republic (1871–1940).10 In Turkey, as in other Muslim countries, secularism is considered to be the prerequisite of Westernization rather than of democratization.11 Secularism, as a modernist ideology in Turkey, is linked to the state’s control of the public sphere (rigidly in the early years of the Republic, especially between 1923–46, but softening gradually from the 1950s to the 1980s). Turkish secularism has meant the banning of religious orders, dress codes for public servants, and the imposition of certain types of audio-visual programming at state radio stations and television channels. According to Ernest Gellner, it became a "didactic secularism:"12 moralistic and pedagogical, teaching and imposing a modern way of life.

The Turkish model of secularism introduced radical institutional changes at the executive and legislative levels, such as the abolition of the Sultanate and the Caliphate in 1924; the abolition of the Ministry of Pious Foundations, religious courts and religious titles; the adoption of a secular civil code of law from Switzerland in 1926; and the declaration that the Turkish republic was a “secular state” by a constitutional amendment in 1937.

Alongside these changes, secularism became instrumental in creating new Republican elites. This took place primarily by means of the national education system, which was put under the authority of the Ministry of Education in 1926. The state delegitimized religious education and established the supremacy of secular modern education nationwide. The building of the nation-state was thus accompanied by the centralization of education and the formation of its nationalist elites. Reforming education in line with modernist and rationalist ideals was not confined to its philosophical content, but also to the medium of education. The replacement of the Arabic script by the Latin script in 1928,
the purification of the Turkish language from Persian and Arabic influences, and the recreation of the öztürkçe (pure Turkish) language secured by the establishment of the Turkish Linguistic Society, Türk Dil Kurumu in 1932, created a radical break with the Ottoman past and the Ottoman elites. The Turkish language became compulsory in national education, and the use of “foreign” languages, other than Western ones, was forbidden.13

The change of script from Arabic to Latin contributed to the consolidation of secularism as well.14 It accomplished this by cutting the ties of the Turks to the language and the script of the Quran, and to the Arabic and Muslim world in general. In their endeavor to “demystify” religion, the Republican elites encouraged the translation of the Quran into Turkish, and mandated that the call for prayer from the mosques be in Turkish rather than in Arabic.15 Thus, language and script reforms introduced a radical cultural shift towards the Western world both symbolically and literally.

Republican elites were the product of this new way of writing, reading and speaking. They used the Latin script, spoke “pure,” “original” Turkish, without a local accent, mastered Western languages (French being gradually replaced by English after the 1950s), and referred themselves to Western sources in science and literature. The new Republican elites were thus cut off from their Ottoman past, seemingly painlessly: They appeared to consider their cultural heritage cumbersome as they turned towards a new future and towards Western civilization. Language and script reforms endowed the new elites with a symbolic capital, conferring upon them legitimacy and prestige, and distinguishing them as “progressive” (because they were Western-oriented) in contradistinction to the previous elites, which were judged “reactionary.” Those among the former educated elites who could not adapt themselves to the new conditions, were disempowered, and lost their social status and authority.

Such a rupture with the earlier elites paved the way and facilitated the formation of new elites owing their existence and power to the Republic. As their “raison d’être” was closely linked to the nation-state, they became the natural transmitters of the Kemalist ideology of progress. These new Republican elites identified themselves as ilerici Atatürkçü aydınlar (progressive Kemalist intellectuals), thus denoting their allegiance as intellectuals to Atatürk’s reforms. Those intellectuals were not only academicians, novelists or journalists, but members of a Republican elite which was progressive, enlightened and felt responsible for improving the lot of society, and included public sector intellectuals and the political ruling elites. In short, Republican elites were the ones endowed with cultural capital rather than financial power, who were faithful to the interests of the nation-state and were dedicated to the values of secularism and progress.

13. It is ironical to note that today English is the language of education in prestigious universities, while Kurdish is still prohibited in public education and in broadcasting.  
15. The Democrat Party, which came to power in 1950, owed its popularity to removing those practices, and was denounced as counter-revolutionary by the Republican elites.
Women and Secularism

The penetration of secularism in daily life is best illustrated by women’s physical and social visibility. Secularism pushed for the emancipation of women from religious practices such as veiling and the segregation of sexes. Participation of women in public life as citizens and as civil servants, and their socialization with men, defined the modern secular way of life and indicated a shift away from a form of social organization framed by Islam.

In Turkey’s modernizing program, women were depicted as the builders of a “new life,” a modern way of living both in the private and the public spheres. The representatives of this modern life appeared in photographs as unveiled women, women in athletic competitions, women pilots, women professionals, and women with men, both in European clothing. Even the body-language and the body-posture of the women portrayed were different from what they had been before the reforms. Advertisements, cartoons and novels depicted women in their fashionable short-cut hairstyles, Western style dresses, using new consumer products, and posing with their husbands in homes decorated with Western style furniture, and in public places such as theatres, restaurants, tea-rooms and streets. The modern way of living was not limited to the acquisition of Western consumer products, but also included the appropriation of modern values such as healthy living, the education of children, and equality of the sexes. Women thus became the primary conveyors of this new way of living, both in the private and the public domains.

The visibility of women in public life—as students, citizens, professionals, in the city, walking hand-in-hand with their husbands, shaking hands, dining, dancing and playing sports with men—signified a shift from a Muslim way of life to a secular, modern one. As such, modernity, in a Muslim context, acquired a gender specific sense. Ironically, women have played a central role in the rise of Islamism as well; the veiling of women in the 1980s and 1990s has indicated the re-Islamization of personal relations, public spaces, and daily practices.

Life-Styles and the Conflict between Secularism and Islamism

Changes in life-styles and aesthetic values that reflected the shift from an Islamic to a Western culture created cultural distinctions and social stratification in Turkish society. More accurately than the concept of “social class” that explains social inequalities in terms of moneyed capital and economic power, the concept of “status-group” that encompasses life-styles, “symbolic capital” and “habitus,” defines social stratification at an intersubjective cultural level. According to Pierre Bourdieu, the habitus is a system of lasting,

transposable dispositions, integrating past experiences and information handed down as a matrix of perceptions and actions.18

Hence, this author posits that it is in this realm of "habitus," cultural codes and life-styles, that the power struggle between Republican elites and Islamists is taking place. In other words, the question of life-styles is not a trivial matter of fashion, trends, and individual choices but reveals much more complex relations of intersubjectivity, stratification, and power. One can argue that upper middle-class Kemalist women, in particular, but also Kemalist men, who acquired an education and a professional career, and who changed their body-language and their way of life in a "secular," that is non-Muslim, manner, garnered prestige and social recognition, and thus acquired "symbolic capital." Ultimately, they became a distinct status group. Western, secular life-styles have distinguished the Republican elites from the parochial elites attached to more traditional, local and religious manners and customs. Social recognition and social status, rooted in the exclusion of the Islamic life-world,19 is the main social and political bone of contention between secularists and Islamists.

Unlike groups at the periphery, urban middle and upper-middle classes in Turkey had access to education for several decades, and were located in the vicinity of the center of the production of values, both in the geographical and the symbolic sense.20 They were thus able to empower themselves through the mastery of "Westernized" ways of life and idiom. The radical break with the local culture, under the modernizing programs of the Republicanists, rendered difficult the process of identification of the rising peripheral classes with the established elites.

This cultural gap between the elites of the center and those at the periphery has become another feature of the asymmetrical realities of Turkish politics and society today. The very project of modernization, based on external references, alien to local customs and traditions, has perverted the relationship between the secular elites and the people. The established elites no longer provide a familiar model for the newly rising social groups to identify with, and to aspire to emulate professionally.

Islamism is an attempt to provide Muslims from the periphery with a new guide of conduct for their daily lives and new forms of political expression. In a seemingly paradoxical way, the more those peripheral groups have access to urban life, a liberal education, and modern means of expressing themselves politically, the more they appear to seek Islamic sources of reference to redefine their life-world.

Contemporary Islamist movements in Turkey emerged after the 1950s and grew during the post-1980 period. During that same period, peripheral groups were moving to urban centers and gaining access to secular education and to the opportunity of upward

social mobility. Islamist movements attempted to respond to the aspirations of these new groups and help them come to terms with modernity in general and with the secular elites in particular. Islamism became the political expression of a conflictual link between an Islamic-Turkish identity and a secular Western modernity.

The veiling of women has emerged as the most visible symbol of the Islamization of the Turkish life-world. Islamist politics clearly define the role of the individual in the community, and the central issue has become the control of women’s sexuality and the social separation of the sexes. But, in addition to that, Islamists have imposed beards for men, and taboos on promiscuity, homosexuality, alcohol consumption, and defined new moralist practices and the semiology of the Islamic way of life.

Islamic faith and the Islamic way of life have become a reference point for the ideologization of seemingly simple social practices such as the wearing of scarfs for female students at university, the permission for prayer spaces in public buildings, the construction of a mosque at the center of Istanbul, the segregation of the sexes in the public transportation system, the censorship on erotic art, and the discouragement of alcohol consumption in restaurants. All these issues demonstrate the way Islamists have politicized social and cultural practices in order to criticize the “secular way of life.”

The conflict between Islamists and secularists is defined by different normative values, gender relations, and life-styles. Islamists and secularists are fighting over control of a cultural model of Turkish identity which has roots in class conflict. Alain Touraine defines a social movement as a struggle for the “control of historicity,” i.e. for a cultural model that is not separable from the one based on class conflict. This author proposes the idea that Islamic movements are not solely a reaction to a given situation of class and cultural domination, but also present a counter-cultural model of modernity, and a new paradigm for self-definition that has led to the formation of Islamist counter-elites.

**THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAMIST COUNTER-ELITES**

Islamic oppositional movements are far from being monolithic—they have taken on very different meanings throughout history, and have varied in different political and cultural contexts. Still, one can discern certain common features among contemporary Islamist movements, throughout the Muslim world, that have developed since the end of the 1960s. For instance, both the leaders and the followers of Islamist movements in Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey are among the recently urbanized and educated. In high school or at university, recent migrants to the cities encounter the works of contemporary Islamist thinkers, such as those of the Pakistani Abu al-'Ala' Mawdudi, the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, the Iranian 'Ali Shari'ati, and the Turkish Ali Buluç and Ismet Özel, who

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redefine Islamic "authenticity" without being apologetic to Western modernity. A return to the original sources, the Quran, the *sunna* and the *hadith* (sayings and traditions of the Prophet), and the "asr-i saadet" period (the age of the Prophet Muhammed and the four orthodox caliphs [622–61 AD]) is a common theme of the programs of almost all Islamist movements that call for the revival of pure Islam and the struggle against the corrupting influence of Western modernity.

The way in which Islamist movements view Western modernity is the main difference between the new generation of Islamists and that of the 19th century modernist Islamists. While Muhammed 'Abdu, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, and Rashid Rida, tried to adapt Islamic values to democratic and modern values, the contemporary radical Islamists take an anti-modernist stand, in the name of an Islamic alternative model. The search for an alternative paradigm in Islam has prompted Muslim intellectuals to launch a major attack on permissiveness, consumerism, pollution, corruption and nationalism, all considered to be the sinful by-products of Western modernity and civilization.

Contemporary Islamism criticizes both traditional interpretations of Islam and modernism. It is neither a direct product of religious and cultural traditions, nor a straightforward representation of Muslim identity. Contemporary Islamism is a cultural and political deconstruction of the category of "Muslim." It is a critique of and a discontinuity with the given categories of Muslim identity; it is an endeavour to rename and to reconstruct Muslim identity by freeing it from traditional interpretations and by challenging modernism. It is radical both in its critique of traditions, considered responsible for the passivity and the "enslavement" of Muslim people, and in its desire to set up a radically different civilization based on the Islamization of all spheres of life from the conception of the self, to the organization of the life-world, and to the politics of government.

Islamism, both in its ideological formulations and sociological practices, has created new hybridizations between tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, community and religion. The new Islamist counter-elites in Turkey incarnate the paradoxical and ambivalent nature of contemporary Islamist movements: They owe their professional identity and social visibility to both the modern secular education system and the Islamist movements to which they belong.

The emergence of contemporary Islamism in Turkey can be traced to the post-1983 period when Islamist engineers rose to power within the ranks of the Motherland Party, veiled women became visible on modern university campuses in big cities, and Islamist periodicals, newspapers and books shifted the intellectual debate in Turkey away from the dominance of leftist intellectuals to that of the Islamists. These new agents of change represented the move of Islam from the periphery of the system to its center, and yet were themselves a product of that center, of its educational institutions and its urban life. As these new agents of Islamism began to obtain the same cultural capital as the Republican

elites, share the same university classes, occupy the ranks of parliament, and participate in public debates on television, they started to gain public visibility, social recognition, legitimacy, and prestige. The Republican secular elites, in turn, reacted primarily in political terms, and began to wage a battle against Islamic fundamentalism and in defense of secularism.

**Engineers and the Islamist Counter-Elites**

Among the urban, educated Islamists, engineers, who represent the technical elite and have been agents of social and economic development, play a crucial role in the politics of Turkey.²⁵ Since their emergence as a professional force in the 1950s, Turkish engineers have taken an active part in political movements, supporting some of the dominant ideological trends of the times. During the 1970s, many engineers supported the then popular leftist movements. In the post-1983 period, the deputies with an engineering training constituted a majority in the parliament and government.²⁶ Today among the cadres of the RP, the number and the influence of engineers cannot be underestimated. The party’s chairman, and currently Turkey’s Prime Minister, Necmettin Erbakan, is an engineer, as is President Süleyman Demirel. Turgut Özal, who was prime minister and president, was also an engineer.²⁷

Engineers in Turkey have been critical of the modernist elites’ concept of development. They have also had problems with the Islamist movement. There is a double commitment of many engineers today to both Islamism and industrial development, to faith and to rationality. Islamist engineers reveal the tensions that exist between a professional technical education and a political Islamic identity, between the prerequisites of science and rationality and the priorities of religious prescriptions.


²⁶ During the period from 1923–1950 (the single-party rule period), 50 percent of the deputies were civil servants and military officers and only 1 percent were engineers. During the period from 1960–80, the percentage of civil servants among the deputies fell to 18 percent, whereas that of engineers increased to 12 percent. See Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Anıtklopedisi (Encyclopedia on the Republican Period in Turkey), fascicle 10 (1983), pp. 2671–81. After the 1987 general elections, 45 percent of the parliamentarians were engineers or architects. See Cumhuriyet (Istanbul), 2 December 1987.

Islamist Intellectuals

As producers of symbols and values, Islamist intellectuals, such as Ali Buluç, Ismet Özel, and Abdurrahman Dilipak, define and transmit the ideology of the Islamist movement through newspapers, periodicals and books. In Turkey during the 1970s, intellectual life was basically in the hands of the leftist intellectuals; in the past 15 years, it has come under the influence of Islamist intellectuals. Islamic publications are proliferating. At first it was the works of radical Islamist thinkers, especially those from other Muslim countries, like ‘Ali Shari’ati and Sayyid Qutb, that were translated; then gradually the interest turned towards local Islamists such as Buluç and Özel. There was also interest in the debates on modernity, leading to the translation, and the publication and discussion of the works of Western intellectuals such as Ivan Illich, Paul Karl Feyerabend, and Michel Foucault.

The new Islamist intellectuals, both men and women, are quite distinct from the earlier Islamist thinkers in Turkey. They use modern Turkish language, refer to Western thinkers, discuss issues such as post-modernism, participate in public debates with secular intellectuals, and master Western foreign languages. Although in their writings, Islamist intellectuals seek to define an alternative Islamic identity and society, in their social profiles, their writing and communication styles, and their use of the mass media, they have a lot in common with the secular intellectuals.

Women and the Islamist Counter-Elites

The educated Islamist women in Turkey, who are professionals and intellectuals, such as Cihan Aktas, Sibel Eraslan and Hamide Toros, constitute a distinct category among Islamists. Their participation in Islamist movements as active agents has influenced both the definition of Islamic elites and the course of change of the Islamist movement itself. The gender question is far from being a derivative issue or an epiphenomenon of the Islamist movement. The concept of women as auxiliaries to men is a central issue that defines the basic stakes of the Islamist movement. It also highlights the power relations between secular and Muslim women, and between Muslim men and Muslim women.

In all Muslim societies, the Islamist movements have gained public visibility by means of the veiling of women. Veiling symbolizes the Islamization of a way of life, and conveys different conceptions of gender identities, spatial organization and aesthetics. The veil, on the one hand, recalls the traditional definition of Muslim womanhood based on values of modesty and virtue, the segregation of the sexes, and the interdictions on women to participate in public life. The veiling of women today, on the other hand, also signifies


the political participation and the active voluntary reappropriation of an Islamic identity by women. As such, the new veiling has almost nothing in common with the traditional image of Muslim women as uneducated, docile, passive, and devoted to their family life. On the contrary, young, urban, educated groups of Islamist girls are politically active and publicly visible. The way they have chosen to wear an Islamic outfit is also different from the way women dressed traditionally, in terms of fabrics, colors and style. The educated Islamist women, both in terms of their appearance—in stylish fabrics with widened shoulders—and in their energetic outlook—taking buses and going to the universities—remind one more of the secular and self-assertive modern women than of the traditional Muslim ones. In short, although Islamist women play an important role within their movement, they also have multifaceted lives and professional careers, and are thus part of the emerging Islamist elite.

Islamist women are, however, facing difficulties in their relations with both secularist women and Islamist men. Being publicly visible, mixing socially with men and having intellectual and professional aspirations have created tension between their collective role as Islamist militants, and their individual roles as female members of the counter-elite.

CONCLUSION

In short, all three categories of the Islamist counter-elites (the engineers, the women and the intellectuals), reveal a new profile of Islamist actors; all three are the product of secular education, urbanization and Islamization; all three are the result of the hybrid nature of modernism and Islamism; and all three are in conflict with the previous modern Westernized elites. The latter became elites when their members emancipated themselves from their religious beliefs and traditional ties, and acquired knowledge and education apart from, and in contradistinction to religion. Islamization, therefore, can be seen as a counter-attack against the principles of the Kemalist project of modernization and the vested interests of the Westernized elites. The concept of an Islamist elite is itself antithetical to secular elites who see it as anachronistic.

Ironically, the new Islamist counter-elites are almost the mirror image of the previous secular Republican ones. Women as markers of secularism, engineers as transmitters of positivism and rationality, and intellectuals incarnating progressive Republican values were central to the Republican project. As humanistic and technical elites, the Islamists have also acquired a rational education and a universal language at the same universities as the Republicanists. Like the previous elites, their social status is defined not by economic power, but by cultural capital. Yet their social ascendancy through education has reached its limits because their provincial, Muslim habitus is an obstacle to their achieving social recognition and prestige.

The questioning of the Muslim identity through radical Islamism has empowered the new actors of the Islamist movements to seek social-recognition of their recently acquired cultural capital through symbols of a Muslim habitus, namely, the veiling of women, the wearing of beards for men, and particular ways of greeting, speaking and eating. The
Islamists are the counter-elites of Republicans, but the elites of their followers. They have become the new models.

The utopian desire to change society is what distinguishes Islamist movements from other contemporary social movements, such as feminism and environmentalism, which recognize pluralism and contribute to the strengthening of civil society. Islamist movements, on the contrary, aim at a complete change that can threaten secularism. They want to have moral control over the public sphere through control of women’s sexuality, limiting public encounters between the sexes, and the right of censorship over the media and the arts.

Engineers, intellectuals and women play a distinct and significant role in the Islamist movement and counteract the totalitarian tendency of the movement. Engineers embody the conflictual tension between rationality and faith; intellectuals reflect that between critical thinking and Islamic morality; and veiled women express the tension between communitarian morality and individualism. To the extent that rationality, individualism and critical thinking emerge as autonomous value-references for the Islamist elite formed through the modern system of education, the process of secularization can be said to be ongoing. In other words, the more the Islamists acquire a professional identity, as engineers or intellectuals, the more the realms of the sacred and the profane will be separated. Thus, becoming a member of an elite activates a process of secularization, independent of the intentions of the actors, that leads to the separation of the two realms.