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Reflections on Secularism and Religion from the Bosphorus¹

Paula M. Coeey

Musing

My first full day in Istanbul I wake up around 4:00 a.m. to barking dogs and men engaged in heated discussion in another language. The most striking feature is the noise. Birds compete with barking dogs and what I guess to be security guards making their rounds on the campus of Bogazici University, where a multitude of yowling cats roam freely. I try to meditate by incorporating the sounds but to no avail. Then from a distance I hear the muezzins' first call to prayer. (I learn later that the ones I hear most clearly call from the mosque up the hill across from the main entrance to the campus and from the Artakoy mosque, farther south, but still within walking distance.) Almost simultaneously cargo ships start blasting their horns as they move along the water, their engines droning as they temporarily drown out the muezzins. Boats and chanters seem to fight it out over which sounds will endure. The muezzins get the last word, then fall silent as the birds pick up again in even greater numbers. By now it is 5:00 a.m. and the sky begins to lighten.

Maybe competition is the wrong metaphor—one that speaks to my own location as a U.S. outsider whose ethos is Christian, whose economic practices are capitalist, whose country claims individualism as its core. Perhaps this cluster of noises that confronts me can ultimately produce a harmony. Certainly this is what the Turks themselves seek. Coming from a history of grand experiments in such directions, experiments that at best never quite succeed and at worst fail dramatically, I am suspicious but hopeful as well.

The view from my room is extraordinary—a corner room in a faculty guest house, set high on a hill that catches a curve in the Bosphorus bending from

the south to the west. The large double western windows look out onto a courtyard marked by forest on one side and the Bosphoros on the other. Farther west looms one of several suspension bridges linking "Europe" to "Asia," "West" to "East." Over time these boundaries will blur in virtually every respect. My southern window, to the left of my desk, opens onto more water, more "Asia" across the way. Looking out and down over the hill from this vantage, I see the ruins of a fortress. Each day greets me with such sounds and sights and ever new ones as well—a recorder, an accordion with base and drums, all playing unfamiliar tunes outside my window; the arabesque music played by taxi drivers; the taped music of Sinatra, the Beatles, and Elvis emanating from the guest house for celebratory occasions; a flutist playing Bach. A cellular phone rings as gulls squawk above me.

It is vividly clear to me from the readings, the sights, and, most of all, the sounds of Istanbul that human lives and interactions vastly exceed and challenge such binaries as secularism and religion and their associated analytical categories of "West" and "East," "Europe" and "Asia." It is much harder to capture motion and rhythms than to portray a single image, which is perhaps why it is important to be suspicious of images as idolatrous—a legacy of monotheism shared by Jew, Christian, Muslim, and Marxist alike—a theological version of anti-essentialism. And the word, the spoken image so central to debate, simultaneously manifests and denies its own ambiguous instantiations in the face of silence and the empty page. To me, the multiple sights and sounds of a place suggest richness and texture, the complexities of human living as it defies the categories by which we seek to analyze it. So it is with the sights and sounds of Istanbul.

Analysis²

One example will suffice. The contrapuntal relation between the Muslim headscarf (*basortu*) and proliferating icons of Ataturk, exhibited in both public and private space, register ongoing, high-pitched debate among the Turks over their future as a nation. This contrapuntal relation provides one way to grasp the complexity of how the secular and the religious produce each other, even as their categorical usefulness dissolves in the process of production.³ When Mustafa Kemal Ataturk secularized Turkey in the early twentieth century, he sought to equalize the status of men and women in an effort to "Westernize" Turkey. His government granted women the vote, and he appointed elite women to judicial and political office in large numbers. Elite women also achieved more education. Just as Ataturk insisted that men wear

European hats, he forbade by law the wearing of the headscarf in government space, including government offices of any kind and the public schools. The public schools included the universities as well as elementary and secondary education. Such was Turkish secularity or Kemalism in its origins.

Over the course of the last eighty years or so this prohibition has generated conflict fraught with irony. For example, observant Muslim women, if they seek to fulfill what they understand to be a requirement of *Sharia*, or Muslim law, are excluded from educational institutions, from work as civil servants, and from participation in political life.⁴ It is important to grasp here that this is not an issue of personal choice as it would be with the wearing of Christian symbols like the cross; rather it is a matter of religious obligation. This exclusion has not only undermined Ataturk's attempt at egalitarianism (an attempt now disputed by some Turkish feminists), it has radicalized secular women, producing an alliance of secular with observant women. Secular women have increasingly *chosen* to wear the headscarf in protest against the law in solidarity with observant women. Wearing the headscarf by choice has come to symbolize secular resistance to statism. Secularity thus undergoes an ironic modification.⁵

As a further irony, merchants have quite literally capitalized on this political movement.⁶ A whole fashion industry has evolved to meet the needs of elite observant Muslim women. "Muslim chic" is making its mark in Turkey through *tesstür*, an elaborate ensemble that involves not only expanding the size of the headscarf, but developing a stylish, long-sleeved, long, wide coat (*pardesu*). Tekbir, Inc., a recently formed design house, like its counterparts in Paris and New York, exhibits models walking the catwalk, displaying lovely variations on "covering." Such displays ironically push the margin on traditional Muslim teaching on feminine modesty. *Sharia* requires none of this garb specifically, though the ensemble provides a modest, tasteful alternative to what a growing middle class of practicing Muslims view as Western fashion excesses. Thus, in response to secular law, Islam itself undergoes a transmutation as further modified by free-market capitalism.

Just as more women, secular as well as observant, have appeared publicly more often in the headscarf, images of Ataturk have proliferated. Images of Ataturk have always appeared on the Turkish Lira and as objects of patriotic veneration in private homes, as paintings and photographs on the walls of public buildings, and as sculptures in public places (much like sculptures of George Washington or Abraham

Lincoln in this country). Now, however, such images appear in bars, in taxicabs, on clothing, baked into dishware, as tie tacks, on ties themselves—everywhere. According to one scholar, Atatürk's iconographic omnipresence constitutes a Kemalist response to the debates surrounding Turkey's future as a secular state that is predominantly Muslim.⁷

Just as *tesstür* exemplifies an internalized orientalism, so images of Atatürk represent both nationalist and tourist secularist kitsch. Their shared fetishizing and commodification notwithstanding, posed in relation to each other, the headscarf and the images of Atatürk exemplify a profound ongoing debate over Turkey's future, one that is in the process of redefining both secularity and religiosity.

To me as an outsider, the issue is one of law. One could look at the situation in an oversimplified manner as a contest between secular or Kemalist law and conservative interpretations of *Sharia*. Looked at this way, the question is one of whether state or religious authority will reign.

Much depends, however, on how one defines secularism. *Laïcité*, the French model for secularism, maintains religious neutrality by prohibiting religious expression in public space altogether. By contrast, the United States Constitution not only prohibits the establishment of a state religion, which includes some restriction on public displays of religion, but it simultaneously upholds free expression of religion—a positive accommodation within certain limitations, defined often by the judiciary, case by case. If one assumes *laïcité* as the model for secularism, and the Turkish state has historically made this assumption, then it follows that for the state to lift the ban on the headscarf is for the state to concede to religious authority. If one assumes the protection of religious expression as an individual right, in other words, if one were to adopt the U.S. model of secularism, then for the state to lift the ban, while an accommodation of sorts, is still for the state ultimately to define what constitutes both secularity and religiosity. Given that the state is claiming this authority and defining it in terms of individual rights (related to, but not to be confused with individual choice), it is redefining religion away from more communal goods toward more individual choices. From the state's perspective, individuals may express themselves religiously as they choose; from the adherent's perspective, she may now perform a duty about which she has no choice in public space. Whether one assumes *laïcité* or a U.S. model, religion in the hands of the secular state undergoes privatization and with this comes a relative trivialization of religious duty as if it were merely a

choice permitted at the behest of the state. The chief difference is that religion's public profession, albeit trivialized, is no longer altogether prohibited under the U.S. model.

The Turks, under the present regime, seem to be moving slowly away from *laïcité* toward a U.S. model. There are past precedents for accommodation, as when the use of Arabic in the call to prayers, once prohibited by Atatürk, was later reinstated. All the same, many Kemalists are not altogether happy about such accommodations. Kemalists largely view with suspicion the present majority party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP). They see AKP as an Islamist party, a view about which the AKP exhibits a certain ambivalence.

Making contact with Islamist scholars was virtually impossible. With one exception, my Islamist colleagues tended not to take Islamists seriously as scholars. Fatma Muge Gocek, Professor of Sociology at the University of Michigan, made every effort to help me get in touch with Islamist scholars through e-mail. Our combined efforts failed, I am told, because Turks often do not respond readily to e-mails. Meanwhile, the Kemalists on the whole showed little if any inclination to establish collegial relations with Islamists. Contact came instead through political channels, thanks to the good will and efforts of one of our alumnae, Anne Seasholes-Kozlu, who arranged a dinner meeting with Orhan Çelebi and his wife Zeynep.⁸ Çelebi, an AKP member of Parliament and one of the chief advisors to Prime Minister Erdoğan, met with Nadya Nedelsky, my colleague in International Studies, as well as others of us. The Çelebi family submitted to roughly three hours of our questions, some of which we had circulated to them through Anne in advance. MP and Mrs. Çelebi gave me my only first-hand look at the impact of secularism on Islam in Turkey.

Orhan Çelebi proved to be the insider's insider, the consummate entrepreneur turned politician. Educated in the United States like his wife Zeynep (who is an aide to the Prime Minister's wife), he was articulate and filled with enthusiasm. He stressed over and over the pluralism within the AKP, of which the Çelebis were living proof. He and his wife were religiously non-observant. She, like her husband, dressed in contemporary Western style. Both of them drank alcohol. Neither of them prayed five times daily. They would be flying the next week to Boston to attend their son's graduation from Harvard.

MP Çelebi waxed at length on his commitment to individualism, a free-market economy, moral incorruptibility, human rights, and admission to the European Union. Though she on occasion deferred to him,

Mrs. Çelebi often prompted him and offered her own, less campaign-oriented, more thoughtful responses. Both were utterly charming and filled with good humor. Both stressed how they regard religious belief and observance as a private matter, a matter of individual choice. They were adamant that Turkey must tolerate all religions.

When I pointed out that religious traditions tend to emphasize communal identity over individual identity (particularly characteristic of Islam and Judaism), they insisted that in the long run all religion belonged in the private domain. When I noted that public and private become somewhat blurred, if not altogether dissolved, in a religious context, they again asserted that all of these concerns were matters of private choice. When Professor Nedelsky asked about the education of women and the ban on the headscarf, MP Çelebi asserted that the headscarf was a matter of choice, that the ban should be imposed less restrictedly, and that women must by all means be educated since, after all, they were responsible for raising the children. I did not ask about women choosing not to have children or having no choice but to work outside the home with children.⁹ When I asked about social programs in response to the massive poverty confronting Turkey as it urbanizes ever so quickly, MP Çelebi proposed as solutions funding for small businesses, accompanied by tax breaks and the encouragement of foreign investment. I felt as though I were listening to Milton Friedman himself. I did not raise the issue of Muslim social teachings, which are quite radical in their sense of communal obligation to the poor. Perhaps Mr. Çelebi was counting on Muslim charity to fund economic relief from the now private domain.

Toward the end of the evening I asked a question that Professor Ahmed Samatar, who was also present, had raised over and over throughout the seminar. What, I asked, does Islam have to offer a secular, religiously plural democracy? Çelebi stressed that Islam, properly understood, stresses tolerance and peace. He answered, as he was to answer later again by e-mail, that Turkish Islam, rooted historically in Mevlani mysticism, differs from other forms of Islam in other countries in that it developed out of a religiously plural environment that was particularly well suited to progressive thought and practice. He went on to say that Islam emphasizes teamwork in the form of collective brainstorming, which in turn requires listening carefully to everyone's input before making a decision, and making decisions by consensus (*ijima*). I was struck by how such virtues are so anti-individualistic.

Their mutual suspicions notwithstanding, the commonalities between the Çelebis' views and those of their Kemalist counterparts stunned me. With two exceptions, everyone with whom I spoke placed great trust in democracy, which was understood as a free-market-friendly, secular, religiously plural and individualistic polity. They further agreed almost universally that entry into the European Union would guarantee political and economic stability for Turkey.¹⁰ They seemed to assume that democracy, understood in relentlessly individualistic terms, would by nature produce a stable common good. My experience in the United States leads me to believe the contrary. Indeed, in my opinion, politics grounded so mercilessly in individual choice sounds the death knell to a common good, whether conceived in religious or secular terms. To me, both Turkish statism and Turkish Islam appear to be on the block at the moment—potential, if not already actual, casualties of global capitalism.

In the process of Turkey's debate over the place of Islam, as manifested in the contrapuntal relation of the headscarf to the icons of Mustafa himself, both Islam and Kemalism have clearly undergone modification in relation to each other, even as their boundaries blur. The secular state has had to adjust to secular feminist resistance appropriated symbolically from Muslim practice and to an Islamist party now in power as the majority power, while the Islamists privatize Islamic identity to accommodate secularism. Both the debate and the mutual modification of Kemalism and Islam reflect the impact of globalization on Turkey, as manifested in the marketing of Muslim chic. Given Turkish aspirations to enter the European Union, the debate has global implications as well.

Musing

During one of our many seminar discussions Ahmed Samatar asked one of our Turkish colleagues, Binnaz Toprak, a professor of political science at Bogazici, why she would want Turkey to join the European Union. She replied to the effect that the United States had been her second home, that there were many people whom she loved as friends and colleagues living there. Then came the big "but... ." She spoke bluntly with sorrow. We now confront a rare historical moment for seizing a better future for the whole world, a better humanity, she claimed. She had given up on the United States that it would seize this

moment, a moment of creative self-critique that she associated with the United States in the sixties, that she saw now as characteristic of Turkey and, more widely, the European Union.

We were speaking in the aftermath of the revelation of the photos of Abu Ghraib. Turkey has a long history of human rights abuses that its government has more recently sought to remedy, which is a condition for entering the European Union. Turkish remedy in the face of U.S. excess strikes me as ironic. What can I say? I haven't given up on the United States yet, though despair tempts me daily. I also think Professor Toprak's view of the European Union is somewhat less than sufficiently critical. All the same, for a couple of weeks, the images of Abu Ghraib dominate the print and electronic media, after which it is back to business as usual, at least in the United States.

The image of the Iraqi man standing, arms outstretched perpendicular to his body, legs chained together, head covered, nevertheless continues to haunt me, for his torturers have forced him to assume the form of a cross. His body, lean and smeared with filth, is tapered perfectly. His physical proportions appear near ideal, his image perfectly composed by the camera lens. Whose camera? Whose eyes? For whose eyes? Now for mine. It is a pornographic image, a precursor to a snuff film, this image of a non-consenting adult who takes into his body first our violence, now our gaze. I say **our** gaze because as U.S. citizens we, the people, claim to be the state, and the state set up the conditions for such events in the first place by defying the Geneva Conventions. A few U.S. soldiers appear in some of the photos, smiling in some cases. U.S. citizens respond with outrage initially, only to go on to other concerns within weeks of the "news." My sister informs me, just before I leave for Istanbul, that we need to focus on the good we are doing in Iraq; I can't seem to move on. This non-consenting adult male—perhaps somebody's lover, surely somebody's friend, certainly somebody's son—lives through this image, humiliated for me to see; for me to see, whether I like it or not. Neither he nor I escape the gaze, he the object, I the subject's subject.

Am I "Christianizing" the image of the unknown man by seeing it as a crucifixion of sorts? Am I a translator across cultures or just another pornographer?¹¹ Whatever his values and practices, they are unlikely to be Christian. But then Jesus wasn't a Christian either, when the Roman government crucified him. I feel caught between the terseness of the gospel account attributed to Mark—a mere fourteen verses—and Mel Gibson's excesses in the film "The Passion of the Christ." Like Michael Moore, I am flat-footed, obnoxious, lacking in subtlety.

As Michael Moore I shove a microphone into President Bush's face: "President Bush, what would Jesus do? You know, the Jesus nailed up on a cross, his

*arms outstretched, his body tapered in perfect proportion for two millennia of devotees to gaze upon in adoration? Jesus who in his dying took on imperial violence deep into his bones, the Jesus who continues to suffer the unrelenting human gaze? Where do you see **your** savior, President Bush, the one whom you claim to have died for your sin? Surely not in the faces of the prisoners you have murdered at home nor in those, combatant and non-combatant alike, killed, tortured and raped under your watch abroad, you, our commander-in-chief who partied and otherwise slept through the Vietnam war, who is uncomfortable reading, who gets anxious in the presence of ideas, who has washed his hands of the details—our Lord of the perpetual **tabula rasa**.”*

Though hardly the inventors of torture, we are once again exporting it. Bodies piled upon bodies parade across the television screen around the world, a performance, an album initially collected to entertain a few of the troops away. Why? For mementoes? For Internet pay-per-view? For consumption, in any case. Yet without these images we, the people, the state, ironically would not know what we have done. What difference this self-knowledge will make remains to be seen. Were we to apply for admission to the European Union (a dubious fantasy but instructive nevertheless), we would not qualify due to our violations of human rights at home and abroad. No wonder Dr. Toprak has given up on us.

Analysis

In the not-so-recent past, for any religious adherent, piety and the observance of tradition through ritual and ethical practices that shape communal and individual identity constituted a way of life involving all aspects of behavior and value. This was true for all three monotheistic traditions as well as for polytheistic, non-theistic, and shamanistic ones. By contrast, for the modern and postmodern secularist, whether he or she is religious or not, religion becomes a private matter, essentialized as discrete from economic and political life. In this respect secularism produces religion. Conceptual distinctions, now reified, reflect a legacy of the European Enlightenment in the aftermath of the Wars of Religion, one that continues as an intellectual imperialism, parallel to ongoing Western imperial political and economic practices. The architects of the nation-state construct “secularism” and “religion” as a way of minimizing internal conflict, a way of exercising power within the state. In light of globalization, the adherent, like the non-observer, now internalizes these conceptual distinctions, adjusting his or her traditions accordingly, often undergoing a diminishment of cultural,

spiritual, and political life in the process—a colonization of the mind, so to speak.¹²

Regardless of whether secularism takes the form of *laïcité* or the United States Constitution, secularism is ambiguous. On the one hand, secularism serves as a space within which religious and political pluralism ostensibly stand protected, at least in theory. The point is to produce a democratic, religiously and politically plural civil society that shares a common good even as it celebrates its differences. In actuality, the practices of secularism protect by imposing what my Religious Studies colleague Jim Laine has called a “meta-religious” authority, designed to police secularity’s ostensible neutrality. This meta-religious authority may take the form of statism, itself a quasi-religion, or explicitly religious nationalism, depending on whether there is a dominant religious tradition to cannibalize in order to insure the authority of the state.

In either case, the meta-religious authority of the state has the effect of privatizing and decentralizing religious identity and life. The meta-religious quality of secular authority likewise tends to domesticate any politically subversive power characteristic of the dominant tradition it cannibalizes, as witnessed by the tension in which the privatization of Islam in Turkey stands with codified Muslim social commitments and practices. Insofar as secularity emerges out of “Western” culture and is imported through the global extension of various forms of capitalism (including intellectual capital), secularity has produced wide-ranging national and transnational responses that include both enthusiastic embrace and adamant resistance and rejection. Turkey represents a cultural and geographical location where embrace and resistance meet head on, as both Kemalism and Islam renegotiate the terms of their relationship.

With the founding of Turkey as a nation-state, Atatürk imposed secularism by law. He also looked directly to Western Europe for his models for relations among economic, political, and religious institutions. As noted earlier, he consciously crafted the separation of Islam and the state on the French model of *laïcité*, thereby producing Islam in Turkey as a discrete religion, subject to state regulation. Turks have internalized this separation, irrespective of whether they are non-observant, nominally observant, or deeply observant Muslims, whether Kemalist or members of the AKP. The Çelebi family exemplifies this internalization.

If you think this Westernization renders them inauthentic either as Muslims or as Turks, however, then you have misunderstood the reality of the historical forces at work. It is as authentically Turkish to assimilate European values as it is to whirl as a dervish, and the assimilation itself changes, generating new forms along the way as exemplified by Tekbir, Inc.'s transformation of elite Muslim women's dress. To be a Turk is to engage in a pluralism of lifestyles and practices that explode any attempt to set up binaries of Europe and the Middle East, West and East, political and religious, non-Muslim and Muslim. The "colonized" develop ever new subtle forms of resistance that can themselves come to dominate the scene, as when secular women wear the headscarf along with their more religiously observant sisters in protest against statism. What begins as colonization transmutes into a reinvention of the terms of the struggle. Sometimes, though not often enough, astonishingly good things may emerge.

Kemalist and AKP member alike hold high hopes for Turkey's admission to the European Union, an alliance that both see as an opportunity to humanize the planet. The unspoken assumption is that we in the United States have relinquished this goal; that the United States is, since the fall of the Soviet Union, at the heart of the problem. As skeptical as I am regarding the idea that economic alliances can produce ethical results (and the European Union is strictly an economic alliance), I, too, yearn for a more humane world. I would like to be hopeful too. The Turks have, after all, begun prison reform. Maybe we will too.

As an outsider who is by birth part of the problem of the moment, I see new formations of both the secular and of Islam in the making, without a clue as to how they will finally shake out. What will this renegotiation mean for Jews, Greeks, and Armenians still living in Turkey, as well as for Muslims of all kinds and the non-observant? What will it mean for Kemalist and observant Muslim women alike? What role do global technologies play—new and better earthquake detection and more earthquake-resistant building materials, for example? How will various capitalisms, more and less regulated by the state and by international economic alliances, shape and be shaped by these secular interactions with the religious? Might Turkey bring to the European Union an opportunity to challenge Europe's own injustices toward Muslim immigrants throughout its present constituencies, an opportunity to address its own Christian-centrism, albeit in secularized form? To what extent is the controversy surrounding the headscarf at the core of it all? Tekbir, Inc. has, after all, expanded its design house

throughout Europe and northern Africa. Or is the headscarf merely a distraction, a Western ploy to deflect attention from the “West’s” own injustice and its role in producing the terrorism on which it has declared war?¹³ Most importantly for me as a U.S. citizen and active member of the loyal opposition, is there still time for us to reform, to give up the empire, to resign from our role as the heart of the problem? These questions continue to nag. I will take them into classroom discussion. Already during the seminar I have phoned home new titles to be added to the book-order lists for the fall.

Musing

The Haggia Sophia or Ayasofia (depending on one’s preference for ancient or modern Greek)—made from the ruins of pagan temples, built on the site of a temple to Athena in Byzantium, burnt to the ground and rebuilt by architects Isidoros of Mellitus and Anthemios of Tralles in 537 CE in Constantinople, converted into a mosque with the Ottoman conquest and Constantinople’s renaming as Istanbul, now transformed by secularists of the twentieth century into a museum—is hardly just another building. The Roman Emperor, Christian by 537 CE, had his own private entrance where, upon entering with his wife, he would remove his armor. While the empress made her way to her own balcony, he, joined by the patriarchate, entered the sanctuary. No separation of religion and state here. Muslims later painted over the mosaics depicting Jesus’ life and hung huge calligraphies in tribute to Allah and Muhammad. They left the fish and the crosses because they were not human figurations. Much to my secularized Protestant surprise, I experience a fleeting moment of offense that they would cover the face of Christ. Where did that feeling come from? Meanwhile, the secularists have set about to restore the mosaics to their original condition. Images of Mary Theotokos (the Mother of God), holding the baby Jesus in her arms, particularly abound.

We begin the day at the St. Savior of Chorea Church, move on to the Suleiman Mosque (Suleymaniye Camii), then to Ayasofia and the Blue Mosque. The Blue Mosque stands across the street from Ayasofia, dwarfing it to some extent, a tribute to the talent of its architect Mehmet Aga, who completed it in 1616. Absent any human representation, the interior is tiled in blue from floor to the tip-top of the dome—austere and grand. It is a working mosque; people enter and pray. I enter without shoes, head covered out of respect. Both buildings dwarf the ego and force the gaze upwards. Our tour ends ironically at

the Grand Bazaar. The sound of the guide's voice transforms circles, squares, and triangles into four dimensions, as hawkers of wares mark every site by the buying and selling of beautiful things, regardless of prohibitions against idolatry.

What does it mean to go, look, listen, wander about, and buy? To remove my shoes and don the headscarf, yet without performing ablutions or prayers? I promise myself that someday I will write an article titled "When Religious Site Becomes Theme Park, How Do We Tell the Scholars from the Tourists?"

But I am distracted; our guide is giving us history, here, now. Whose history? God's? I am losing all sense of personal possessive pronouns, all sense of "here," "there," and "when." I have undergone the temporary dissolution of time and space before, the loss of "me" and "mine." But now "ours" and "theirs"—whole families, tribes, communities, groups, nations—blur. NOT into a single universal "one." Rather, particularities pile one upon another in a jumble, their borders fuzzing yet remaining, huddling, shimmering without end. It is the near-death of each and every distinctiveness blurring into the birth of another—not some final, complete whole, but a never-ending rhythm or series of rhythms, wound around one another, pulsating in the muezzin's call, the cargo ship's blaring horn, the rare but occasional church bell, the music of flute, accordion, and Sinatra. We return to our rooms. The rich, various sounds along the Bosphorus haunt my memory, even as the view continues to dazzle my imagination. I write furiously, striving to capture every moment—my own particular practice of idolatry.

I hear laughter outside my window. It's time for a drink with friends. ●

Notes

1. I am extremely grateful for the help of Fatma Muge Gocek, Professor of Sociology at the University of Michigan; Khaldoun Samman, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Macalester College; Nadya Nedelsky, Assistant Professor of International Studies at Macalester; and Anne Seasholes-Kozlu, Macalester alumna, for their aide in my research. Fatma recommended Islamist scholars and gave me e-mail addresses to pursue; she also suggested excellent readings. Khaldoun, who plays a mean drum, put me onto important texts as well. Nadya, with whom I had overlapping research interests, developed most of the initial questions for our interview with the Çelebi family (not their real name) and took off on adventures into the unknown at the drop of a hat as together we sought Islamist women to interview, though without success. Anne set up the interview with the Çelebis and steered us through it with uncommon generosity, hospitality, and grace.

2. I am, after all, a scholar, by definition both an iconoclast and an idolater of sorts.

3. For purposes of this discussion *secular*, as manifested in the context of the modern nation-state, refers to ostensibly religiously neutral space governed by laws that, while they often originate in religious traditions and practices, now owe no allegiance to their

historical origins. A state governed by secular law may or may not accommodate historical religious traditions and practices, at the state's disposal. *Religion* in the modern era has come to refer to a private spiritual domain, governed by transcendent realities, and organized around discrete teachings and practices that generate individual and communal identities apart from political considerations. For the modern nation-state, secularism and religion expand and contract in the content of their respective definitions in relation to one another. The more narrowly religion is defined and the more privatized and spiritualized, the more religious functions the state takes on. Functions that usually represent faded forms of the religious tradition dominate within the state. My point here is to interrogate such definitions.

4. Muslims do not universally agree that Muslim law requires covering women, nor do those who practice covering agree on what "covering" means.

5. Women have transcended the religious-secular divide on other important issues as well, chief among them, the issue of domestic violence.

6. See Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 94–107.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 85–94.

8. In keeping with the academic practice of confidentiality for informants, Çelebi is a fictitious name. Because all others in this essay spoke as scholars in public contexts, I have used their real names.

9. See Jenny B. White's *Money Makes Us Relatives: Women's Labor in Urban Turkey* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

10. In our seminar presentations and discussions, Professor Mine Eder, a political scientist of economics from Bogazici, and Huseyin Erkan, Executive Vice Chairman of the Turkish Stock Exchange, expressed reservations about the potentially negative economic effects of entry into the European Union, particularly for rural areas. Eder also briefly addressed the problems of thoroughgoing individualism. Eder added that she was often accused of disloyally representing Turkey when she was critical on such matters.

11. By translator, I mean someone who seeks to carry something really important from one context to another in ways that honor both contexts, the action of which produces something new that will serve a wider good. See Milner S. Ball, "Common Good in Performance," unpublished manuscript.

12. For the development of these very briefly stated claims, see Talal Asad's *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) and *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, Conn.: Stanford University Press, 2003).

13. A European Court of Human Rights judgment recently held that the human rights of Leyla Sahin, a fifth-year medical student at the University of Istanbul, were not violated when she was denied access to a written examination and enrollment to a course for her refusal to remove a headscarf. In addition, she was suspended from the university for a term for participating in an unauthorized protest against the ban, although all disciplinary penalties had been revoked under a general amnesty. The Court found that the ban, though a state interference in religious life, protected the rights and freedoms of others according to the principles of secularism and equality. The Court found that under Turkish law, "secularism in Turkey was, among other things the guarantor of

democratic values; the principle that religious freedom was inviolable, to the extent that it stemmed from individual conscience; and, the principle that citizens were equal before the law. Restrictions could be placed on freedom to manifest one's religion in order to defend those values and principles... [T]he Court considered that, when examining the question of the Islamic headscarf in the Turkish context, there had to be borne in mind the impact of wearing such a symbol" on others and on public order, given the political significance of this religious symbol in recent years. "It was the principle of secularism which was the paramount consideration." Excerpted from *Chamber Judgments in the Cases of Leyla Sahin v. Turkey and Zeynep Tekin v. Turkey*, a press release issued by the registrar and posted at <http://www.echr.coe.int/Eng/Press/2004/June/ChamberjudgmentsSa>. Downloaded 16 July 2004.